Using Online Blogs to Develop Student Teachers' Behaviour Management Approaches

Andrea Reupert

Barney Dalgarno
Charles Sturt University

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Andrea Reupert
Monash University
andrea.reupert@monash.edu.au
Barney Dalgarno
Charles Sturt University

Abstract: This paper reports on a study involving 74 third and 17 fourth year student teachers enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (Primary) course at an Australian regional, multi-campus university. These pre-service primary teachers completed the single semester, compulsory subject Managing the Learning Environment, which involves the application of behaviour management theory and research into the primary school classroom. The aim of the study was to investigate the experiences of student teachers using blogs whilst on professional placement and more specifically, the effectiveness of blogs to facilitate reflection on behaviour management. Data were drawn from focus group interviews and blog postings. There were mixed responses to the use of blogs as a learning tool; those who found it useful saw its utility in developing behaviour management strategies, venting emotions and supporting each other, while others considered blogs a time imposition and questioned the usefulness of peer advice. While blog postings demonstrated some evidence of reflection and aligning theory and practice, they were overwhelmingly used for the sharing of behaviour management 'tips'.

Introduction

The ability to effectively manage classroom behaviour is an essential teaching skill for creating a supportive learning environment for teachers and students (Ormrod, 2003). At the same time, behaviour management issues are one of the most significant causes of concern for student teachers (Chaplain, 2008) with discipline problems being one of the main reasons for teacher stress and burnout in both primary and secondary teachers (Kyriacou, 2001). Priyadharshini and Robinson-Point (2003) found that stressful behaviour management experiences during placement were a significant deterrent to joining the teaching profession. Thus, it is important that there are comprehensive undergraduate training programs for student teachers in the area of behaviour management. School placements are an important learning experience, though often considered by student teachers to be distally related to what they learn at university (Cope & Stephen, 2001). This study explores the efficacy of blogging for shared reflection on behaviour management by student teachers whilst on placement

Literature review

Notwithstanding the importance of effective behaviour management training, many student and beginning primary teachers report feeling inadequately trained to deal with student misbehaviour (Atici, 2007; Giallo & Little, 2003; Houston & Williamson, 1993). Merrett and Wheldall (1993) interviewed 176 teachers and found that while they considered classroom management skills important, approximately three-quarters were dissatisfied with the training they had received in this area, a finding confirmed in more recent studies (Atici, 2007; Giallo & Little, 2003). It is not only the student teachers who believe that they are inadequately trained in this area. Over 300 senior teachers who worked with beginning teachers reported that beginning teachers were inadequately prepared in behaviour management (Louden & Rohl, 2006).

The problem for teacher educators however, is that student teachers prefer a recipe like model for addressing behavioural issues rather than learning about theory or principle based behaviour management. For example, Bromfield (2006, p. 189) presents the results of a training survey which found that student teachers requested "...step-by-step strategies to deal with bad behaviour and a discussion of options for different situations". Similarly, McNally, I'anson, Whewell and Wilson (2005, p. 180) found student teachers want "...practical things that will work in the short term". The problem with mechanistic approaches to behaviour management is the tendency to over-simplify the nature of students' behavioural difficulties, disregard contextual influences and over-emphasize discipline, power and control (Slee, 1995). Thus, it is important that student teachers not only learn behavioural strategies for dealing with classroom behaviour, but are also encouraged to reflect on an ecological framework of behaviour, based on well grounded theories about motivation, behaviour and learning.

There have been several documented approaches to train student teachers in behaviour management and in particular, to encourage reflection about behaviour management, including the use of journals (Stoughton, 2007), vignettes (Bromfield, 2006) and via supervisors or mentors in schools (Rathel, Drasgow & Christle, 2008). Stoughton (2007) invited primary student teachers to record in a journal their philosophy about behaviour management, their behaviour management practices, to reflect on how these worked in their assigned classroom (during placement) and record whether there was anything they would do differently. From an analysis of these writings she identified a willingness of some primary teaching students to consider the complexity of behaviour interventions, and a rejection of simplistic, uni-dimensional solutions. At the same time, others were ambivalent and could not see a connection between their developing beliefs and the larger cultural context of the school and community.

The most substantial way that student teachers are trained in behaviour management is through experience, vis-à-vis their school practicum or placement. These experiences tend to be grounded in the belief that teachers learn about teaching "by teaching and from teaching" (Myers & Simpson, 1998, p. 58). Hagger, Burn, Mutton and Brindely (2008) concur that while student teachers learn from experience, the nature and extent of that learning varies. They argue that it is not necessarily the exposure to practice per se that makes competent teachers, but instead, the opportunities student teachers have to engage in the *process* of planning, delivery and evaluation as they develop their competencies as teachers.

The reflective practitioner model we employed in this study is based on Dewey's philosophy (1938/1997) whereby the learning model is cyclic and occurs through experience and reflection. We encouraged student teachers to reason why they and others might employ certain strategies and how teaching could be improved. In this way, a student's placement can be an opportunity to reflect on practice. The model is also consistent with Schön's

(1983) reflective practitioner model, and in particular, the way in which he differentiates between reflection on-action and reflection in-action. Providing an opportunity for students to report on their classroom experiences and the consequences of the "on-the-fly" decisions they have made, supports the process of reflection in-action. Additionally, encouraging students to articulate a personal position on classroom management and discuss their classroom experiences in light of this personal position, helps to bring together their reflections on-action and their reflections in-action, as well as their espoused theories and theories-in-use (see Argyris & Schön,1974) .

One way of providing opportunities for these types of reflection is by inviting student teachers to post their experiences, thoughts and reflections to a blog. The widespread availability of 'Weblog' or blog systems has attracted the attention of educators interested in providing students with a central location on which to store their journals as well as mechanisms for students to read and comment on each others' entries. Farmer, Yue and Brooks (2007, p. 1) define blogs as

… a contraction of 'web-based logs' or 'weblogs' … essentially online journals where an author … publishes a series of chronological, updateable entries or posts on various topics, typically of personal interest to the author … and often expressed in a strongly subjective voice, on which readers are invited to comment.

Deng and Yuen (2011, p. 442) concur that blogs can be used as 'reflective devices' in the way that Farmer, Yue and Brooks (2007) suggest, but argue that there is a second strand of blog applications where they are used as 'interactive devices', "enabled through commenting and linking to other websites or blogs". McLoughlin and Lee (2010, p. 23) add that "although blogs were originally designed to allow individuals to maintain their own personal journals or diaries and make them available for public viewing, shared or multi-author group blogs have found numerous uses...to support learning". While authors such as Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht (2004) have listed social benefits of blogs including providing the opportunity to express opinions and seek feedback from others, and as an avenue to release emotional tension, others have speculated about the educational benefits of blogs. Duffy and Bruns (2006, p. 31) indicate that blogs allow "collaborative content creation, peer assessment, formative evaluation of student work, [and] individual as well as group reflection on learning experiences". Lee (2005) concurs with this emphasis on content creation, reflection and collaboration, while Oravec (2003) reports that blogs can encourage the development of individual critical voices. On the other hand, Farmer, Yue and Brooks (2007) suggest that possible benefits of blogging for students include allowing them to become subject matter experts, increasing their ownership of learning and enculturating them into a community of practice.

Of particular relevance are the benefits of blogs over traditional forms of student journals in a teacher education context. When comparing the quality of student blog postings to written journals, Stiler and Philleo (2003, p. 795) note that "...entries were longer and written in ways that indicated that students were considering the bases and motivations behind their beliefs rather than merely describing them". Wagner (2003) highlights the benefits of blogs through the way in which they can provide opportunities for students to share postings with others and for instructors to monitor student reflections. These articles provide support for the idea that blogs might be a more effective medium than traditional print based mediums when encouraging students to reflect on behaviour management issues in the schools.

Despite these positive reports about the value of blogs for student reflection a number of researchers have highlighted problems or unresolved issues associated with their use. Divitini, Haugalokken and Morken (2005) describe a study where student teachers in Norway were encouraged to use a blog to share information and reflect on their learning while

undertaking teaching practicums in schools. Use of the blog was optional and only two of 31 students who responded to a questionnaire (from a population of 34) actually used the blog in any meaningful way. In contrast, Farmer, Yue and Brooks (2007) describe the use of a blogging activity in a media studies subject, where the task formed a part of the subject assessment. Of the 220 students in the subject, 211 posted more than 1 entry, with the average student posting 11 entries. It would appear, then, that making blog use compulsory or assessable is necessary to ensure participation. However, Drabble (2010) reports very high percentages of students choosing to use an online system designed to provide support while on professional teaching placement, despite its use being optional.

Lee and McLoughlin (2010, p. 27), in reporting on a study in which teacher education students were required to post and comment on blogs as well as sharing voice recordings of critical incidents while on professional placement, indicate that a key issue of concern was "how to stimulate students to reflect deeply on their own experiences and comment constructively on the postings and contributions of others". While Drabble (2010, p. 21) comments that "students appeared to use the online network as a psychological safety net that offered freedom to connect with others, to find and give reassurance and to build trusting relationships", it is not clear whether there was evidence in this study of the level of deep reflection on practice sought, but not found, by Lee and McLoughlin (2010). Granberg (2010) in reporting on a study of pre-school student teachers' use of a blog for reflective dialogue also highlights substantial variability in the degree to which students engaged in deep reflection, pointing to mismatches between the assessment task and the intended activity as a possible cause.

Another issue highlighted by a number of studies regarding the use of blogs for shared reflection and student support is ensuring that all students' postings are read and commented upon by others. For example, Deng and Yuen (2011) in a study of teacher education blog activity note that around half of the blog postings received no feedback from other students. McLoughlin and Lee (2010) describe a study in which students were grouped in pairs and instructed to provide feedback to their allocated partner. They found that students were equally likely to respond to other students whom they shared common interests with as they were to their allocated partners' postings. Interestingly, Paulus and Scherff (2008, p. 129), in a study of student teachers' use of a discussion forum, comment that "even though interns were not required to respond to each other's messages, most messages did receive at least one if not several replies". It may be that a discussion forum where participants read all postings sequentially may facilitate greater responsiveness than blogs, where students have to deliberately visit a person's blog in order to read and comment on postings.

In sum, despite the well documented importance of behaviour management training, and the value of reflection as a central part of the learning process, more needs to be known about the ways in which explicit reflection on practice impacts on the behaviour management learning process. Additionally, although there have been a number of recent studies of the use of online blogs to assist with this process, a number of unresolved questions remain and consequently the ways in which such tools might best be used needs further exploration.

Accordingly, there are two research aims in this study:

1. What are the views of student teachers regarding the use of blogs for learning about behaviour management?
2. In what ways did student teachers develop their behaviour management knowledge and practice as a result of undertaking shared reflection using blogs whilst on placement?

Methodology
The subject

The compulsory subject *Managing the Learning Environment*, is undertaken in a single semester during the third or fourth year of an undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree program in regional Australia, training student teachers to teach children aged 5-12 years. The subject required students to apply behaviour management theory and research into classroom practice, to recognise the impact of teacher behaviour on the classroom environment and to differentiate between proactive and reactive approaches of classroom management. The syllabus involved an ecological, relational approach to classroom management, taking into account cultural, social and the religious diversities of classrooms. The learning design of the subject, involved weekly, one hour lectures and two hour workshops.

The subject ran for seven weeks, after which students undertook a five week professional experience placement in schools. The two assessments, both worth 50%, were intimately associated with the placement and aimed to encourage students to reflect on behaviour management experiences and identify the links between theory, research and practice.

The first assessment asked students to develop a classroom management plan that involved both preventative and reactive (or corrective) elements, as supported by empirical literature, which they could then use whilst on placement. The second assignment required students to put this plan into practice, during placement. Students were required to use a blog during their placement to document how their classroom plan was progressing, to reflect and share experiences on the challenges they were facing, and to support each other. Specifically, the second assignment asked student teachers to provide:

(i)   a posting before the placement outlining their overall philosophy towards behaviour management;
(ii) two postings describing (in a non identifying way) two case studies (a child, a group of children or a whole class); one describing an effective application of their plan, and another describing a less effective application, and in each case reflecting on the implications for their plan;
(iii) at least four responses (including support, advice, or comments) to other students' case study postings; and
(iv) a final posting commenting on the usefulness of blogs during placement.

As discussed above, some authors have queried whether mandating the number of postings is desirable, with a number reporting a lack of meaningful participation in non assessable or less prescriptive blog activities and others reporting more substantial participation in compulsory or assessed activities (see for example Divitini, Haugalokken & Morken, 2005; Farmer, Yue & Brooks, 2007; Luca & McLoughlin, 2005). Thus, one of the eight assessment criteria was based on the number and timing of blog postings, to ensure students provided these during the placement period. The remaining criteria related to the

reflective quality of the postings (for example, "Reflective writing indicates personal questioning and investigation of management issues") as well as the ability to provide meaningful advice to peers (for example, "Blogs demonstrate insightful reflection on practice as well as the ability to provide sensitive and constructive feedback to peers on classroom management issues"). Consistent with our view that a student's blog should be a place where they can post entries anywhere on the spectrum between quick "on the fly" reports of incidents, and longer more considered, reflections on practice, we chose not to include grammar, spelling and punctuation within the blog assessment criteria.

Participants

Participants included 74 third and 17 fourth year undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Primary) students enrolled in the subject, based at an Australian regional, multi-campus university. These included 75 students aged 25 years or under and 16 mature aged students; and 70 female students and 21 male students. The majority of students were from an Anglo-Celtic cultural background and had grown up within a rural or regional area.

The Blog Platform

We chose the BlogWow blog system which was available as part of the university's Sakai-based Learning Management System (LMS). As well as ensuring that the tool was easily accessible to students this choice ensured that students did not have to be provided with an additional login code and that minimal work was required to ensure that all student teachers had access. We considered the alternative of using a publically accessible platform such as WordPress, but we believed that the danger of confidential information about school students being made public was too great. We also considered the use of a commercial platform such as EduBlogs, which allows a closed blog community to be created, but as the blog tool within the LMS provided all of the features that were needed at no additional cost and with minimal administrative overhead, we decided to use BlogWow. Faced with the need to make a similar decision, Divitini, Haugalokken and Morken (2005) chose to use a tool outside of their LMS and suggested that this may have partially explained their low rate of participation in the activity, while McLoughlin and Lee (2010) reported less problems with student participation in their study where an LMS blog tool was used.

Like most blog platforms, BlogWow allows students to create an individual profile containing a picture and formatted text, and then permits them to post individual messages containing text and pictures, which can be read and commented on by other students. Although the interface for posting pictures was a little more difficult to use than that provided by alternatives such as WordPress, for the core functionality of posting textual reflections and commenting on other students' postings the system was relatively straight forward to use.

Procedure

The first assignment was due before students' professional placement. Prior to commencing their professional experience placement, student teachers attended a 1.5 hour workshop on using the online blog system. At this workshop, student teachers were informed about the purpose of the activity, namely that it was a constructive means of developing and reflecting on their behaviour management strategies and at the same time obtaining peer

support, during placement. Other issues addressed online etiquette, acceptable use policy, and issues related to confidentiality (for example, student teachers were asked not to report the names of any schools, students and/or teachers). Finally, the more technical aspects of using the online blog system were explained and demonstrated at this time and students undertook hand-on exercises using the blog system. Students then went out for their five week professional placement in schools and during this time completed the blog posting components of assignment two. Students submitted printouts of their blog postings as part of their final assignment at the completion of the placement.

Four focus group interviews and students' blog postings were the primary data sources drawn for this study, in order to provide different perspectives on, and a deeper understanding of the research aims. While blog postings were a compulsory aspect of the subject, it was not compulsory to participate in the focus groups or release blog postings for analyses. Ethics approval was provided by the relevant human ethics committee.

Focus groups

Twenty five students (6 males and 19 females) attended one of four focus group sessions (containing 5, 7, 7 and 6 participants respectively) to discuss their perspectives on the blog activity. The focus group sessions, lasting 1-2 hours, were facilitated by a moderator external to the project. Sample questions included:

- To what extent did the blogs help you in your understanding of behaviour management?
- What, for you, were the best parts of the activity? The worst parts of the activity?

Audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed and analysed using an open coding system, attaching labels to lines or paragraphs of data and then describing the data at a concrete level, before moving to a more conceptual level (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002), first within each focus group transcript and then across all four transcripts. This descriptive and iterative analytic process aimed to meaningfully classify codes into the themes presented in this article.

Blogs

Permission was sought from students to have access to their blog postings for the purposes of this study. Blog postings were analysed in the same manner as focus group transcripts (that is, using an iterative coding process leading to the identification of themes) and extracts are presented in this article as posted, complete with spelling and grammatical errors (see the comment above about our rationale for not assessing students on the grammar, spelling and punctuation within their blog postings).

Results

Results from the focus group and blog postings are presented according to the two research questions:
1. Student teachers' perceptions towards the blogs
2. What student teachers learnt as a result of participating in the blog activity

1. Student teachers' perceptions towards the blogs

There were a variety of perceptions towards the use of blogs as drawn from the focus groups and summarised here, and elaborated further below:

a. Issues related to providing peer support and advice
b. Opportunities for venting
c. A time imposition.
d. Who has the answers?

a. *Issues related to providing peer support and advice*

The blogs provided a means of facilitating advice to students with one student teacher reporting, "*I think the blogging was great! It was good because you could get many strategies from other prac students*". The blogs supported students who, whilst on placement, might otherwise have been isolated from their peers: "*... [the] blog was a connection for me. I was able to connect to people. I don't have to do that when I'm at uni, but [when] I'm at home [and on placement]... I feel that I am isolated*".

In comparison, other students who were not isolated from their peers did not see the social benefits of the blog activity.

> *... I had a mate there [at the school] and the face-to-face communication and that was really helpful when [students name] was at the same time and the same place. – we helped each other of an evening – what we should have done, not done, that kind of thing …and we did that before we went onto the blog!*

Not all student teachers received the same level of support, even if they wanted it.

> *Well I got all excited about blogging to begin with and I was looking for everybody's advice and, you know, I think I wrote my first three comments in the first three weeks... And it's like, [no] other people were having a look, and nobody else seemed to be talking so I was, oh, nobody's looking at it so I didn't look at it for the rest of the time – hardly at all.*

Many complained that student teachers posted suggestions only to those that knew each other, with some clearly frustrated by this, "*You [are supposed to be] helping people that you don't know….are we supposedly mature enough to do that? … Clearly they are not!*" Others described their difficulty in providing advice to students they did not know.

> *Their [other students] responses too were very personal. And so when I wrote something it felt like well, if they didn't know me they're not even going to read through this.*

> *I'd mainly comment on my friends and people that I knew…. I didn't want to get on to someone that I've barely talked to and say, 'I think you should do this' and sound like*

a real know-it-all or anything. So I only used it for the people I knew so I wasn't really interacting with everyone.

Others felt uncomfortable discussing issues in a public forum, "*No one wants to write the wrong thing and read what some of them had written in the blog, read their responses and go, "Well".*"

b. Opportunities for venting

The blog activity provided a useful way in which to vent or debrief from the stress caused by placement.

It was a good way, it's a release, you know, from prac as well, like to get of your feelings.

It's good for a vent. Like, I know I had a couple of good vents...

Students were also able to compare their situations with other students, for better or for worse. "*And I think if, you are having a naughty student… It was like, 'Oh yes, I'm not the only one having trouble'. Other people out there that have worse situations than me...*"

c. A time imposition

Many students complained about the time needed to complete the blog postings whilst on placement. "*It was an extra thing. It was inconvenient... It's something that I had to put a lot of work into to get anything out of... And it was a very poor choice of time to be making us do it*". For many, it was a question of priorities. "*It comes down to we just, we had too much more to do…. To blog or program? What's more important? You get your program done before [anything else]*". The time the blog activity required was related to technological problems with repeated comments about the internet "*always being down*" or problems with computer access at schools.

d. Who has the answers?

Some student teachers queried the quality of advice from peers, indicating that suggestions from textbooks, lecturers or supervising teachers would be more valid.

I'll go to textbook for help…. No offence to you guys but that's a proven [source] of information thing, kind of like. Then you might have an awesome idea though but like, I'll always have a look at my textbook advice or easier, for the teacher's advice.

I think many other people's opinion is good but getting our lecturers' opinions, just because of their experience, would have been more valuable.

... are you really going to sit there blogging or are you just going to go and speak to the [supervising] teacher?

One student teacher clearly wanted the lecturer to be more directive: "*Don't waste my time with this blog crap during the hours where you'll need to be teaching me, actually teach me about classroom management*". Some described feeling intimidated by having the lecturer read their postings:

> *I wouldn't feel very good if I went in there and gave my two cents' worth and then [the lecturer] gives something completely different – I'd feel like a complete idiot. I'd hate for her [the lecturer] to read my remarks and think my god, is that how she feels or whatever, and then go and mark one of my assignments and I remember what this girl said about that.*

Others pointed out that the lecturer's presence would change what they posted.

> *It changes how you write. If you knew your lecturer was going to read it, it'd change how you write.*

> *You're kind of, you're a bit more inclined to write kind of what you think the teacher would like to hear.*

2. What student teachers learnt as a result of participating in the blog activity

Here data are presented that demonstrate what students learnt, as evident in the blog postings. Resulting themes were:

    a. Development of practice
    b. Moving past practical tips
    c. Aligning theory and practice (or lack thereof)

a. *Development of practice*

Blogs were overwhelming used for sharing strategies, with students often finishing case studies with "*any tips of what I should do?*" Accordingly, the blog postings demonstrate the sharing and/or discussion of behavioural strategies such as:

> *... try using a "Noise Meter". I implemented it in my class and it worked great! The noise level was reduced significantly.*

> *Maybe you could try to give him [a case study of a child] some "important jobs" to do or give him some responsibilities for a particular day. This always gives kids with low self-esteem a big boost and may even get him to rise above following distracting students even more.*

There were numerous other examples of behavioural tips that student teachers shared with each other in order to deal with and/or manage their various case studies.

b. *Moving past practical tips*

While there were numerous practical tips shared using the blog system there were also instances in which student teachers demonstrated a reflective stance toward the case studies. For example, in the following blog comment exert a student teacher is asking questions that aim to obtain a clearer picture about the possible causes of misbehaviour reported in another student's blog posting.

> *Does his behaviour often end in him hurting other students?... Is the student bored? Does he have an interest that you might use to connect with this student? ...Is there anything going on at home for this particular student that he feels the need to act out?*

Blog postings also demonstrated student teachers' awareness that their plans needed to change.

> *I have [had to] change my classroom management plan as it wasn't dealing with some particular students in my classroom. I suppose that we had no idea if our classroom management plan would be suitable for our designated classroom.*

> *I've also now realised my classroom management plan isn't as well thought out as I thought it was. I realise my plan seemed to cater to the extremes of negative behaviour and not just relating to everyday problems.*

As well, blog postings demonstrated student teachers' final reflections about their behaviour plan.

> *This prac has reinforced to me that no matter what you say you need to have behaviour strategies for each INDIVIDUAL student. I'm not saying have 30 different behaviour management plans but some strategies work on some but not on others and it's up to us to establish positive relationships with our students to know what works what doesn't.*

c. Aligning theory and practice (or lack thereof)

Some student teachers, albeit the minority, were able to align a theory or theorist to specific behaviour management techniques.

> *I have really been working on the choice theory. It does work on some students. i used it today on my most challenging student by teling her she has the choice right now to do the wrong thing and get in trouble and fall behind in her work or do the right thing so we can move onto the next activity.*

Other student teachers wanted to identify the theory underlying a particular strategy. For instance, one student teacher described an effective way of settling her class but then at the end of the blog posting asked, "*I'm not sure however, what theories I exactly used. Can anyone help me??*" In response another student teacher posted the following comment:

> *[your strategy] reinforces what we learnt about being positive rather than negative. I really think by the sounds of your responses that you are leaning more towards a teacher centred approach. It sounds as though you have very good control and technique.*

Blog postings also demonstrated that some student teachers were able to identify the theoretical approach employed by their supervising teacher and/or school and reflect on its effectiveness.

> *My teachers are using Canter.... even though I first I didn't think there were. [This week] about 3 students names were put on the board today by my classroom teachers, one sitting on the "thinking chair", and one student in the corner. As I said before, I don't really agree with Canter...though it seemed to work well with the kids it was used on in class today. I think my classroom teacher uses it really well, but I still don't like it.*

One student teacher clearly articulated the clash between her own beliefs about behaviour management and that of her school and how her beliefs changed over time, when teaching a challenging class.

> *[I] first went into the class with my own behaviour management approach, with in the the first day i decided that this just wasn't going to work and very quickly adapted the canter system that the school was using. In one sence [sense] it really showed me the effectiveness of canter.... but after a week i struggled with feeling so cranky all the time and soo hard on the kids, as i learnt a very important part of using the canter approach is to follow through, if you dont follow through with a threat the kids can*

> *easily see that your bluffing. It was at this point that irealised this is not the teacher i want to be and that i needed to find a happt medium. SO...... i really pushed through the situation and tried my hardest to give children a choice to chnaging their own behaviour and seeing the benifit of doing so. Of course it wasn;t brilliant to start with but as i built my cnfidence up it became very effective.*

This same student teacher concluded her placement by posting the following:

> *it was such a sucess to push through and implement my behaviour managemnt strategies. i have come to accept the canter approach and see its benifits with a difficult class. But i now believe in a happy medium. I am now neither a techer that takes a student centred appraoch or a teacher that takes a teacher centred approach but i am simply in the middle. I am no longer against canter and adapt this appraoch into my b/have plan to find a HAPPYMEDIUM.*

Overwhelming however, the blog postings demonstrated clear disparities between student teachers' espoused theories and their actual practice, which neither they nor their peers identified. For example, one student teacher described her theoretical framework as

> *Embedded within my personal philosophy and classroom management plan are influences from key theorist: Vygotsky, Glasser and Dreikurs. Reflecting on [my] management plan I feel that my main focus is Glasser, 'Choice Theory.' I believe that teacher and student should work in unison to enhance learning environments and learn through the art of discovery.*

However, the strategies she then employed were clearly behavioural, with a focus on elaborate reward systems. In the main, many student teachers indicated that they were student centred teachers, and/or advocated a liberal approach but the strategies subsequently described were predominately reward and behavioural based strategies (such as ignoring, reinforcers and time out).

Discussion

Student teachers had mixed reactions regarding the utility of blogs whilst on placement. Those who were positive reported that the activity provided them with suggestions and support from their peers and allowed them to 'vent' their feelings about classroom experiences, similar to the social benefits of blogging, highlighted by Nardi, Schiano and Gumbrecht (2004). Conversely, those who found the blog activity a negative experience reported a lack of support from others and/or felt uncomfortable about providing advice to those they did not know. Additionally, a number of students expressed frustration at the limited feedback they received.

McLoughlin and Lee (2010) allocated students to pairs and asked students to provide feedback to the student they were paired with. Although they report that students found this somewhat restrictive and many students commented on a wider range of students' postings, such a strategy may have been effective in our context as a way of ensuring that all students at least received some comments on their blogs. Alternatively, the approach reported by Hramiak (2010), whereby groups of students participated in face-to-face community building activities before participating in an online community, may have been effective. An aspect that may have affected student teachers' experience of the task was the degree to which they had support networks within their placement schools, or pre-existing support networks with peers. For example, one student teacher commented that because there was another student teacher in his school, he had less need to participate in the blog activity. However, the social issues reported by student teachers here do not indicate a problem with the utility of blogs per se but more the manner in which the blog activity and the assessment were established as

well as the different needs of student teachers whilst on placement. Accordingly, the culture of mentoring among student teachers and the explicit teaching of interpersonal and critical reflection skills, as espoused by Le Cornu (2005) might need to be considered by others who intend developing a shared blog activity, amongst student teachers.

Some student teachers commented that feedback from their lecturer, textbooks and supervising teachers would have been more useful than feedback from their peers. This is important in terms of understanding student teachers' views on the way they learn and on knowledge construction more generally. Similarly, Pringle (2002, p. 226) found, in a web mediated course, a devaluing of peer feedback with one student teacher asking, "How can my peers give me feedback for improvement? They know just as much as I do". However, LaPointe and Gunawardena (2004) found that learning outcomes for higher education students in computer medicated environments is strongly related to peer interaction, and moreover, as peer interaction increases, learning outcomes increase. Lowery (2002) makes the point that for student teachers, knowledge comes from four sources; other teachers, children, from lecturers (or university courses) and, lastly, one's peer group. Moreover, working with, and learning from, others is a skill that student teachers need to learn as effective teachers in school communities (Francis, 1995). As well as encouraging peer responsiveness, would be for the lecturer to focus on prompting students to reflect more deeply. Yang (2009, p. 17), for example, reports that the instructors "pushed their student teachers to think further but also encouraged them to express more", with comments on students blogs such as "what do you think...?" and "what would you do if...?".

A number of student teachers indicated that they felt the activity took up more time than they felt was justified and that preparing for class was a better use of time. Technical issues accessing the blog system were also reported. An additional aspect to this complaint was that the task was assessable and student teachers felt obliged to participate. At the same time (as discussed above), Divitini and colleagues (2005) found that an optional use of blogs resulted in a lack of significant learning, with only two of 31 students actually using the blogs in any meaningful manner. Thus, while student teachers appeared resentful that the blog postings were a compulsory aspect of this subject, on the other hand, if optional, we were concerned that student teachers would not engage in it, and/or learn anything meaningful about behaviour management.

In terms of what student teachers actually learnt as a result of engaging in this compulsory activity, the postings indicate an extensive sharing of behavioural tips, confirming earlier studies which found that student teachers want step-by-step strategies to manage classroom behaviour (Bromfield, 2006; McNally, I'anson, Whewell & Wilson, 2005). There was some, albeit little, evidence of student teachers' reflecting about the nature of behaviour and misbehaviour in the classroom and the linking of theory and practice. As highlighted earlier, a lack of depth to student-teacher reflections and limited evidence of links to theory was also reported by McLaughlin and Lee (2010). They suggest that additional scaffolding that encourages students to relate their classroom experiences to their theoretical understandings would be helpful. To some extent our requirement that students draw on their expressed classroom management philosophy within their postings was consistent with this suggestion. However, the development of student teachers' reflectivity whilst on placement is also influenced by the supervising teacher and the teaching context. Indeed, Boud and Walker (1998, p. 196) argue that "Context is perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning. It can permit or inhibit working with learners' experience". Such arguments highlight the need to seek placements that are aligned to the goals of the faculty, and allow time for student teachers to reflect on, and analyse their own and others' teaching.

Furthermore, on many occasions, the behaviour management strategies adopted by student teachers seemed at odds with their previously articulated theoretical beliefs. In the

main, blog postings demonstrated that student teachers espouse a theory of behaviour management that is typically humanistic though subsequent, self reported practice was decidedly behavioural and reductionist. Similarly, Chen (1990, as cited in Kyriacou, 1993) found that student teachers usually start their training with humanistic ideals but after a block of teaching practice and working alongside teachers, highlight the difficulties in working in the 'real world of school' and gravitate to more behavioural approaches. Similarly, Reupert and Woodcock (2010) found that while student teachers found preventative approaches to be the most successful, they predominately employed mostly corrective strategies when addressing behavioural issues in the classroom.

The dissonance between schools and universities has been highlighted elsewhere, with some suggestion that universities favour (and therefore assess) analytical and reflective thinking, while schools, in comparison, require immediate classroom effectiveness (Cope & Stephen, 2001). As reported by a student teacher in this study, many might have articulated a theoretical position consistent with what they saw as the lecturer's views, while subsequently employing strategies which they believed were consistent with their supervising teachers' expectations. Additionally, some reported differences between their own and their school/supervising teachers' behavioural approaches, which might have prevented them from implementing their preferred strategies. One of the positive aspects of the task, then, was that it made the disparity between theory and practice explicit and provided student teachers and lecturers with a body of case studies illustrating the complexity of the issues involved. Thus, these blog postings could be used as a point for further discussion after placement, when student teachers return to university.

Conclusion

Based on these results, a number of recommendations can be made for others considering implementing blog activities. To ensure that the blogs are used equitably amongst all student teachers, lecturers might consider blog partners or groups, in which allocated student teachers support each other. A sense of community would need to be actively cultivated, so that the online environment is conducive to providing support and advice (see for instance the work of Le Cornu, 2005). Lecturers also need to work with placement supervisors to ensure that student teachers are supported and given time to do the activity whilst on placement. Finally, the blog postings that highlight the disparity between theory and practice could be used as points of discussion when student teachers return from placement.

This study demonstrates that while *many* student teachers learnt more about behaviour management strategies through their engagement in the online blog activity, only some used their blogs to reflect on causes of behaviour, ask further questions about (mis)behaviour and consider linking theory and practice. Many student teachers were negative about the task, due to the lack of meaningful contact and the time pressures associated with being on placement. At the same time, the blog posting provide useful documents to further reflect on behaviour management, when student teachers return from placement.

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