A cross sectional study of student teachers' behaviour management strategies throughout their training years.

Abstract

Despite the importance of behaviour management training, many student teachers report being inadequately trained in this area. The aim of this study was to identify the strategies, confidence and reported levels of success in regards to various behaviour management strategies, across 509 first, second, third and fourth year student teachers training to be primary teachers. The most significant differences were found between first and second year student teachers in regard to their use and confidence of initial and later corrective strategies, and between second and third year student teachers in terms of their use and confidence in differentiating the curriculum and preventative strategies. The findings have implications for teacher training programs and future research.

Key words: student teachers; behaviour management

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Effective behaviour management is arguably one of the most valuable teaching skills that student teachers need to acquire. Teachers with sound classroom management skills are better able to support the educational needs of their students (Ormord, 2006) and tend to find teaching to be less stressful and demanding (Rogers, 2006). Student teachers have reported that discipline problems are their most stressing concern during practicum (Mastrilli & Sardo-Brown, 2002), and a deterrent to joining the profession once training is completed (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Point, 2003). Thus, for training purposes, it is important to ascertain what strategies student teachers are employing throughout their teacher education training, how confident they are in a range of behaviour management techniques, and what they find the most successful.

Many beginning teachers report feeling inadequately trained to deal with student misbehaviour (Aticik, 2007; Giallo & Little, 2003; Maskan, 2007; Merrett & Wheldall, 1993). For example, Giallo and Little (2003) investigated the differences between graduate and student teachers and found that both groups reported feeling only moderately prepared in behaviour management, with over 80% indicating they require additional training in this area. Such research highlights the gap in many teacher education programs in training student teachers to be effective classroom managers.

There have been some studies investigating the behaviour management practices of student teachers. In-depth interviews with nine Turkish student teachers found a tendency to employ preventative, positive and less intrusive methods, such as non-verbal messages, warning and positive reinforcement to manage student behaviour (Atici, 2007). More generally, Bromfield (2006) found that student teachers need to ‘be in control,’ because they believed that being in control was an indication of effective behaviour management. Tulley and Chiu

(1995) invited student teachers to submit written narratives describing one effectively managed and one ineffectively managed incident. Content analysis revealed seven different strategies with the most effective being the more humanistic strategies, such as praise and approval, and the least effective being the most authoritarian, including the use of threats and warnings (Tulley & Chiu, 1995). Using a similar methodology, McNally, I'anson, Whewell and Wilson (2005) invited student teachers to describe a critical incident they had experienced after their first teaching practicum. The diversity of the incidents led these researchers to summarise that it was not appropriate to provide behaviour management 'tip sheets' as the context in which student teachers are placed are multifaceted, diverse and could not be easily generalized. Stoughton (2007) also employed the use of written narratives with student teachers, inviting them to record their philosophy and subsequent behaviour management practices. Student teachers were found to employ a range of strategies whilst on placement, though expressed varying reactions regarding the efficacy of some strategies, such as using stickers as rewards.

A related body of research focuses on teacher confidence or efficacy. Teacher confidence is an important mediator in determining how teachers interact with students generally, particularly with challenging students (Giallo & Little, 2003; Martin, Linfoot & Stephenson, 1999; Pajares, 1992). Confidence or self-efficacy can be defined as an individual's perception of his or her ability to implement a given behaviour required to produce certain outcomes (Bandura, 1986). Several theorists of teacher self-efficacy argue that teacher efficacy beliefs are context, and in many cases, subject specific judgements (see for example, Pajares, 1996). For instance, teacher self-efficacy beliefs have been studied in relation to science teaching (deLaat & Watters, 1995), moral education (Narvaez, Khmelkov, Vaydich & Turner, 2008), the arts (Garvos, 2009), and teaching English as a foreign language (Eslami

& Fatahi, 2008). More specific to this paper, Emmer and Hickman (1991) found that discipline self-efficacy was distinct from other beliefs.

In relation to student teachers, Main and Hammond (2008) found that third year student teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, in relation to classroom management was high and even higher after practicum. Indicating that training and experience might enhance confidence, Giallo and Little (2003) found that practising teachers have a greater sense of self-efficacy than student teachers. At the same time, however, confidence in managing behaviour does not always translate to effective behaviour management practice. Main and Hammond (2008) found that even though student teachers' self-efficacy was high, the range of behaviour management strategies they employed was limited and did not incorporate strategies to deal with challenging and persistent behaviour. Emmer and Hickman (1991) reported that during practicum, student teachers rated themselves more highly on behaviour management than did their supervising teachers. They conclude that "unrealistically high self-efficacy might impede a teacher from making changes that would result in stronger teaching performance" (Emmer & Hickman, 1991, p. 764).

A teachers' sense of efficacy and behaviour management practice is acquired over many years and will be modified according to teachers' personal and professional beliefs, student groups, educational policies, professional experiences and the cultural context within which they are located. Similarly, student teachers change their beliefs, attitudes and practices over the course of their training. From research conducted with 23 student teachers, Jones and Vesilind (1996) found that whilst students' teaching knowledge was initially incomplete and idiosyncratic, after exposure to teaching practicums and university seminars, student teachers' knowledge became increasingly conceptual and interrelated. Specifically related to

behaviour management, Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) found that student teachers became more controlling and custodial and less confident that they could overcome the limitations of home environment and family background, over the course of teacher training.

Overall, there is some research examining the practices and self-efficacy of student teachers in relation to behaviour management. At the same time there is no research, that we have been able to locate, that has examined student teachers' behaviour management attitudes and practices throughout the course of teacher training. However, in our experience as teacher educators, we have found that student teachers' needs and views change throughout their training, according to the practicum experiences they have had, and the other, often university training, they have been exposed to. For example, in our experience of working with student teachers, some first year student teachers need convincing that behaviour management is a skill that they need to learn as many seem to believe that behaviour management will not be an issue for them and/or do not see that students might misbehave. In comparison, we have found that fourth year student teachers tend to be highly motivated to learn how to balance the curriculum and behavioural needs of students whilst being an independently functioning classroom teacher.

Thus, the aim of this cross-sectional study was to identify the behaviour management practices of first, second, third and fourth year student teachers. We also sought to identify how confident they were in using various behaviour management strategies. The third and final aim was to identify, across the four years, what they found most successful when dealing with behaviour management issues.

Method

Context

The student teachers in this study were drawn from a regional university in New South Wales, Australia. The student teachers were undertaking a Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree which prepares graduates to teach children from Kindergarten to Year 6, ranging in age from five to 12. Alongside their university studies, student teachers are expected to successfully complete teaching practicums. In their first year they spend two weeks in the classroom, with a focus mainly on observing how schools and classrooms function. In the student teachers' second year, they are expected, in the first instance, to team teach, but then provide individual whole lessons. The third year practicum involves individual whole unit teaching while in the final fourth year practicum, student teachers are expected to complete a full term (ten week) internship, in which they run a class independently. See table one for the data collection points in relation to practicums over the four years.

Table 1: Data collection points and practicums over the four year teaching degree

Year level	Semester	Data Collection Point	Practicum length
First year (N = 136)	Semester one Semester two	Collection	2 weeks
Second year (N = 148)	Semester one Semester two	Collection	4 weeks
Third year (N = 128)	Semester one Semester two	Collection (after the 5 week practicum)	5 weeks
Fourth year (N = 97)	Semester one Semester two	Collection	10 week internship

Participants

Participants included 509 student teachers enrolled in a four year teacher-training program at a university in New South Wales, Australia, 21% of who were male and 79% female, a similar ratio of male and female primary teachers in Australia (Callan, 2004). Participants included student teachers from each of the four years of the primary teaching course. See table two for participant demographics. The vast majority of student teachers in the degree are from an anglo-celtic cultural background and have grown up within a rural or regional area.

Table 2: Participant demographics

Year level	Gender		Cohort total numbers
	Male	**Female**	
First year	29	107	136
Second year	28	120	148
Third year	29	99	128
Fourth year	20	77	97
Total student numbers	**106**	**403**	**509**

Instruments

The Survey Of Behaviour Management Practices (SOBMP) was specifically developed by the authors to assess student teachers' frequency, confidence and success of various behaviour management strategies (see Reupert & Woodcock, 2010, for more detail). The SOBMP included items that reflected a wide variety of behaviour management strategies ranging from prevention through to corrective strategies, as well as instructional practices, based on an extensive review of behaviour management textbooks and research articles.

Behaviour management references were located by a series of searches of the EBSCOHOST data base for papers published between 1990 and July, 2008. The search utilised a number of key words in combination, including 'behaviour/behavior management' 'school' 'teacher' 'classroom' in primary/elementary as well as secondary/high school settings. A variety of behavior management textbooks were also accessed that spanned the theoretical spectrum, from behavioural approaches (e.g. Canter & Canter, 1992) through to Glasser's choice theory (Dotson & Glasser, 1998). Instructional and differentiation strategies were included, such as utilizing additional supports, providing an authentic and/or differentiated curriculum and lesson pacing when they were specifically related to behaviour management principles (e.g. Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Given the focus of the study was generalist teaching, strategies identified from specialized institutions such as juvenile delinquent settings and special schools were excluded in the instrument development.

From the literature view, 31 items were identified, which were then placed on a five point Likert-scale. Participants were then invited to rate their frequency use, confidence, and success of each strategy. The Likert-scale included five points ranging from 1 (not at all) through to 5 (extremely). Thus, the higher the participants' score the more frequent/confident/successful student teachers scored on a certain behaviour management strategy. The complete questionnaire can be obtained from the authors.

The items were categorised into five subscale variables through factor analysis using principal components extraction and Varimax rotation and consisted of: preventive strategies, rewards, initial corrective strategies, later corrective strategies, and differentiation strategies. Preventive strategies consisted of strategies commonly considered to prevent behavioural issues from arising, such as establishing routines, seating arrangements, and class rules (e.g.

Kern & Clemens, 2007). The reward subscale included strategies related to the use of rewards (e.g. "provide rewards such as stickers" see Canter & Canter, 1992). The initial corrective subscale included items involving mild or low intrusive corrective strategies such as proximity control, signalling, and re-directive statements (e.g. Rogers, 2007). In comparison, later corrective strategies focused on relatively more intrusive strategies, such as time out and behavioural contracts (e.g. Nelson, 1996). Differentiated strategies were based on adapting and differentiating the curriculum to meet students' needs (e.g. Sugai & Horner, 2002). Internal reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) resulted in acceptable (>.7) alpha coefficient scores of reliability for frequency, confidence, and success. Of the initial 31 strategies five items did not load substantially onto either of the dimensions and were deleted from subsequent analysis.

Procedure

A pilot study of the SOBMP was conducted to obtain feedback on the questionnaire items with 42 student teachers (not included in this data set). Based on their feedback, minor changes to the instrument were made. All participants for the present study were surveyed in semester one, at each year of the four year course (see table 1). Participants were approached at the end of a lecture and the surveys were distributed by colleagues of the researchers. Ethics approval was obtained by the relevant university committee.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and one-way (multivariate) analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were carried out to examine student teachers' frequency use, confidence, and success in various management practices.

First to Second Year

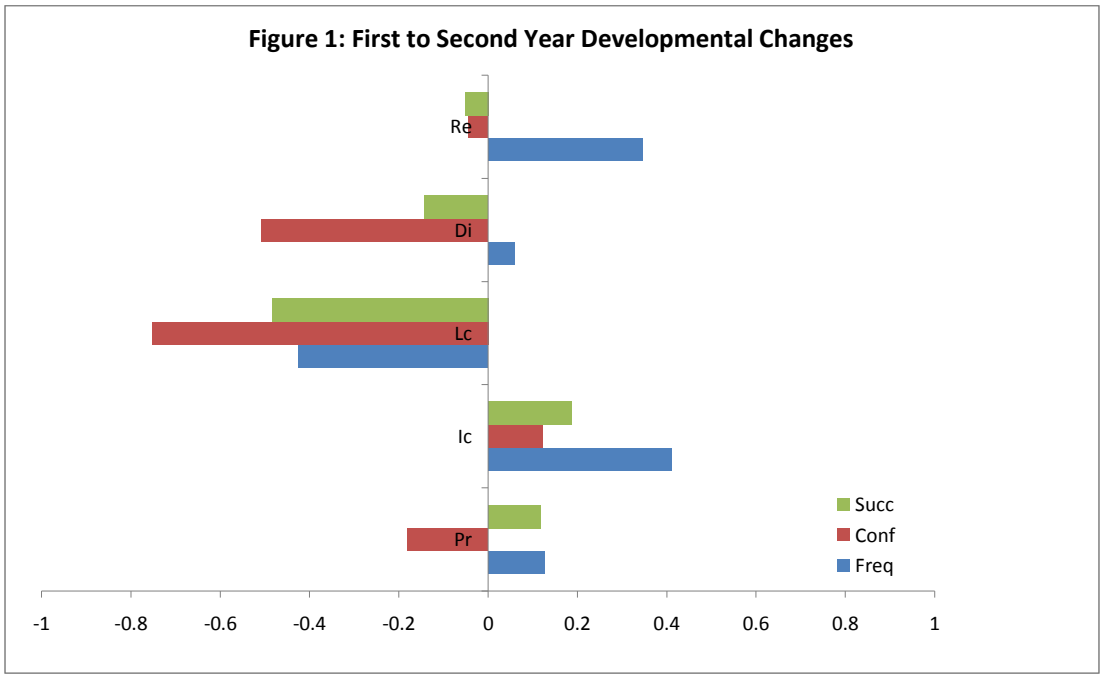
As figure one indicates, significant differences ($p<.003$, $F= 16.367$) were found within the frequency of initial correction strategies between first and second year student teachers. Student teachers in their second year of the course would use initial correction strategies more often ($M = 3.40$) than those in their first year ($M= 2.99$). Moreover, this was particularly so in that second year student teachers would use strategies such as move closer to the student (M^1-M^2 = +.710), use non-verbal body language (M^1-M^2 = +.530), and say the student's name as a warning (M^1-M^2 = +.490) more frequently than their first year counterparts.

There were also significant differences between the frequency ($p<.003$, $F= 14.085$), confidence ($p<.003$, $F= 34.909$), and success ($p<.003$, $F= 12.589$) of later correction strategies between year one and year two student teachers. Those in their second year would use later correction strategies less frequently ($M= 1.60$) than those in their first year (M-2.03). Moreover, second year student teachers felt less confident (M^1-M^2 = -.753) and less successful (M^1-M^2 = -.484) using later correction strategies than first year student teachers. This was particularly so in regards to referring students to other professionals (frequency: M^1-M^2 = -.570; confidence: M^1-M^2 = -.950; success: M^1-M^2 = -.600), contacting the student's parents (frequency: M^1-M^2 = -.590; confidence: M^1-M^2 = -.910; success: M^1-M^2 = -.710), and referring the student to the principal or assistant principal (frequency: M^1-M^2 = -.590; confidence: M^1-M^2 = -1.02; success: M^1-M^2 = -.800).

In regards to the self-reported use of differentiation strategies within the classroom, significant differences ($p< .003$, $F= 16.615$) were found between first and second year student

teachers' confidence. Student teachers in their second year of the course felt less confident (M= 2.350) in differentiating the curriculum than their first year counterparts (M = 2.859). Moreover, it was the adaptation of the curriculum in particular that the second year student teachers felt less confident in (M^1-M^2 = -.660). There were no significant differences in regards to the frequency use (p = .658, F= .197) and success (p = .295, F= 1.101) of differentiated strategies between first and second year student teachers.

No significant differences were found in regards to differences amongst first and second year student teachers' usage, confidence and success in preventative strategies (frequency: p = .245, F= 1.355; confidence: p = .054, F= 3.748; Success: p = .208, F= 1.597) or use of rewards (frequency: p = .012, F= 6.407; confidence: p = .688, F= .162; Success: p = .618, F= .249).



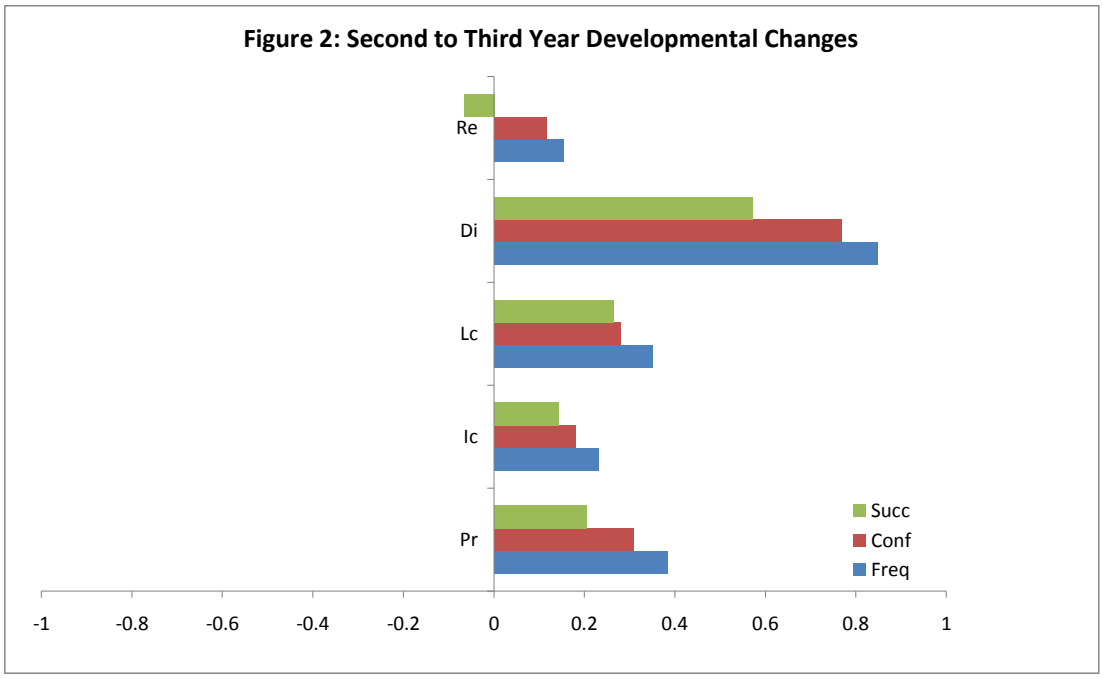
Second to Third Year

As can be seen in figure two, differences occurred between the self-reported frequency, confidence and success of various behaviour management strategies between second and third year student teachers. In regards to preventative strategies, significant differences were found between the proposed frequency use ($p < .003$, $F = 14.783$) and confidence ($p < .003$, $F = 9.321$) between second and third year student teachers. Third year student teachers would use preventative strategies more often ($M = 3.328$) than second year student teachers ($M = 2.943$). More specifically, third year student teachers would change the seating positions of targeted students and whole class seating arrangements (M^1-M^2 = +.660, and M^1-M^2 = +.640 respectively) more often than their second year counterparts. Furthermore, third year student teachers felt more confident in using preventative strategies (M^1-M^2 = +.308). This was especially so in regards to feeling more confident in employing student-centred teaching approaches (M^1-M^2 = +.510). There were, however, no differences in the success of preventative strategies ($p = .038$, $F= 4.370$) between student teachers in their second and third year.

Third year student teachers significantly ($p < .003$, $F = 9.083$) used later correction strategies more often than second year student teachers. There were, however, no differences in the confidence ($p = .550$, $F= 3.735$) or success ($p = .126$, $F= 2.362$) in using later correction strategies between second and third year student teachers. There were differences amongst the frequency ($p < .003$, $F = 31.663$), confidence ($p < .003$, $F = 30.615$), and success ($p < .003$, $F = 13.434$) of differentiated strategies between second and third year student teachers. Those in their third year used differentiated strategies more often ($M = 3.115$) than those in their second year ($M = 2.267$). Moreover, third year student teachers felt more confident (M^1-M^2 =

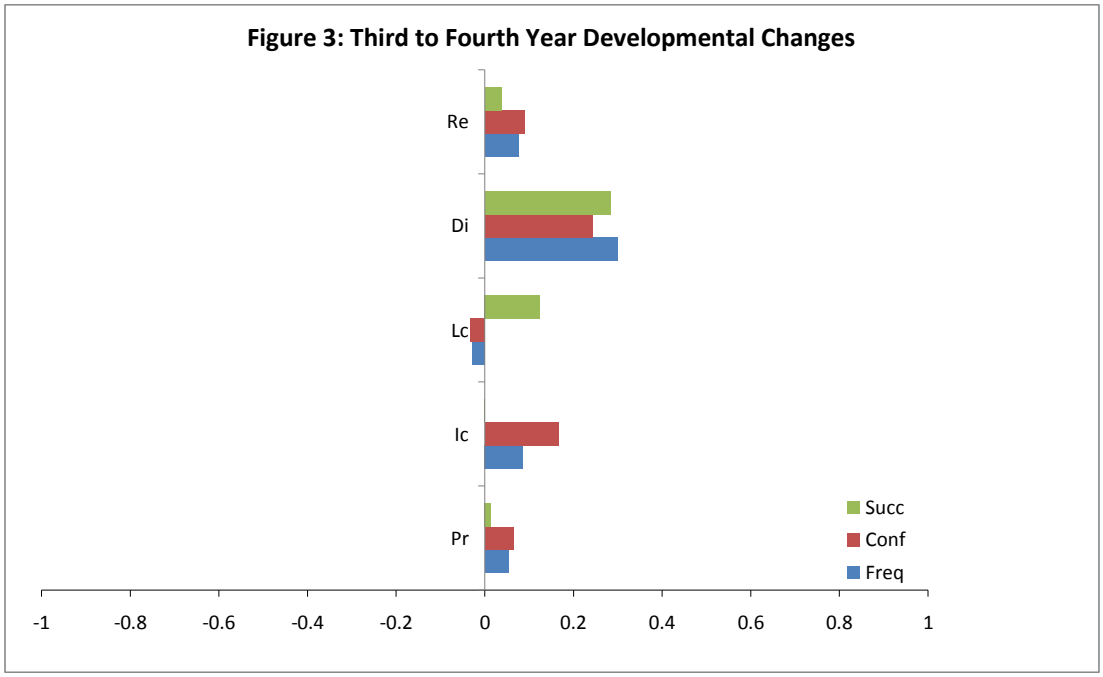
+.768) and more successful (M^1-M^2 = +.572) using differentiated strategies than second year student teachers.

No differences occurred between those in their second and those in their third year of the course in regards to using initial correction strategies (frequency: p = .018, F= 5.685; confidence: p = .067, F= 3.394; Success: p = .140, F= 2.198) or use of rewards (frequency: p = .279, F= 1.180; confidence: p = .345, F= .896; Success: p = .580, F= .307).



Third to Fourth Year

There were no significant differences amongst the self-reported frequency, confidence, or success in any of the itemised behaviour management strategies between third and fourth year student teachers.



Discussion

The study demonstrates that student teachers differ, according to year level, in regards to the use, confidence and success of various behaviour management strategies. In comparison to first year students, second year student teachers report using significantly less later corrective strategies (in particular, contacting a student's parents, and referring students to a member of the administrative team). They are also significantly less confident in these types of strategies, and consider them to be significantly less successful. This result demonstrates a substantial change in thinking and use regarding later or more intrusive corrective strategies. Even though the frequency in which student teachers use later correction significantly increased between second and third year, they are not employing it as frequently as first year student teachers believe they would. Perhaps second year student teachers see the benefits of more subtle, less intrusive behaviour management strategies, as they experience the realities of the classroom (via the practicum) and learn more about schools, students and teaching at university. Student teachers probably also recognise, between the first and second year, that they are not in a position to readily call a child's parents, or send a student to the principal.

Instead, compared to first year student teachers, second year students are significantly employing more initial corrective strategies, in particular moving closer to the student, using non verbal body language and saying a student's name as a warning. Hoy and Woolfolk (1990) found after spending time in schools, student teachers were more likely to adapt a controlling orientation. Bromfield (2006) also found that student teachers' preference was to employ reactive or corrective strategies. This study extends previous work by showing that rather than becoming more controlling per se, student teachers increasingly employ less intrusive corrective strategies, as opposed to relatively more intrusive strategies, that might still serve to 'control' students, but in a subtle and less intrusive manner.

Additionally, compared to first year student teachers, second years report feeling less confident in differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of students, perhaps in appreciation of how difficult such strategies are to implement. This self-reported attribute however significantly improves, between second and third year, possibly as a result of additional training and experience. Emmer and Hickman (1991) found that confidence regarding classroom management varies from other teaching practices. We extend this work by finding that student teachers' confidence varies according to type of behaviour management practice (i.e. differentiation and corrective strategies), indicating that within the classroom management concept there are potential variations.

Compared to second year teaching students, third years report using significantly more differentiated instructional strategies. They also become significantly more confident in using these types of strategies, and consider them to be significantly more successful. These results demonstrate a significant increase in behaviours aimed to cater and adapt to students' needs, interests and learning styles. This is a positive result because, as Tomlinson (1999) claims,

differentiating the curriculum prevents behavioural problems from occurring and so are an effective preventive strategy for teachers to employ. There was also a significant increase in the frequency and confidence in using preventative strategies between second and third year student teachers, such as changing students' seating positions. Again, such a finding suggests that with time, training and experience student teachers are increasingly employing more proactive approaches that may perhaps not be so readily appreciated by first year student teachers.

The findings from the study interestingly reveal that there are no significant changes between third and fourth year student teachers in regards to frequency, confidence or success in rewards, prevention, differentiation, initial correction, and later correction. However, it is important to note that in the present study, data were collected *before* the fourth year student teachers' final comprehensive practicum (the internship). It would have been interesting to have measured fourth year student teachers' behaviour management views after this important training experience. Such a 'no change' result tentatively indicates that there could be a link between classroom management strategies and school experience, given that changes were apparent throughout each of the other four years, after practicum experiences.

Additionally, the findings indicate that the frequency, confidence, and success of rewards did not change over the four years of training. This could be due to the controversial nature regarding the use of rewards as a behaviour management tool, and that the resulting mixed messages might mean that student teachers' views and practices in this specific area are confused and/or do not change over time. Different teachers, as do researchers have different views regarding the use of rewards as an effective management tool (Edwards & Watts 2008). Hoffman and colleagues (2009) found that all of the 86 elementary teachers surveyed

employed rewards, in one form or another, even though only one third believed that rewards should be used conditionally, indicating that contextual issues and limits play a role in their use. Some, albeit few, reported that rewards should not be used or were undecided about its utility, even though at the same time reported using rewards in their classroom. Such data underscore the confusing nature of rewards in classrooms which perhaps contributed to the 'no change' results found here across the four year levels.

Across the four years of training, student teachers' self-reported use of behaviour management changes from relying on relatively intrusive behaviour management strategies, such as sending a student to the principal, to employing more subtle corrective strategies such as moving towards students or saying a student's name as a warning. As student teachers progress through their training course overall, their frequency use, confidence, and success in preventative, differentiation, and initial corrective strategies increases from their initial year to final graduating year. Furthermore, while there was a significant reduction in student teachers' frequency use, confidence, and success of more intrusive corrective strategies in their initial years, in their latter years of training this did not change.

While the use of preventive and differentiated strategies does increase over the four years of training, overall, in their final year, student teachers most frequently employ initial correction strategies, followed by rewards, and then preventative and differentiated strategies. The least used strategies employed by fourth year students were the later correction strategies. Final year student teachers felt most confident in using initial correction strategies, followed by rewards, preventative strategies, differentiation strategies, and then later correction strategies. However, their most successful strategies were prevention, differentiation, initial correction and rewards, followed by later correction strategies. The finding that student teachers found

success when using prevention and differentiation mirrors other research (see Bambara & Kern, 2005; De Jong, 2005; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch & Sugai, 2008): nonetheless, it is concerning that student teachers are most frequently employing low level corrective strategies in their final year of training, rather than more proactive approach to classroom management.

The results highlight a need for a sequential model of behaviour management that is embedded into student teachers' practicum experiences and year level. Given that first year student teachers reported using mostly reactive, albeit low level corrective strategies, the need to highlight an engaging curriculum to promote discipline is required in the early stages of training. Additionally, from the very beginning of professional learning it is important that student teachers are provided with appropriate role models of preventive practice in schools and given opportunities for reflection regarding what they see and experience. Conversely, the self-reported lower scores for later corrective strategies might also indicate a need for student and beginning teachers to engage with wider school supports such as principals and behavioural specialists.

As the current study found a drop in confidence between first and second years, towards a range of behavioural strategies, student teachers coming off their first practicum might well require debriefing and additional support around issues regarding "being a teacher' and dealing with behaviour management strategies. The drop in confidence might not necessarily be a negative experience of student teachers, but might instead motivate them to reflect on why certain strategies are inappropriate and to develop a broader repertoire of responses. It is, we believe, up to teacher educators to provide opportunities for student teachers to reflect on these experiences and consider what this means for them as future teachers and classroom

managers. Hence, in order to retain student teachers in training programs, the time between first and second year might be an optimal period to provide further support.

Finally, while student teachers often baulk at theory (Laursen, 2007), we believe that theory of behaviour management provides central principles that can guide teachers' practice. We believe that clarifying and articulating one's core beliefs and principles in regard to motivation, learning and behaviour, can assist student teachers to navigate their learning and professional experiences over the four years of training and beyond. Such reflections need to provide opportunities for beginning teachers to be aware of the needs and resources of all children, and appreciate of the links between context, instruction, learning as well as student (mis)behaviour.

A major limitation to the current study was its cross sectional design, which means results can only be considered as a snapshot in one period of time. There could well be differences across student teacher cohorts that are not reflected in these results but would be identified in a longitudinal, prospective study. Future studies could employ such a prospective design as well as qualitative data to tap the underlying issues regarding student teachers beliefs and attitudes about behaviour management. Additionally, this study was carried out at a single teacher training institution with student teachers working in similar cultural contexts. As teacher training programs differ in terms of content and duration (Alvarez, 2007) future studies would profit from surveying student teachers from other institutions and other countries. At the same time, the study does indicate that student teachers have different behaviour management training needs throughout their university years, which training institutions and schools need to be mindful of.

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