Teaching to T7: The Impact of Tutor Interventions on Secondary Trainees' Behaviour Management Development

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INTRODUCTION

The current Initial Teacher Education (ITE) inspection framework focuses explicitly on how ITE partnerships should improve trainee teachers' skills in managing pupil behaviour. This is in response to the Government's determination to tackle what is considered to be a key barrier to pupil progress; namely, a "culture of casual acceptance of low level disruption and poor attitudes to learning" (Wilshaw, 2013, p.17).

Nationally, there appears to be a wide variation both in evidence of a deterioration in pupil behaviour and in trainees' confidence in managing behaviour effectively in their classrooms. In 2012 three out of four teachers rated behaviour as good or very good (Office for Standards in Education, 2012), with 85% feeling equipped to deal with unruly behaviour. This is in stark contrast to survey data collected nine months later, with 53% of teachers reporting a deterioration in behaviour over the past five years and a need for improved and more specific training (Association of Teachers & Lecturers, 2013). This wide variation in responses can possibly be explained in terms of the variable socio-economic contexts from which the data was derived (Bush, Edwards, Hopwood & Lewis, 2005) and by the motivating factors of those who commissioned the studies. Yet what is of significant concern for ITE providers is that national perceptions of poor pupil behaviour and discipline may impact on teacher recruitment and retention (Barmby, 2006).

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> Many trainee teachers identified challenging behaviour as one of their most negative classroom experiences, in particular low level disruption and pupils' poor listening skills.

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> ITE tutors must ensure that trainees have the knowledge and skills to manage behaviour effectively if they are to remain in the profession for the long-term.

Securing the long-term retention of postgraduates in the profession has never been more important as OFSTED are increasingly holding ITE providers to account as they observe and track the progress of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) under the Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework (OFSTED, 2014).

It is, therefore, incumbent upon ITE tutors to reflect upon their teaching, observational feedback and intervention in this area to ensure that trainees are equipped with the necessary skills to manage behaviour and develop the strategies and resilience to stay the course in the classroom.

The attainment data (Feb, 2014) of trainees enrolled on the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in secondary English at Liverpool Hope University reflected the above challenges. Mean scores were calculated for each Teacher Standard across the trainee cohort (n=24). Out of the eight Teacher Standards, "Managing behaviour effectively" (T7) attained the second lowest mean score of 1.92. At this point in their training, many of the trainees highlighted behaviour as one of their most negative experiences, referencing, in particular, low level disruption and pupils' poor listening skills. This concurred with the Teaching Agency NQT Survey (2012, p.3) where teachers requested "better teaching of step-by-step strategies to deal with bad behaviour and a discussion of options for different situations". Hence the undertaking of this small scale enquiry to investigate the impact of tutor intervention on this key Teacher Standard for students undertaking the Secondary PGCE (English).

METHODOLOGY

By Review Two, in February 2014, (which is the culmination of trainees' first school placement experience and midway through the PGCE course), the cohort had attended both a lecture and seminar on behaviour management (October, 2013) and a NUT Behaviour Management Conference. The lecture/seminar supported the reflective philosophy of the PGCE course by encouraging trainees to reflect on their practice and experiences against each of the four sub-divided areas of the behaviour management standard, as articulated in the following outcomes. Students should:

1. Have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms, and take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in classrooms and around the school, in accordance with the school's behaviour policy.

2. Have high expectations of behaviour, and establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies, using praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly.

3. Manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them.

4. Maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary.

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Trainees were provided with a comprehensive behavioural checklist from which to select strategies that would have the greatest impact on their pupils' behaviour. Working in collaboration with tutors and mentors they used these strategies to create a personalised behavioural intervention plan.

Trainees were also encouraged to consider both humanist theories of behaviour and the behaviourist approach (Skinner, 1969), which form the core of many school behaviour management policies.

The NUT conference, *Promoting Positive Behaviour for Learning in Classrooms*, encouraged trainees to adopt a collaborative learning approach to finding solutions to behavioural issues, as suggested by Bear's (2011) systemic model. Bear focuses on social problem solving, as well as refining strategies to improve verbal and non-verbal communication, in order to develop teacher presence. Conference resource materials included a comprehensive checklist, *Getting Behaviour Right*, from which trainees were encouraged to action plan for their own practice. Post-conference lesson observations led to further tutor refinement of this checklist for the PGCE trainees, as Standard T7:4 was still proving to be one of the weakest areas during observations. These refinements responded to Bear (2011) with a closer analysis of how trainees could present authority and decisiveness in their relationships with pupils.

This checklist formed the basis of the enquiry, anticipating that when planning and teaching, the trainees (with the support of their mentors) would select strategies from the list that they considered would have the greatest impact on pupil progress. In this way, they would create personalised behavioural intervention plans. The impact of these plans was evaluated during trainees' weekly target review cycles with their subject mentors, who would use weekly lesson observation feedback and data when judging lessons against T7.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the intervention plans and the resultant analysis provided a number of key insights into trainees' experiences in managing pupil behaviour:

- The non-verbal/verbal communication elements (e.g. body language, smile, greeting) which all integrate into "how" to manage behaviour (Canter & Canter, 2001), appeared the most challenging area for some trainees who, at times, lacked confidence in their interactions with pupils and felt unable to relax sufficiently to develop more positive relationships.

- Many trainees lacked awareness of the behaviourist power of praise as evidenced by Hart (2010), which was one of the most frequent areas requiring improvement during observation feedback. There often appeared to be too little time for trainee-pupil interaction during lessons thus reducing opportunities for positive reinforcement. Once trainees were more confident with their classes and developed less didactic pedagogies, which increased opportunities for dialogue/dialogic interaction, there was often greater use

of praise and personal response. However, the dichotomy here for some trainees was that in an attempt to respond to tutor feedback they often used praise in undeserved contexts, thus acting in opposition to behaviourist theory. The praise, therefore, became meaningless and did not impact effectively on the pupil. The challenge here is to provide behaviour-specific praise, which has been found to impact most conclusively on individual pupils and indeed the whole class (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer and Merrell, 2008).

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- There was evidence of impact in terms of responses to feedback that referenced the checklist. There was also an increased focus on checklist strategies in terms of proactive and pre-emptive preparations (Hallam & Rodgers, 2008) by organising resources, using and adhering to seating plans and strengthening early engagement through strong starter activities.

- Encouraging trainees to use their voice more effectively and work on physical proxemics in the classroom often required further deconstruction to diagnose precisely what was required for impact. This "teaching by number" approach was effective for some trainees who were engaged by the self-analysis, which perhaps re-emphasises the importance of iPads/flip cameras for self/peer assessment as a powerful pedagogical resource for improving classroom practice (Marsh & Marshall, 2014).

- The explicit "teaching" of pupil behaviour had not always been considered or planned for by many trainees, and emphasising the impact of using behavioural objectives alongside learning objectives proved particularly popular and effective in supporting this area.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

In terms of developing future practice there are three main recommendations:

Firstly, tutors must be mindful to develop trainees' understanding of both humanist and behaviourist theories in their approaches to managing behaviour and their awareness that both can complement and support each other. To ensure this, sufficient time must be allocated to independent reflection and analysis of trainees' own practice in the light of such theory.

Secondly, trainees require increased opportunities to observe good practice in terms of T7. Devoting time to lesson observation often loses value to trainees as they become more familiar with their placement. Yet secondary trainees' exit evaluations in 2014 explicitly requested more opportunities to critique videos of teachers/lessons during their course. Tutors and mentors must ensure that trainees are active observers, analysing in fine detail how experienced staff manage their classes and develop positive relationships with their pupils (O'Leary, 2012).

► Key Point

Trainees must actively observe how experienced teachers manage pupil behaviour effectively and develop positive relationships in the classroom.

Thirdly, tutors should work more closely with mentors and trainees to triangulate their approaches to developing behaviour management, enabling mentors themselves to partake in effective reflection using a reciprocal learning model (Hopper, 2001). With the recent requirement for ITE institutions to work with schools in challenging circumstances (OFSTED, 2014), where behaviour can sometimes be a cause for concern, this approach has the potential for significant impact as all educators participate in strengthening their capacity in this arena.

Ultimately, trainees' progress in T7, lies with developing relationships on a daily basis by engaging pupils with excellent teaching and learning while building the necessary confidence to tackle behavioural issues as they arise. But what is clear from this enquiry is that the trainees' use of many intervention strategies and their response to associated feedback had some impact in the classroom.

At their final review point in June, the English trainees exited the PGCE course with an average of 1.57 which is an increase of 0.46 from Review 2. This is the second highest increase across all Teacher Standards. However, whether this is the effect of the intervention plan, tutor feedback or simply the growing confidence of PGCE trainees, remains open to conjecture and further research.

► Key Point

The learner centred teacher manages behaviour not by choosing from a pre determined list but by building multiple different strategies into an aproach to behaviour management that is grounded in a sound understanding of relevant theory and developed in relationship with pupils.

A final outcome relates to the Managing Behaviour Checklist, which although based on fundamental theoretical underpinnings could risk becoming a "top tips" guide. This trial and error approach has been crticised by Bromfield (2006) for discouraging teachers from considering why particular behaviour management strategies work in some contexts and not in others. It is important that tutors develop trainees' awareness that behaviour management is not simply a set of strategies to be learned and

implemented when needed. Understanding human interaction is key. However, it is often difficult for trainees to develop this capacity during the brief intensity of the PGCE course, as behaviour management skills are developed over time and with experience (Van Tartwijk, Brok, Veldman & Wubbels, 2009). Trainees need to have an awareness of what Nie and Lau (2009) found in their study involving 350,000 pupils; namely, that it is the learner-centred teacher, who encourages pupil autonomy and choice, who will impact most successfully on behaviour in the classroom. In other words, as Bromfield (2006) reminds us, there are no quick fixes.

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