

**First Year Pre-service Teachers' Learning about Behaviour  
Management**

**PET091277**

**Judy Peters**

**Full paper for refereeing prepared for:**

*AARE Conference, Canberra  
30<sup>th</sup> November -3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2009*

Dr Judy Peters  
School of Education  
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences  
University of South Australia  
St Bernards Rd  
Magill SA 5072  
Fax: +61 8 8302 4536  
Email: [judith.peters@unisa.edu.au](mailto:judith.peters@unisa.edu.au);

## **First Year Pre-service Teachers' Learning about Behaviour Management**

**Judy Peters**  
**School of Education**  
**University of South Australia**

### ***Abstract***

*The management of student behaviour is widely recognised as one of the greatest challenges facing pre-service, beginning and experienced teachers (McCormack, 1996). Studies have found that some beginning teachers attribute their behaviour management difficulties to lack of attention to this area during their teacher education program (Australian Education Union, 2008; TTA NQT Survey, 2005, cited in Bromfield, 2006). Yet there have been few studies that focus on pre-service teachers' learning about behaviour management during their program (McNally, I'anson, Whewall and Wilson 2005; McCormack, 2006). Many studies and reports have pointed to the important role of professional experience in pre-service teachers' learning (see for example House of Representatives Standing Committee and Vocational Training, 2007; Peters, 2009). This study sought to address identified gaps in the field by examining first year pre-service teachers' perceptions of learning about behaviour management after their initial professional experience.*

*Data for the study were collected via a questionnaire administered to all first year students after their first five day program of professional experience. The professional experience program was delivered by five schools in close partnership with lecturers in the course and was intended to provide a highly structured and supportive introduction to teaching for 25 – 30 pre-service teachers in each school. The participating schools were selected for their ability to model best practice.*

*Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from the questionnaire produced a number of themes and insights into students' learning about behaviour management. In the paper these are compared and contrasted with a frame-work of seven key principles of best practice developed by the MCEETYA Student Behaviour Management Project (De Jong, 2005). The analysis revealed that the pre-service teachers had learnt about many aspects that were congruent with these principles. It also revealed notable gaps in their learning which will need to be addressed in the course in future years and in the remainder of the degree if they are to become effective teachers upon graduation. These gaps were in the areas of: understanding the complex and interconnected nature of pupil behaviour and the environments in which it is constructed; applying professional judgment in responding to different students in different contexts; managing chronically disruptive students; and engaging within wider support systems. This paper presents and discusses the findings from the study and makes a number of suggestions as to how the gaps in pre-service teachers' learning might be addressed.*

According to McCormack(1996) classroom management, and in particular the management of student behaviour, is widely recognised as one of the greatest challenges facing pre-service, beginning and experienced teachers. She draws on a number of theorists to propose the following definition of this complex aspect of teaching:

... the term classroom management refers to more than discipline of control but rather spans a broad range of activities such as arranging the physical environment, establishing and maintaining class room procedures, monitoring pupil behaviours, dealing with misbehaviour and keeping students on task in a productive environment (Sandford, Emmer & Clements, 1983; Emmer, 1987) (p. 2)

Studies of beginning teachers in Australia and overseas show that many feel they struggle once they have sole responsibility for management of a class (Kiggins, 2008). In a study of 18 beginning teachers at the end of their first year Huntly (2008) found that participants' feelings about 'being in control' of students' behaviour affected their feelings of success or failure when determining professional competence (p. 135). Other studies have found that some beginning teachers attribute their difficulties to lack of attention to this area during their teacher education program (Australian Education Union, 2008; TTA NQT Survey, 2005, cited in Bromfield, 2006).

For pre-service teachers issues around managing student behaviour have been found to be a 'dominant preoccupation' from first through to fourth year (McNally, I'anson, Whewall and Wilson, 2005, p. 170). McNally et al described the experience of many of their students in their first professional experience as a 'mini crisis, induced mainly by pupil behaviour' (p. 170) and reported that many incidents were seen as 'extreme' from the pre-service teacher's perspective (p. 179). These findings were echoed in Bromfield's (2006) study of first year secondary pre-service teachers that showed they placed greatest importance on being 'in control' of a class (p. 191). It was also a finding of a study I conducted in 2007 that revealed that first year students were most concerned about issues around student discipline (Peters, 2009). McNally et al (2005) and McCormack (2006) noted the absence of studies in regard to pre-service teachers' learning about behaviour management. In an earlier study McCormack (1996) pointed to the need for teacher educators 'to understand the main problems, strategies and influences experienced by both pre-service and inservice teachers in order to attempt to adequately prepare teachers for the future' (p. 10).

Many studies and reports have pointed to the important role of professional experience in pre-service teachers' learning (see for example House of Representatives Standing Committee and Vocational Training, 2007; Peters, 2009). It is widely claimed that professional experience provides the opportunity for students to apply and develop their theoretical understandings about effective teaching in classroom settings with the support of experienced practitioners (Haigh & Ward, 2003; Dobbins, 1994). This study sought to address the gap identified by McCormack (2006) and McNally et al (2005) and build on my earlier 2007 study by examining first year pre-service teachers' perceptions of learning about behaviour management after their initial professional experience.

## Background

There are two periods of professional experience in the course Practical Applications and Reflection 1 (PAR 1), undertaken by all Bachelor of Education (Junior Primary/Primary) students in the second half of their first year. This study is based on the Stage 1 Professional Experience which comprises five consecutive Thursdays in the second to sixth weeks of the study period. It is offered by a small number of R – 7 schools in close partnership with lecturers in the course and is intended to provide a highly structured and supportive introduction to teaching for 25-30 Pre-service Teachers (PTs) in each school. PTs complete an additional 6 days of professional experience (Stage 2) at the end of the year. In the Stage 2 Professional Experience PTs are placed in a large number of city and country schools and work individually or in pairs (in city placements) with one mentor teacher for an introductory day followed by a five day block in the final week of the study period.

In 2008 five schools worked in the Stage 1 Professional Experience and accommodated 140 first year PTs. The schools included one with a high level of socio-economic disadvantage (65%), one with a moderate level of disadvantage (31%), one with a high level of Non English Speaking background students (45%) and two with relatively low levels of both (less than 10%). On each of the five days of the Stage 1 Practicum the schools ran special programs around the five themes of:

- Introduction to the school
- Learning is an active process
- Self esteem influences learning
- Language is basic to learning
- Resources, organisation and management

The daily program featured input from staff members to the whole group about the focus for the day, modelled lessons illustrating the focus in action and clustering of student teachers in small groups in home classes for observation and teaching of prepared lessons to small groups of children. University lectures and workshops over those weeks focussed on the same themes.

In the first half of the study period behaviour management was not addressed as a discrete topic in either workshops or the school-based programs, but was rather a theme that permeated throughout. For instance, school staff talked about school wide behaviour policies on the first day, and teachers shared class norms/rules, routines etc. Each week pre-service teachers had observation sheets to complete while watching Mentor Teachers. Foci for observation included:

- school and class contextual information;
- the physical features of the classroom;
- the organisation and management of space and resources;
- teachers' use of communication skills such as explaining, questioning and negotiating expectations; and

- teachers' strategies for actively engaging and acknowledging students, inviting positive interactions, giving positive feedback and responding positively to behaviour.

Parallel on-campus workshops provided the opportunity for PTs to debrief, share information from across the five schools and the related reading, engage in related tasks, reflect on their learning and ask questions. Every year, in the workshop following the final day of the Stage 1 professional experience, PTs are given an anonymous questionnaire to complete in order to evaluate the success of the program and their perceptions of their learning. The results are fed back to the participating schools and used as the basis for planning the program for the following year.

### **Methodology**

The overall aim of the research was to investigate PTs' perceptions of their learning about behaviour management after the Stage 1 Professional Experience. To this end additional questions about PTs' perceptions of their learning about classroom management were included in the annual questionnaire completed by all students (133) following the Stage 1 Professional Experience. I decided to focus on the Stage 1 Professional Experience for two reasons. Firstly it involved a concerted effort by university and school-based staff to deliver congruent messages about teaching and learning. Schools were specifically selected because they are perceived to model best practice. I wanted to see how effective this approach was in terms of students' learning. Secondly, students do not return to the university after their final Stage 2 Professional Experience so the chances of a high return of surveys would have been low.

The questionnaire comprised a mixture of open ended and 'Likert-type scale' questions (Bernard, 2000, p. 295) against which PTs were asked to indicate their degree of agreement using a 4 point scale of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. Usually this annual questionnaire targets students' general learning about teaching and their perceptions of the kinds of support provided by the school but for the purpose of this research additional questions which were specifically about behaviour management were included. These were Likert scale questions about confidence in and learning about behaviour management, interaction with students and planning and implementing engaging learning activities. There were also the following open-ended questions:

What are three things you learnt about managing student behaviour?

What was one thing that surprised you about the way behaviour was managed in your schools?

What else would you like to learn about behaviour management?

The study had a qualitative element in that it was partly based on the 'holistic picture, formed with words' (Creswell, 1994, p.2) arising from PTs' responses to the open ended questions, but it also included a quantitative element in that frequencies were calculated for students' responses to the Likert scale questions and for key themes emerging from

their responses to the open-ended questions. Neumann (1997) argued that quantitative data can supplement or complement qualitative data, providing a form of triangulation. A grounded theory approach was initially used in the analysis of the qualitative data whereby initial themes were inductively derived from the data (Bernard, 2000). In accordance with Bernard's (2000) 'mechanics of grounded theory' PTs' open-ended responses to the three open-ended questions above were coded and categorised. As categories were developed they were reviewed to identify similarities, differences and other patterns that linked them (p. 443). The themes identified through this process can be seen in Table 1. The numbers of instances of each theme were also counted to provide frequencies of students' responses and can also be seen in Table 1. The frequencies for students' responses to the Likert scale questions in the questionnaire were also calculated.

The findings from the data analysis are presented in the next section of the paper but rather than simply reporting on each theme represented in Table 1 I elected also to compare and contrast them with seven core behaviour management principles that were recommended by the MCEETYA funded Student Behaviour Management Project as best practice in Australia. The seven recommended principles identified can be summarised as:

1. an eco-systemic approach to discipline that considers the complex interplay between 'environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors' (De Jong, 2005, p. 357);
2. the creation of a safe, supportive and caring environment;
3. inclusiveness which caters for the different potentials, needs and resources of all students;
4. a student-centred philosophy;
5. a quality learning experience;
6. positive classroom relationships (De Jong, 2005, p. 358); and
7. school-based and external support structures (De Jong, p. 359).

In analysing pre-service teachers' learning from their first professional experience, these principles provided a useful frame of reference to determine the extent to which students' learning was congruent with nationally determined principles of best practice. In the following section it will be shown that across the cohort and across the five schools there was some evidence of learning that was congruent with five of these principles but there was little evidence of the first principle and significant gaps in learning about the last principle. Illustrative quotes will be used to illuminate the findings and to show that they are from different students and across different schools they will be labelled as follows: PT1:23 (*indicates 23<sup>rd</sup> Pre-service Teacher in School 1*).

### **Students' learning about classroom management**

The analysis of quantitative data from the Likert scale questions completed by students at the end of their first professional experience indicated that students had been very anxious about managing student behaviour before entering schools. 42% of students 'strongly agreed' and 42% 'agreed' with the statement 'before this placement I was worried about managing student behaviour'. There had clearly been improvement in their feelings of confidence after the placement with 25% strongly agreeing and 63% agreeing with the statement 'I now feel more confident managing student behaviour' and the

majority (SA = 30%, A= 64%) reporting they had ‘learnt strategies for managing student behaviour’. Confidence was also at high levels for ‘interacting with children’ (SA= 52%, A= 48%), ‘planning and implementing engaging learning activities’ (SA = 34%, A=63%) and ‘working in a school setting’ (SA= 40%, A = 57%).

The analysis of students’ responses to open ended questions about their learning revealed more about what students had learnt about behaviour management. The themes that emerged from this analysis can be seen in Table 1 as well as the frequencies for each and these will be discussed in the rest of this section. Clearly students’ responses to these open-ended questions did not comprise the sum of all their learning about behaviour management as they had to be selective in responding, but it is reasonable to assume that those themes that emerged represent the learning that was at the fore-front of their minds at the time of completing the questionnaire. It appears that, to varying degrees, students were able to articulate some aspects that were congruent with key ideas and practices related to some of the MCEETYA principles identified earlier. These findings will be presented below, together with findings about gaps in the students’ learning around these principles.

**Table 1**

<b>Themes from responses to open-ended questions</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>
Giving positive acknowledgement	43%
Responding to variation in student needs	32%
Effective communication skills	31%
Developing positive relationships	29%
Providing clear expectations	26%
PTs wanting more strategies/practice	24%
Import of teacher’s interpersonal qualities	18%
Using rewards	16%
Applying consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior	16%
Whole school policies for behaviour management	16%
Empowering students to make decisions and choices	15%
Teaching for student engagement	13%
Ignoring minor disruptions	13%
Responding consistently	12%
Having positive Mentor Teacher models	11%
Having negative Mentor Teacher models	10%
Managing serious student disruption	10%
Strategies for gaining attention	7%
Importance of being organised	4%
Conducive physical environment	2%
Recognising role of parents	2%

***Principle 1: An eco-systemic approach to discipline that considers the complex interplay between environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors***

It will be seen in the discussion of other principles that students were aware of the impact of a variety of factors on student behaviour but there was little evidence that they had an awareness of the complex interplay of these factors. Rather, responses such as those below indicated that most tended to see behavior management as a set of strategies that once learnt would enable them to perform competently regardless of differing contextual conditions:

More behaviour management focus. Tell us pre-service teachers what we are meant to do to control our class. (PT4:4)

(I want to learn) how + when + what to implement (PT2:15)

Techniques! Lots more! I found we haven't really been taught anything in this course so far that is useful in regards to behavior management. (PT4:31)

***Principle 2: The creation of a safe, supportive and caring environment***

It was clear that some of the strongest messages PTs had learnt were about the creation of positive classroom learning environments. It can be seen in Table 1 that nearly half of the cohort (43%) referred to the importance of supporting students' endeavours through positive acknowledgement. Some PTs were able to identify specific strategies such as 'point(ing) out students who are behaving well to encourage others to do the same' (PT4:28). A further 16% made specific reference to providing support through the use of rewards with responses such as:

Using positive reinforcement, for example using rewards, even very simple ones, can help to manage a classroom (PT5:7)

It was evident in responses such as this one that seeing teachers using positive acknowledgement had more impact than simply learning about it in theory:

The use of positive reinforcement. I read about in books. However it was good to see it in practice. (PT1:17)

A significant number of students (26%) also showed awareness of the role of clear expectations in the development of safe and supportive environments. Some referred to the need to do this before the start of the lesson they were about to teach:

I learnt that you need to set clear expectations for the students before the lesson starts so all students know what behaviour is acceptable. (PT5:10)

Others thought more broadly about the need to have expectations around all aspects of the learning environment:

Create a positive environment where students know their boundaries/expectations – prevention is better than cure. (PT3:5)

Some students also realised that working with students to develop explicit expectations takes considerable time and energy:

Preparation and hard work setting up the classroom attitude and expectations is most important. (PT1:3)

It was clear from their responses that many PTs had experienced positive classroom environments with a high level of cooperation from students. A possible consequence of this was that PTs did not show a high level of awareness of how to respond when students threatened to disrupt the environment through inappropriate behaviour. The strategies identified included applying some sort of consequence for inappropriate behavior (16%), being consistent (13%) and ignoring mildly inappropriate behavior (12%). Comments such as this one revealed that knowing a strategy and knowing how or when to apply it are two different things:

How to decipher what behaviour is to be discussed and what behaviour can be ignored. (PT3:13)

Not surprisingly, many PTs felt that they had a great deal more to learn about specific strategies for maintaining positive environments and managing behaviour (24%). For example:

Other things I would want to learn about behavior management is more strategies that keep children focused and engaged in their learning. (PT3:21)

10% of PTs expressed specific concerns about their ability to manage highly disruptive behaviour in future professional experience. For example:

Need to know more about behaviour management techniques for ‘difficult’ children or situations that could go really bad if mishandled. (PT4:26)

A surprising gap in students’ responses was that very few (2%) made references to the importance of the physical environment in the development of a safe and supportive environment, particularly as one of their first tasks was to map the physical lay-out of their classroom.

### ***Principle 3 Inclusiveness which caters for the different potentials, needs and resources of all students***

In Table 1 it can be seen that another dominant theme in students’ responses was around recognising and catering for the diversity of students’ needs with 32% of students

indicating an awareness of this theme. Comments such as these showed a growing awareness of the importance of finding out about each student's background and motivation:

Get to know the child so you may understand why they are acting this way. (PT4:13)

To be patient and understand the backgrounds of different students and how it affects their behaviour. (PT3:10)

With the awareness of students' individual needs came awareness of the need for teachers to differentiate tasks and management strategies:

Individuals respond differently to different strategies e.g. Talking to a student one on one may be more effective for those who thrive on attention from their peers. (PT2:24)

Although some PTs recognised the importance of responding to individual student needs, most also realised that this was a very difficult challenge both at the level of academic needs and behavioural needs, as indicated in responses such as:

(I still want to learn) how to cope with the different students' personalities and even more different strategies on behavior management. (PT2:16)

Learning to adapt activities to suit different ability levels. (PT4:14)

Adding to the challenge was their growing awareness that most classes had students with special needs who 'need to be treated differently' (PT3:20).

#### ***Principle 4: A student-centred philosophy***

Those PTs who acknowledged the importance of focussing on individual students' needs showed they were moving towards a student-centred philosophy, as can be seen by this comment:

Every student wants a chance to be validated and heard. (PT3:19)

However, this awareness did not appear to translate into consideration of the importance of supporting students to develop independence and self responsibility in regard to their own behaviour. AS can be seen in Table 1 only 16% of students made comments that indicated students should be empowered by making decisions and choices about classroom management or their own behaviour. Those that did mentioned practices such as students taking responsibility for actions (PT4:7), making choices (PT2:12), negotiating the class rules and expectations (PT3:19; PT1:14), allowing 'all students to have a say' (PT1:22) and developing a 'consciousness of others and their needs' (PT3:5).

***Principle 5: A quality learning experience;***

Some PTs also appeared to have made the connection between engagement, quality learning and behaviour management with Table 1 showing that 13% made comments about this aspect such as:

Engage students in activities (so there is) less chance students play up. (PT5:16)

Active learning helps to reduce the need for behaviour management. (PT4:5)

Many more PTs identified aspects of the teacher's behaviour that contribute to quality learning experiences for students. In particular, 31% identified a variety of important communications skills such as 'clear instructions' (PT5:5), 'open questions' (PT4:25) 'non verbal (strategies)' (PT3:1), 'tone of voice' (PT3:4), 'being assertive' (PT2:5) and 'eye contact' (PT2:20). A further 8% made particular mention of the skill of the teacher 'gaining attention' as a pre-requisite to a quality learning experience.

***Principle 6: Positive classroom relationships***

26% of students highlighted the importance of developing positive and respectful relationships with students and its impact on effective behaviour management. They commented on aspects such as listening to students (PT1:16) and earning their respect (PT1:23). Some also realised that good relationships between teachers and students depend on teachers treating students respectfully when responding to inappropriate behaviour:

The aim was for students not to be embarrassed for their misbehaviour, more confidential. (PT4:5)

Not to exclude or pull children out of class in front of everyone. (PT2:16)

They identified a range of interpersonal characteristics that they felt teachers needed to promote good relationships such as patience (PT1:4) calmness (PT2:25), consistency (PT2:24), firmness (PT3:13), passion (PT4:27); and a caring and professional approach (PT5:17). A tension expressed by PTs such as this one was how to balance positive relationships with students with the need to maintain appropriate professional distance:

I learnt that in order to enable students to stay on task and behave well, the teacher needs to be strict but still be able to relate well to students. The students have to see you not just as their friend but mainly as their teacher. (PT 1:8)

***Principle 7: School-based and external support structures***

Although all five schools in the program have well developed behaviour management policies, Table 1 reveals that only 16% of PTs referred to wider school policies which

supported teachers to manage behaviour and the majority of these came from one school that has an innovative approach based around a school wide Peace Code. It was clear from comments such as this one that this had made an impression on PTs at that school and that it also underpinned approaches used by some of their Mentor Teachers.

I really liked the Peace Code they use. It really worked and all students knew how ti worked. (PT4:32)

Other than this there appeared to be little awareness of wider school support available to teachers to manage severely disruptive student behaviour, or for students with significant special needs. Similarly there was no mention of the possibilities for support from agencies outside of the school. Finally PTs showed little awareness (2%) of the important role that parents/caregivers might play in supporting teachers to work with their child around behavioural issues

### **What did students learn about classroom management?**

It can be seen that by the end of their first professional experience there were PTs across the cohort and across all of the five schools who could articulate an understanding of aspects of behaviour management that are congruent with some of the core principles identified by the MCEETYA Student Behaviour Management Project as best practice in Australia (De Jong, 2005). It is probable that awareness of these principles was higher than reported as students had to be selective in what they included in the survey. To get a more accurate picture it would be useful to design a survey around these principles to administer to future cohorts. However, there is sufficient evidence from this study to suggest there was considerable learning about some aspects of best practice from participation in the on campus program for PAR 1 and, in particular, in the structured introductory program provided by five schools especially chosen for being able to model and articulate good educational practice. In particular, some of the strongest messages PTs appear to have received were about using a supportive, positive and preventative approach to student behaviour incorporating positive acknowledgement, clear expectations and respectful relationships. Other strong messages included the importance of effective communication and responding to the diversity of student needs. A smaller group of PTs showed awareness of the relationship between engaging learning programs and positive student behavior and the role of wider support structures.

Overall the findings are encouraging for this particular course and the participating schools, especially considering that this is only the first of five professional experiences in which PTs engage over their four year program. The findings suggest that it is important that in their first professional experience students work in schools that are able to articulate and demonstrate practices that are congruent with the themes of the on campus program and national principles of best practice. In the study I conducted in 2007 based on the same program and using the same schools students identified the following factors as most important in supporting their learning in the school-based component of the course:

- the supportive culture of the school in which they were placed;

- the deliberate modelling provided by mentors;
- the encouragement and feedback from mentors; and
- the structured nature of the professional experience with emphasis on set foci, guided observation and opportunities for PTs to practice. (Peters, 2009)

McCormack (1996) too identified ‘the important influence and role modeling provided by school personnel to pre-service teachers’ (p. 10), while Schmidt (2006), in her study of music pre-service teachers, found that they only acknowledged the learning about classroom management that arose from their experiences in schools, even though they had been taught the same messages in the on-campus program prior to their school experience. She explained this anomaly as follows:

These teachers claimed their most effective learning about classroom management occurred in student teaching, and I suggest that the contextual understandings they gain in this immersion experience played an important role in that learning. (p. 31)

Overall, the study presented in this paper confirmed that professional experience played a critical role in these pre-service teachers’ learning about behavior management. Clearly it indicates that it is important for teacher educators to work closely with school partners to develop programs that deliver congruent messages about principles of best practice.

### **What did PTs still need to learn?**

Unfortunately knowing about particular principles and strategies is not the same as being able to put them into practice. Research about final year students (for example McNally et al, 2005) and beginning teachers (for example Kiggins, 2008; Chambers & Hardy, 2005) and anecdotal evidence from my own final year students indicate that they still feel ill prepared to manage classrooms after graduation from their programs. It is clearly important for the future development of this particular first year course and the rest of our B. Ed program, and for other teacher education programs and professional development programs for beginning teacher, to consider what appear to be the most significant gaps in first year PTs’ understandings – gaps that are acceptable at such an early stage of their program but which it is important to address both before and after they enter the profession. The absence of particular themes from the findings together with the low frequencies for some of the themes in Table 1 suggest four areas in which these PTs need a great deal more development. These are:

- understanding the complex and interconnected nature of pupil behaviour and the environments in which it is constructed;
- applying professional judgment in responding to different students in different contexts;
- managing chronically disruptive students; and
- engaging within wider support systems.

*Understanding the complex and interconnected nature of student behaviour and the*

***environments in which it is constructed***

The seven best practice principles identified by the MCEETYA Behaviour Management Project (De Jong, 2005) were used to frame the findings from this study. However, there was little evidence that PTs understood the first principle that: ‘Student behaviour needs to be understood from an eco-systemic perspective’ De Jong elaborated this principle as:

(an emphasis on) the complex interconnected, interdependent and recursive nature of relationships between a range of environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors that influence the daily lives of schools and organizations, teachers and students’. (p. 357)

Some first year PTs did acknowledge the relationship between students’ behaviour and other aspects of the learning environment such as respectful relationships and engaging pedagogy. However, there were also indications that many PTs did not recognise that managing student behaviour needs to be part of a holistic approach to responding to students’ academic, physical, social and emotional needs. For instance it is interesting that there was almost no mention of the important role played by the physical environment in the construction of student behaviour. Rather, many PTs’ comments indicated they tended to see effective behaviour management as an isolated set of practices. Like PTs in other studies they indicated that what they primarily wanted more of in the future were ‘tips on discipline’ (McNally et al, p. 169) or a ‘bank of strategies’ (Bromfield, 2006, p. 191). This finding is not surprising given the inexperience of the PTs and the finding from the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study that even by experienced teachers ‘pedagogy and student behaviour (certainly the management of student behaviour) had been treated as two distinct aspects of schooling both at the policy level and in practice in many schools’ (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001, cited in Fields, 2008, p. 5).

It is clear that an ongoing focus in teacher education and professional development programs must be to dispel the myth of ‘neat answers that can be packaged or prescribed’ (Bromfield, 2006, p. 191) and develop an understanding of the individualistic, complex and constructed nature of student behaviour and the role of teachers as reflective practitioners who can analyse and respond to student needs and critique their own practice. I agree with Bromfield (2006) that:

Additional connections need to be made for trainees between well-paced, motivating lessons that meet the needs of individuals in terms of differentiation and attention to learning styles and how this will facilitate a more conducive learning environment. (p. 192)

That is not to say that PTs don’t need to be introduced to a wide array of specific strategies, but in on campus and school experiences these need to be taught in conjunction with opportunities to apply and reflect on them in situations that require considerations of all aspects of students’ development and the learning environment.

### ***Applying professional judgment in responding to different students in different contexts***

Fields (2008) cites Queensland's Code of School Behaviour in identifying the following factors that need to be taken into account when responding to student behavior; 'the student's age, gender, cultural background, disability, socio-economic situation, family care arrangements and the students' emotional and mental health' (p.13). A positive outcome of the study was to see the extent to which some students understood that pupils are a highly diverse group of individuals. Associated with this understanding was some awareness that teachers need to take into account each child's individual needs and the contexts in which teaching and learning occur when responding to behaviour. However, it was clear that students had little idea about how to make judgments about which strategies might be appropriate for particular students and particular contexts. This is not surprising when one considers that teacher judgment is not something to which most pre-service teachers have access when on practicum. They can see what their mentor teachers do but often do not have the time to discuss with them the reasons behind their choices of actions. Research has also indicated that mentor teachers are not always able to articulate their philosophies and rationale when working with pre-service teachers – rather they react intuitively and effectively without being able to explain their decisions (Wasley, 2002). Lourdasamy and Khine (2001) suggested that this may be even more the case when it comes to reflecting on management issues:

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

Furthermore, Zuckerman (2007) cites studies that show that strategies used by expert teachers are not necessarily useful to all teachers 'because experts have not only more (and more elaborate) knowledge than most teachers, but their knowledge is organized into more efficient pattern recognition and information retrieval schemas (Glaser, 1985; Hankins, 1987; Simon & Simon, 1979)' (p. 5).

It seems PTs need many structured opportunities to talk to mentor teachers about why they make the decisions they do. In communicating with school mentors, teacher educators need to highlight the importance of building in times for debriefing with PTs each day while PTs need be supported to develop the kinds of questions that will elicit mentors' reasoning. In addition PTs need to develop the skills and attitudes that enable them to critically reflect on others' and their own practice and courses should include opportunities for PTs to utilize these skills by grappling with dilemmas and problems based on students' individual needs and diverse teaching contexts. McCormack (1996) suggests a range of other opportunities that are likely to develop PTs' abilities to respond appropriately to students' needs:

Exposure to the reality of teaching can be achieved through observation, peer teaching, video lesson reviews, team teaching, mentoring, practicum and extended internship placements in relevant classroom settings. This process must involve

personal evaluation to allow preservice teachers the time to reflect and discuss their experiences and plan for the future. (p.10)

Huntly (2008, p. 136) suggests that teachers need to develop an 'intuitive sense of what level of control is required' but that this can only occur when they have a thorough knowledge of students and their learning environment. As PTs are only in classrooms for limited period times it would be helpful if their periods of contact with their professional experience classes are extended over as long a period as possible through official weekly introductory visits and as many voluntary visits as mentors are able to sustain.

### ***Managing chronically disruptive students***

Fields (2008) in a study for Education Queensland found that between 5 and 15% of students engage in 'more frequent and more serious forms of misbehaviour, requiring support over and above what an individual class teacher can provide' (p. 12). It was clear that although the majority of first year PTs in this study showed improvement in their confidence about behaviour management, many were still fearful about being subjected to serious misbehaviour in future professional experiences and were doubtful about their ability to manage it. These fears may have been compounded by the high degree of student cooperation they witnessed in the Stage 1 schools as it meant they had little opportunity to see strategies used by teachers in more serious situations.

The PTs fears of future disruptive behaviours are likely to be well founded as McNally et al (2005) found in their study of secondary student teachers' accounts of first professional experiences many examples of behaviour that were 'above the low level of incidental distractions'. They speculated that such behaviours in fact were provoked by the presence of the PTs in classroom: 'What we may have are incidents which may be seen by them as extreme, but which in fact tend to happen in their classes simply because they are beginners' (p. 172). They speculated that part of the problem was that PTs are less skilled in applying preventative strategies and need time to develop their understandings of the complexity of classroom contexts and the ramifications of decisions (p. 178). Given this, it would seem reasonable to suggest that mentor teachers should support PTs to manage behaviour in the early stages of professional experiences, gradually withdrawing the support as they become familiar with the students and context.

It is clear that in both their on campus and in school programs PTs need to explicitly engage with theories and practices for the management of students who display serious forms of misbehaviour. This might involve exploring with lecturers, school mentors and students the variety of reasons for such behaviour, the range of strategies that are available and deemed to be effective and the sources of support both within and outside of the school. However, once again it is important that the focus is on developing PTs understandings of the 'eco systemic perspective' mentioned earlier rather than on 'ready made responses' (McNally et al, 2005, P. 174). McNally et al (2005) recommended using problems with multiple interpretations as one way of helping students develop such a multi dimensional perspective, while Kiggins (2008) found in her study of beginning teachers that their involvement in problem based approaches to learning in their teacher

education program enabled them to work through very significant behavioural issues with some students in their first year of teaching.

### ***Engaging with wider support systems***

Fields (2006) makes the point that before the advent of school-based management policies, approaches to discipline 'were invariably unsystematic, highly personalised and frequently idiosyncratic collections of practitioner wisdom' (p. 5). In a more recent study of schools in Queensland he found that this situation had changed greatly with examples of school based and external support including 'behaviour support teachers, guidance officers, school nurses, parent volunteers and mentors, teacher aides, police liaison officers, Life Education Program, Community Health, Child & Youth Mental Health, and the Juvenile Aid Bureau to name just a few (Fields, 2008, p. 19). Although the Stage 1 Professional Experience is a school wide introduction to teaching, the findings from this study showed that most PTs' foci appeared to remain firmly on the classroom. Apart from those in one school that had a very strong focus on the Peace Code, PTs demonstrated little awareness of the role of wider school policies, resources and practices in the area of behaviour management. Nor were the roles of parents/caregivers or support personnel in and beyond the school acknowledged in their responses.

It is evident that at some point in their degree PTs need to be introduced to the broad range of support personnel and services that teachers can access when faced with diverse student needs and significant behavioural difficulties. They also need to learn more about the important role of parents and caregivers in students' education and ways to develop strong partnerships with them. In addition they need the opportunity to put their understandings into practice by working with support personnel and parents/caregivers while on professional experience. Such opportunities cannot be left to chance but need to be structured into course development and the expectations and communications between teacher educators and school mentors. In the PAR 1 course, a first step will be to ask participating schools to explicitly address and demonstrate the role of wider support systems in effective teaching and management.

### **Conclusion**

According to Lourdasamy and Khine (2001) effective behavior management is at the heart of 'learner centred teaching' and must be a dominant focus throughout teacher education programs. They proposed that failure to help students feel confident in this area can lead to a preference for 'the teacher-centred approaches in teaching that allow them to control the class better than collaborative learning situations that may lead to disruptive student behavior'(p. 11). This small study provided some insights into some aspects of pre-service teachers' learning about behavior management from their first professional experience. The findings suggested that the first experience in a school can be a powerful means of introducing key principles of best practice to pre-service teachers when the approach is coordinated across the on-campus and school-based programs. The findings also revealed some of the more complex aspects of classroom management

which are not evident in pre-service teachers' early learning and so need to be addressed in the remainder of their degree and the early years of teaching.

## References

- Australian Education Union (2008) *New Educators' Survey 2008*. Online: <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/> (accessed January 2009)
- Bernard, R. H. (2000) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Sage Publications, California.
- Bromfield, C. (2006) PGCE Secondary Trainee Teachers & Effective Behaviour Management: an evaluation and commentary, *Support for Learning*, 21 (4) 188-193.
- Chambers, S. M. & Hardy, J. C. (2005) Length of Time in Student Teaching: Effects on Classroom Control Orientation and Self-Efficacy Beliefs, *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28 (3) 3-9.
- Creswell, J.W. (1994) *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Sage Publications, California.
- De Jong, T. (2005) A Framework of Principles and Best Practice for Managing Student Behaviour in the Australian Education Context, *School Psychology International*. 26, 353-370.
- Dobbins, R. (1994) *The Practicum: A Learning Journey*, PhD Thesis, Deakin University.
- Fields, B. A. (2008) *Systemic and School Level Responses to the Imperatives of Behaviour Management: A Review of One Education System's Plan for School Improvement*, 2007 AARE Conference Proceedings.
- Fields, B. (2006) *Pedagogical Reform and Classroom reality: How Teachers View Teaching and Discipline*, 2005 AARE Conference Proceedings.
- Haigh, M. & Ward, G. (2003) *Metaphors, myths and models: Clarifying practicum partnerships*, ATEA Conference Proceedings.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training (2007) *Top of the Class: Report on the inquiry into teacher education*, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Huntly, H. (2008) Teachers' Work: Beginning Teachers' Conceptions of Competence, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 35 (1), 125-145.
- Kiggins, J. (2008) *Lessons from the Classroom: First Year teachers Report about their Perceptions of Life as a Beginning Teacher*, 2007 AARE Conference Proceedings.
- Loudusamy A. & Khine, M. S. (2001) *Self Evaluation of interpersonal behaviour and classroom interaction by trainee teachers*, 2001 AARE Conference Proceedings.
- McCormack, A. (1996) *Managing to Teach Physical Education: From Preservice to Inservice*, 1996 AARE Proceedings.
- McNally, J., I'anson, J., Whewell, C. and Wilson, G. (2005) 'They think that swearing is okay': first lessons in behaviour management, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 33 (3) 169-185.
- Neumann, L. W. (1997) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Peters, J. (2009) *Sustaining Student Teachers' Commitment: The role of first practicum experiences*. 2008 AARE Conference Proceedings.
- Schmidt, M. (2006) 'It's Just a false Sense of Reality': *Student Teachers' Latent Learning about Classroom Management*, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.
- Wasley, D. (2002). *Potential of the practicum in Teacher Education: Roles, communication and professional development*, PhD Thesis, University of South Australia.
- Zuckerman, J. T. (2007) Classroom management in Secondary Schools: A Study of Student Teachers' Successful Strategies, *American Secondary Education*, 35 (2) Spring, 4-16.