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Teachers' Attitudes in Classroom Management as Perceived by Pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Abstract: Studies have extensively presented a range of best practices for teachers to develop adequate classroom management skills. Yet, to date the connected attitudes that teachers would require to capably execute classroom management have received scarce attention in scientific literature. Accordingly, this article documents teachers' classroom management attitudes (TCMA) from the perspective of pupils presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Individual interviews were conducted with fourteen SEBD pupils attending secondary-school special education programs. Using thematic analysis, emergent themes were then identified and categorized, resulting in seventeen teacher attitudes which then fell into four overarching dimensions: 1) Respect; 2) Authority; 3) Supportiveness; and 4) Differentiation. The connection between the teacher attitudes, as voiced by the pupils, and the pupils' perception of their teachers' classroom management skill and proficiency is described at length. In light of these findings, avenues for better classroom intervention outcomes and for further research have been proposed.

Keywords: Students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD); classroom management; teacher attitudes; student voice and participation; schooling experiences.

Funding: This research project received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarships' Doctoral Scholarships Program.

Introduction

Classroom management is currently considered one of the greatest teaching challenges, particularly in inclusive education settings where the diversity among learners' needs is ever-growing (Bergeron, 2014 ; Prior, 2014). With this in mind, several studies report that a good number of teachers, by their own accounts, consider themselves ineffectual, inadequately trained and/or ill-equipped when it comes to managing their classrooms (Massé et al., 2015; Oliver and Reschly, 2007; State et al., 2011). To develop classroom management proficiency, teachers must necessarily acquire three things: the knowledge (information); the skills (practical know-how; habits; reflexes); and the appropriate attitudes (manner; mindset; delivery; tone) according to what research findings have shown to be effective. To effectively manage a classroom, a teacher must simultaneously know *which* strategies to operate, exactly *how* and *when* to put them into play, all the while adopting the right attitudes to foster positive interactions with and amongst the students.

From its outset over a century ago, research on classroom management has observed and scrutinized teacher practices as a core focal point (Emmer, Sabornie, and Sabornie, 2015). Hence, when investigating classroom management, the great majority of studies have focused considerable attention on teaching proficiency from a *teacher knowledge* standpoint (information; the "*what to do*") and from a *teacher practises* standpoint (methods; the "*how to do*"). Over many decades, numerous studies have highlighted all the many actions, strategies and techniques that teachers should know and use when endeavouring to become proficient classroom managers (e.g., Emmer, Sabornie, and Sabornie, 2015; Simonsen et al., 2008; Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering, 2003). Despite the abundance of research available, a considerable gap lingers between what researchers recommend and what teachers actually practice at large (Cooper et al., 2018; Evans,

Weiss, and Cullinan, 2012; Massé et al., 2020). Despite the great emphasis that has been placed on the need to study classroom management practices, research shows that some of the core requisite knowledge and skills are still little known by teachers (Main and Hammond, 2008; Massé et al., 2020). Furthermore, when teachers were in fact adopting recommended or proven practices, they were at times inadequately administered or else not applied with sufficient frequency to bring about any significant behavioural change in their pupils (Casale-Giannola, 2012 ; Maggin et al., 2011 ; Gable et al., 2010). Based on this, the challenges that teachers face in classroom management might stem from their inability to choose the best practices (lack of knowledge; lack of discernment) or their inability to use them effectively (lack of know-how; lack of skill; lack of mastery).

Beyond the two aforementioned reasons, the challenges teachers face in classroom management might also stem from their not adopting appropriate attitudes (not knowing how to act; not knowing what type of relational stance or behaviours to espouse). Despite the great importance of attitudes as part and parcel of any classroom management effort, teacher attitudes have been largely neglected as a research topic and few studies have ever been centred on them. Teachers' classroom management attitudes (TCMA) merit special attention due to their influence on classroom management effectiveness in this genuine daily struggle (Aksu and Caglar, 2006). These very same attitudes also influence pupils' academic and social development, children's emotional wellbeing and - given their substantial impact on both a pupil's and a teacher's classroom experience - deserve due consideration and a considerable amount of further study (Sezer, 2018).

With this goal in mind, who better than a group of learners themselves to be tasked with documenting TCMA from an insider's point of view? Several studies indeed show that pupils are capable of offering relevant and subtle critical appraisal of their teachers (Bernier, Gaudreau, and Massé, forthcoming; Cefai and Cooper, 2010; Sellman, 2009).

To this day, studies on classroom management have rarely considered student voice despite pupils being the primary recipients and end-users of such classroom practices (Montouro and Lewis, 2015; Bernier, Gaudreau, and Massé, 2021). Moreover, from the entire student body, it seemed plausible that pupils presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) might hold particularly valuable insights into teacher classroom management - given the nature and intensity of their struggles - which often tend to lead them to gain greater exposure to a suitably broad range of practices (Desbiens, Levasseur, and Roy, 2014). Notwithstanding this, pupils presenting with SEBD are among the most unheard voices in scientific research, even more so when they find themselves placed exclusively in special education classes (Herz and Haertel, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2011). Considering the scant attention given to SEBD pupils to date, this study aims to document their views on teachers' classroom management attitudes and practices. Written as a complement to our other published findings on teacher classroom management practices (Bernier, Gaudreau, and Massé, forthcoming), this article more comprehensively documents the perceptions held by a group of secondary-school pupils presenting with SEBD in full-time special education classes with respect to TCMA.

Conceptual Framework

In the manner of Kauffman and Landrum, (2018), this article draws inspiration from Forness and Knitzer's (1992) definition of pupils presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as being those whose "emotional or behavioral responses in school programs [are] so different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms that they adversely affect educational performance, including academic, social, vocational, or personal skills" (p.13). Our definition of classroom management herein is "the set of conscious acts, orchestrated sequentially and/or simultaneously, that professional

instructors devise, organize and carry out, for the benefit of and in conjunction with their students, for the specific purpose of establishing, maintaining or restoring an educational climate which fosters both the pupils' engagement in the lessons and the pupil's competency development" (Gaudreau, 2017, 7). Learner perceptions are understood to mean "thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about persons, situations, and events" (Schunk and Meece, 1992, xi). Generally speaking, an attitude is understood as a person's manner, "a mindset (involving feelings, ideas, convictions, sentiments, etc.), a person's inner disposition, views of oneself and of one's surroundings (including people, things, situations, events, ideologies, means of expression, etc.) and that all lead to a particular way of being or acting, agreeably or disagreeably, as may be the case" (Legendre, 2005, 138). Within this article, teacher classroom management attitudes hence equate to a teacher's mindset and inner disposition which underlie his or her particular manner (of being or acting) whether beneficial or detrimental to classroom management. It is essential here to emphasize that an attitude is not a directly observable phenomenon, but rather inferred based on teachers' behaviours (Legendre, 2005). In this article, the teacher attitudes described by pupils presenting with SEBD are hence judgements (subjective inferences) borne by the latter (in the form of perceptions) as to the behaviours (objectively observable phenomena, such as conduct, practices, strategies, intervention methods) that teachers adopt during their classroom management endeavours. Therefore, the attitudes invariably emerge and exhibit themselves through the various mannerisms, postures and actions that our study participants perceive as being more or less effective as teachers go about managing the class.

Materials and Methods

Based on a descriptive and narrative design, the study objective was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by drawing on participants' personal experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018) using qualitative-interpretive research methods. Individual interviews helped document the SEBD pupils' perceptions of TCMA in sufficient detail.

1. Sample

The study sample comprised 14 secondary-school pupils presenting with SEBD (3 girls and 11 boys)[1] and enrolled in full-time special education classes. Participants were recruited from four different secondary schools situated across two different regions in the province of Québec (Canada). Table 1 shows a breakdown of sample characteristics.

[Table 1 near here]

2. Procedure

Having obtained approval from the university Ethics Committee for research involving human subjects, the lead researcher then contacted 16 secondary school principals at schools which offered full-time special education programs for pupils presenting with SEBD. Four of the schools accepted the request to participate in the study. Study participants were recruited from two predominantly mainstream public schools, an alternative training centre and a specialized private school. Potential participants were first preselected by school principals to fit our study criteria (i.e. pupils presenting with

[1] The proportion of boys and girls within the sample is quite representative of the Quebec (Canada) population of pupils presenting with SEBD. The province counts 2 girls for every 10 boys attending full-time special education programs (MEES, 2016).

SEBD; in full-time special education placement; 14-18 years of age), and then invited to meet the researcher. Information sessions were held in the four participating schools where the eighteen (18) pupils attended to inform them further about the project, along with the implications, risks and advantages of participating. Fourteen (14) of the eighteen (18) attendees agreed to move forward with the study. All signed a consent form and parents/guardians all received an informational document about the study that their child agreed to be involved in. All data collection was conducted between February and April, 2019. At each of the four schools, an informal preparatory session was conducted so participants could get to know the researcher, submit the signed consent forms and review their school records together. Lastly, one-on-one semi-structured interviews (roughly one hour per person) were conducted.

3. Data collection

Documents reviewed during the preparatory session were later analyzed using a short form to obtain equivalent data on all participants. Based on that information, the researcher then prepared and personalized each of the meetings. The final interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guideline comprised of 16 questions covering three broad themes: 1) Classroom practices and teacher classroom management attitudes (TCMA); 2) The influence of the former in the classroom experience for pupils presenting with SEBD and 3) Mainstream reintegration of pupils presenting with SEBD. The study results presented herein were principally derived from pupils' answers to the first interview theme and, more precisely, the questions specifically designed to discern the attitudes exhibited by the "*best*" and "*worst*" teachers the participants had encountered throughout their schooling.

4. Data analysis

All interviews were recorded on audio files, re-transcribed into Word, anonymised and imported into the *NVivo* (Version 12) software program where they underwent thematic analysis to find emerging categories, in line with the purpose of the study. The data extracted from the pupil's school records helped assign a number of distinct attributes to each participant (e.g. age, gender, results, retention, duration of placement). In the *NVivo* database, the authors read the transcribed final interviews and coded the data by creating emerging nodes (primary categories) representing different teachers' attitudes in classroom management. At this point, the analysis lead to seventeen emerging attitudes who were directly extrapolated from data. After, short reports were produced to describe these seventeen emerging attitudes and to select the most representative excerpts from participants' testimonials. The attitudes pinpointed during this analysis were then categorized in four overarching dimensions by the authors to facilitate the presentation of the study's findings. These overarching dimensions are aggregate categories of the emerging attitudes (primary categories) reflecting dominant and recurring themes in the dataset. Aspiring to rigour and credibility, investigator triangulation was applied throughout the analysis phase (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2014). Lastly, a coding method was used to conceal the identity of each participant and preserve confidentiality (1 = girl, 2 = boy; age; school attended (A, B, C, D)).

Results

Data analysis reveals that participants alluded to, in almost equal proportions, the "good" classroom management attitudes which they endorsed, deemed beneficial, or recommended adopting (n = 9, equating to 56 % of the dataset analyzed) and the "bad" classroom management attitudes which they criticized, found detrimental, or

recommended avoiding (n = 8, equating to 44 % of the dataset analyzed). Table 2 shows how the seventeen identified TCMAs fall into the four overarching dimensions which emerged during analysis.

[Table 2 near here]

The subsequent sections outline the four overarching dimensions and detail the positive and negative attitudes that participants perceived as being linked to teacher classroom management proficiency.

1. Attitudes involving respect

The first broad attitude dimension that participants touched upon centred on the theme of respect. Participants drew attention to the importance of teachers adopting respectful attitudes towards their pupils - under all circumstances - in order for good classroom management to occur:

> We need to feel like they respect us. Sure, we're the students, but we're also actual people, too. So, we deserve some respect. (…) What's the *most* important, it's for the teacher to remember that teachers are just humans, and us students are just humans too, you know. (…) Personally, I'd say that they gotta talk to us respectfully. We might be kids, but we deserve respect too. (1.15.B)

Attitudes that demonstrate the aforementioned respect may manifest in various ways, such as being discreet, addressing issues privately, or using non-verbal forms of intervention (e.g. a signal, a glance, increased proximity) with learners:

> Well, you know, I'd much prefer to, like, talk to the teacher privately out in the corridor than in front of the whole class, and for everyone to know the score… It's like, my issues are none of their business, right… (2.17.D)

> She [teacher] would say, after class for example, that everyone else could go to recess, but she asked me to stay and talk, because she wanted to tell me how I could do better. She really helped me a lot, you know. (2.16.C-2)

Furthermore, it was suggested that being even-tempered and serene was another way for respect to manifest, and participants linked this to better classroom management outcomes:

> She [the best teacher] was easy-going. She was dynamic, but still relaxed. It's like, even when we were too chatty, she stayed calm and never lost her cool. (2.15.A)

In the participants' eyes, there is nothing to be gained from a teacher getting angry when a student insults or bothers them, nor in a teacher taking student comments too personally. In reacting to these situations, the teacher's tone of voice, posture and gestures are indicators of respectful or disrespectful attitudes in classroom management:

> Mr. X, he was always saying that kid he needed to calm down, like all the time, but he didn't talk to him the same way he did with the rest of us. He used a more dominating tone of voice, like, to show he was in charge. (2.14.D)

Participants also emphasized how important it is for teachers to acknowledge their own mistakes and to apologize if they have reacted badly. The idea of teachers making amends, which is a concept so frequently expected of school children, was mentioned as an effective classroom management idea. On the other hand, eleven study participants suggested that teachers should simply avoid using a disrespectful manner in the first place, as it invariably leads to teachers acting snippy, yelling, complaining, pressuring or criticizing. Similarly, irony, sarcasm, cheap jokes (the unkind type) and nastiness are all

at the top of the "most detrimental" charts when it comes to showing signs of disrespect in classroom management:

> I get that they have a position of authority, but sometimes, they speak to us kinda rudely. I'm like… whoa, take it easy! It's just that when she speaks rudely to me, I'm gonna be rude back of course. (2.15.A)

> There was once, I remember, last year. Well – full disrespect! He called me a bad name. You know, you just can't talk to students like that. He called me a *twit* or something like that, he said I was like a total moron. Well, that didn't fly with me – no way – so I just stormed out and then, I punched a locker cause I was so furious. You know what else? At the start of class, the teacher even said, if you respect me then I'll respect you back. How is that respect? It's totally the opposite: he should respect me, then I'll respect him. (2.16.B)

Study participants unanimously agreed that being unfair, contradictory or inconsistent were all highly detrimental to good classroom management. For instance, some teachers were not trustworthy (e.g., not keeping their word, not doing what they said, not sticking to own rules, not sticking to the student's education plan, etc.) or unfairly applied rules:

> Well, they [the worst teachers] didn't have any patience. Then, I'd say they weren't really fair. They preferred the other kids. Like, the ones who always listened well. They assume those kids are more intelligent, then they let them get away with more [stuff] than me. (…) Like, sometimes, they'd make rules to follow, and they didn't respect the rules themselves. They don't walk the talk. Like when the "good" students did something wrong, often the teacher pretended not to see it, and then when we did something wrong it was like, we'd be punished. (…) I would definitely accuse them of unfair treatment. Then, I'd try to explain how it's not right when they do that. (2.14.B)

Another common injustice brought up by participants was that some teachers were always on someone's back or else had favourites (teacher's pets):

> In 5th grade, it was like she was just fixated on me. Even all the other kids said so. I didn't think it was fair. Like, why me lady? You know, personally, I already find school difficult, and it kind of sucks, but I still try pretty hard, but she was just really confrontational. (2.15.D)

Lastly, on the topic of respect, four participants mentioned having experienced situations wherein teachers were seemingly "against" them and spoke ill of them behind their backs (conversing with staff or other students), adding that this was a disrespectful attitude which they considered highly unprofessional:

> It's really about the way she talked about me to the other kids when I wasn't around. That's the whole reason I didn't like her. I stayed home from school sometimes, and the next day my friends would say: Hey, guess what? You know, the teacher said this or that about you in front of the whole group. It often ended up with me losing it in class, leaving the room; I wanted to get out of there, so I'd just run away from school. (…) Once, she even said straight up in front of everyone in class that my parents couldn't handle me, and didn't bring me up right. (1.15.D)

2. Attitudes involving authority

The second attitude dimension which participants brought up was related to teacher authority and differing authoritative styles. According to our participants, the manner in which teachers exert authority (i.e. their attitudes towards authority and discipline) is a highly influential factor in classroom management. According to the pupils, teachers need to be firm, steadfast and somewhat strict, aiming to be neither too authoritarian (intimidating, forceful) nor too permissive (relaxed, laissez-faire). Study participants suggested teachers should be adopting an authoritative demeanour that impels students to show respect for them, without having to disrespect any pupils along the way. In this sense, participants agree that authority should be wielded as a leadership tool in a consistent and coherent manner:

> They [best teachers] were, like, *friendly* with us students. They knew how to have *fun*, but also how to get the work done. (…) We could have *fun*, but we had to work too. They wouldn't let us just mess around all the time. (2.16.B)

Participants reported that, in their view, the teachers who managed classes best were the ones who got more actively involved with their pupils and encouraged discussions. Leveraging one's sense of humour was suggested as an excellent way to adopt a good attitude in an effort to curtail behavioural challenges:

> Well, a teacher's gotta be a bit *chill*. She needs to be kind and smile a lot. But she's also gotta get involved with us. Not like in our stupidities, but like, she can't just give the class and then that's it, that's all. She's gotta take an interest in our lives, and help us out. (1.15.B)

Eleven participants also suggested that the best classroom managers tended to be pleasant, funny, smiling, happy, dynamic, kind, genuine and honest:

> Whereas if you're nice to the class, they'll be like: well whatever, she's nice to me so why would I want to be a bitch. (…) So, we're like… She's trying to be nice, she wants to have fun with us; OK, let's have some fun together then, why not? (2.16.B)

For our study participants, these attitudes towards authority have a positive influence on class behaviour (e.g., engagement, participation). Conversely, the majority of participants also stated that permissive laissez-faire attitudes (i.e., non-investment, dispassion, non-intervention, acting overly casual) proved highly detrimental and were too-often present:

> It's like, let's say, as if she was asleep on the job all day. That's the teacher I didn't really like in fact. She was a nice teacher, just a bit lost or not quite with it… There wasn't any classroom management. We were just like…we just talked amongst ourselves, we did whatever we wanted. (1.15.B)

> Kids will misbehave a little, and then when the teacher does nothing, well, they'll misbehave a lot. Then, it just goes downhill from there. Then, there are some teachers

> who let it go two, three, four, five, six times, and it just gets totally out of hand. (1.16.B)

Participants suggested that a lack of authority or discipline makes for more problems than an excess of it. On this aspect, it was nonetheless also observed that taking on a highly authoritarian attitude - rigid, aggressive or overly strict - is clearly detrimental to classroom management too. Moreover, in order to resolve an issue with a student, willingly lording inordinate power over a pupil (a controlling attitude) and handing down increasingly tougher punishments (a punitive attitude) were deemed ineffective classroom attitudes, due to the negative impact on pupil behavioural choices and pupil emotional wellbeing (e.g. fear, worry, anxiety):

> For sure kids'll give you trouble if you're too strict as a teacher. The worst [teachers], they just acted like they were the "big boss". Like, in class, they would never ask our opinion or anything. It was just: do this whatchamacallit and that's that, you've got no say in it, otherwise you know where the door is. (2.16.B)

> In 6th grade, what was really strange to me, was that they kept telling us: in high school, the teachers'll be really strict. So they decided to be super strict too. But you know, when you get to high school, they're not that strict, they're even kinder. So then [in primary school], they became much stricter on us, but really too strict, it was totally annoying. They were, like, acting all confrontational with our class. I really didn't like feeling confronted like that at all. (2.15.D)

On this note, half of the participants stated that threatening and confrontational attitudes were detrimental in the classroom. Furthermore, the most frequent threat was being excluded from class, a threat which some teachers would seem to use to rid themselves of certain children which they would supposedly incite to misbehave as a means to justify their exclusion:

> They [worst teachers] used threats. All they did was make threats, like: Do you want me to throw you out of class? … and they would just ignore our questions … They

> did everything possible to make us lose it, so they could justify kicking us out of the room. Basically, all they wanted was to get rid of us so they could be left in peace. It was their technique for getting us out of the way, you know. (2.16.C-1)

3. Attitudes involving supportiveness

The third dimension of attitudes emerging from participants' testimonials centred on the theme of both pedagogical and emotional support. Firstly, participants were fond of teachers with supportive attitudes towards their learning endeavours, and who believed in their ability to progress and learn the material. They noticed a number of benefits associated with teachers who placed confidence in them, who considered them capable, who knew they could change, and who did everything in their power to assist in reaching those goals. Participants believed that this kind of caring attitude had a very positive impact on classroom motivation and engagement:

> Well, you know, I love Mr. X as a teacher cause he, hmmm, well it's like he really wants us to succeed. So, he tries really hard. Like, he just won't let us fail. When he sees you really need some help big time, he'll come see you and say: "My job is to support you, I'm here to help". (2.15.D)

Twelve participants pinpointed attitudes that showed these teachers were good listeners, were empathetic, and openly offered assistance which, in turn, they felt, led to proficient classroom management. In their view, classroom management improves when teachers are mindful of pupils' needs, check how pupils are doing, try and understand pupils' situations, and nurture their charges. Participants also liked to be told that they were an important part of the teachers' lives and that teachers cared about them overall. They hence recommended that teachers no longer criticise, remove or punish, but rather support, care and assist:

> The best teachers I've had so far, serious, are the ones who actually take the time and listen to us. Not just school stuff, but about life and all. And with those teachers,

> you know that they've noticed when you feel a bit *off*, they take the time to come see you in the hallway for a chat, and ask "What's the matter, dear?" until they see that you're ok. Cause if a teacher doesn't listen to us, how's he supposed to adapt to our situation. It's just logical, don't you think? (1.15.D)

Contrastingly, participants also brought some situations to light wherein teachers adopted closed-off attitudes, literally refusing to help a pupil learn something or refusing to take the time to re-explain:

> My worst ever teacher was in my first year here. She wouldn't answer questions, she just did nothing, absolutely nothing. I'd raise my hand and she'd never come see me. (1.15.B)

Study participants listed numerous negative effects associated with closed-off teacher attitudes: a refusal to assist pupils in need, not bothering to provide extra support, not attempting to understand where pupils are coming from (e.g. feelings) and a general disinterest in addressing their personal challenges:

> The worst teacher I've had, seriously, wasn't that she wasn't friendly or nice to us. She was totally cool, really sweet, but she just didn't seem to understand us or take the time to ask us anything, like to know how we're feeling and all. Like, when one of us was feeling a bit *off*, she wouldn't even ask about it. She'd just go about her business and turn a blind eye, so as not to upset the apple-cart. (1.15.D)

4. Attitudes involving differentiation

The fourth and final dimension of attitudes which emerged from participants' testimonials was centred on the theme of differentiation. Many touted the benefits of having certain teachers who were open and receptive to pupils' individual differences. More specifically, the pupils found personalized educational responses – specifically adapted to their own strengths and weaknesses – particularly constructive. Pupils hence recommend that teaching techniques, strategies and responses should vary to fit the student profile:

> Personally, I'd say the teaching staff should use a different method with each and every one of us, based on the kinds of difficulties we have, our behavioural issues. You know, sometimes, they act the same with every kid, but it's like, not everyone has the same issues. It's not the student's job to adapt to the teacher, in fact. It's that the teacher should adapt to the students. (1.15.D)

Pupils also suggested that teachers pay special attention to each student's needs and level of progress over the course of the school year, with a view to adapting their teaching strategies accordingly:

> I'd say, being mindful of students' needs. You know, it's like if you pay attention to see what each kid actually needs, then you organize things a certain way, well, I reckon that could really work. (2.17.D)

In addition, our study participants suggest teachers should remain flexible, be ready to make compromises and give second chances (but not unlimited chances). This implies early intervention to prevent weaknesses from further declining. In order to see results, this may sometimes require teachers to bargain with their charges a little:

> My first time in 5th grade, she [teacher] caught on that I had serious issues with concentration. That it was really tough for me to control it. So, she gave me a lot of chances to try and do better. Like, she'd see me messing around with someone, she'd just say my name aloud, and I got what she meant. It was super helpful, how she gave me a second chance to behave better, cause it's not easy to do. (2.16.C-2)

Lastly, participants stated that teachers should avoid being impatient and rigid, avoid reacting too hastily, and avoid rushing into classroom management norms and mechanisms without first granting the pupil sufficient time to do their best to react or respond to the request. Pupils recommended deferring or better staggering interventions, deeming it more constructive to allow students the time – both during and in between each intervention – to make real attempts at modifying their behaviours:

> In my class, they stopped the three-warning system, cause sometimes, it escalated too fast. So you had the three warnings that's ok, but they checked them off too quickly, and then the kids really hated it, so they got rid of all that. For sure, what's a better idea with the warnings, it's to have some kind of time interval before the next one, cause otherwise the kid acts up, and then 3 warnings are used in no time, and it's like: you're out of the room before you even get started, and the frustrations fly. So, I reckon having a bigger gap between warnings. Like 2-3 minutes. You know, I wouldn't wanna get a bunch of warnings all in a row so fast like that. (2.15.D)

> Well, I need extra time, cause sometimes when I'm too…. maybe too flustered, over-excitable or just too angry. I need, like, just 5 minutes otherwise I just won't get through the whole period. (1.15.B)

Discussion

This study aspired to document teachers' classroom management attitudes (TCMA) as seen from the student-voice perspective of a group of secondary-school special-education pupils presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Analyses of pupil testimonials led to the emergence of seventeen attitudes (9 positive; 8 negative) falling into four overarching dimensions: 1) Respect; 2) Authority; 3) Supportiveness; and 4) Differentiation. The findings of this small-scale qualitative study with students attending full time special programmes for children with SEBD hence constitute a significant breakthrough in research on classroom management attitudes by identifying specific attitudes teachers. Consistent with Sezer's (2018) findings, the pupil testimonials herein highlight the ways in which positive TCMA tend to positively influence student engagement, student well-being and students' desire to adopt appropriate behaviours. Antithetically, the exact opposite naturally applies to negative TCMA. Study findings also bring to light the fact that sound TCMA respond to pupils' emotional needs for reassurance, which continue to exist even in the secondary-school level where children are not looking to befriend teachers or develop "chummy" relationships, but rather seek

a caring role-model as well as a respectful and respectable adult mentor. In accordance with other such studies (Casale-Giannola, 2012 ; Maggin et al., 2011 ; Gable et al., 2010), our findings similarly indicate that when it comes to proficient classroom management, simply being aware of the recommended practices (having knowledge; the "what") does not suffice; proficiency requires intervention skill sets and operational finesse (competency; the "how", "how much" and the "when") in combination with the appropriate attitudes (tone and manner). This observation reminds us how strongly a teacher's attitudes underpin and directly influence a teacher's classroom conduct and, by way of this, a teacher's effectiveness in classroom management.

Respect, guidance, supportiveness, differentiation: The fundamental pillars of sound classroom management

This study revealed four broad attitudes dimensions, thus depicting many fundamental attitudes involved in teacher's classroom management. Despite the small number of studies focused directly on attitudes, others' research does support our findings. Firstly, our findings are consistent with several studies having documented pupils' viewpoints on their best teachers' qualities, such as being respectful, caring, pleasant, understanding, empathetic, helpful, flexible, open, patient, calm, consistent, fair and having a sense of humour (Davies and Ryan, 2014; Minott, 2020). The aforementioned qualities intersect with several of the positive TCMA which our participants identified, those being: showing respect; being fair, kind, genuine; being a good listener; showing empathy; being considerate and flexible. In line with existing literature, our findings herein now serve to underline the importance of embracing positive attitudes in order to achieve favourable classroom management outcomes.

Beyond this, our findings are also consistent with research on teachers' authoritative styles, which suggest that teachers should exercise authority in the classroom by

establishing fair rules, issuing clear guidelines and setting clear limits, without, however, being too authoritarian, strict, rigid, threatening or punitive (Woolfolk Hoy and Weinstein, 2006; Montouro and Lewis, 2015). Much like other authors have suggested, our study participants, too, deem it more effective when teachers use a firmer style of authority (instructive, democratic, cooperative) rather than being too permissive (absent-minded, lackadaisical, laissez-faire) or too authoritarian (autocratic) (Artraud, 1989; Robbes and Afgoustidis, 2015; Reynaud, 2007). On this level, participants referred to a few quite precise sub-elements - such as tone of voice (e.g. neutral, firm), a sense of humour, and body posture (e.g., in proximity, relaxed) - as factors that influence how teachers exert their authority (Cashdollar, 2018 ; Minott, 2020).

Furthermore, the study findings substantiate the value of supportiveness and pedagogical differentiation in successful classroom management. Pupils deemed it essential for teachers to demonstrate openness towards individual differences and adjust their approach to the students' diverse needs, challenges and interests with a view to successful learning outcomes for all learners. On this level, several other studies demonstrated that teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of special needs pupils in mainstream classes had a significant impact on how they managed their classrooms (Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka, 2014; Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman, 2008; Sharma et al., 2018). Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka's (2014) findings show that teachers who entertain more positive attitudes towards inclusion were considered, by pupils, as being more capable when it came to establishing a respectful, supportive, structured, sustainable and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. What is more, recent findings from Ariana et al. (2020) confirm that sound classroom management practices have a significant impact on children's social acceptance of peers with special needs in their mainstream classrooms (Ariana et al., 2020). In short, attitudes

involving respect, authority, supportiveness and differentiation – as emerged during this study – align with several other studies in the field of classroom management.

Avenues for Teacher Competency Development in Classroom Management

Our findings herein offer several avenues for further exploration, all with a view to fostering teachers' acquisition of proficient classroom management skills. First and foremost, it would seem crucial for those developing teacher education programs (in both core teaching studies and continuing education) to acquaint themselves with these study findings with a view to incorporating TCMA content (encompassing manner, mindset, delivery and tone) into their curricula on classroom management. The present research is liable to supply meaningful talking points and constructive material to explore during teacher training programs with a view to ensure that sound classroom management skills are being adequately developed so teachers might acquire the knowledge (information), master the skills (reflexes) and adopt the right attitudes (mindset).

Parenthetically, some research indicates that, by developing teachers' social-emotional competencies (soft skills) via some form of training program, not only does better instruction occur, but more importantly - with teachers increasingly resorting to educational practices which are recommended by science - better classroom management occurs (Blewitt et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2017; Freiberg, Oviatt, and Naveira, 2020). Social-emotional competency is defined as "a way of being and behaving that can be taught, acquired, and assessed" (Minichiello, 2017, p. 1) and is comprised of self-management (emotional and behavioural self-regulation skills), self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills (interpersonal skills) (St-Louis, 2020 ; Collaborative for Academic, 2020). Despite the fact that links between teacher social-emotional competency and teacher classroom management proficiency are now becoming more and more apparent (Jones, Bailey, and Jacob, 2014), additional

research is needed for some deeper exploration into how these two competencies interact with each other and to pinpoint the best way to ensure that teachers develop them both. Lastly, anyone involved in the design of teacher training programs should endeavour to incorporate instructional activities where these two competencies are developed simultaneously, underscoring which TCMA are crucial to classroom success.

Limitations

The study findings should be construed with due care and discretion. Primarily, the small (N = 14) and homogenous (e.g., age, class type, nature of difficulties) sample does not meet the requirements for these results to be generalizable and applicable to the overall population of pupils presenting with SEBD. Secondarily, certain classroom management attitudes may have been over- or under-represented in pupil testimonials due to gender imbalance, limited number of participating schools, limited geographical span, among other reasons. Despite such limitations, the reported findings stand as an accurate representation of the pupils' genuine schooling experience, and provide us with concrete and actionable classroom intervention pointers for teachers to follow.

Conclusion

This exploratory study, involving a selection of pupils presenting with SEBD, serves as a constructive departure point for future research. Essentially, future research in classroom management should systematically incorporate teacher classroom management attitudes (manner, disposition and mindset). Furthermore, it would be worth conducting this same study on a larger scale, incorporating quantitative methods, and documenting a wider spectrum of pupil perceptions (with or without difficulty; various ages, genders and geographical locations) in a wider range of settings (from mainstream through special education). Our study findings could serve as a foundation for the

development of further questionnaires on TCMA. It may also be worth exploring innovative research methods in order to document primary-school pupil perceptions, as well as look at how pupil perceptions evolve over time (at various intervals) using a longitudinal study design. Lastly, it seems pertinent to assess how teacher training (e.g., social-emotional competency development) might impact proficiency levels by revisiting pupil perceptions post-training to document any changes they observe in classroom management abilities.

In closing, in order to develop, execute and maintain high proficiency levels in classroom management, teachers must constantly reassess, question and adjust their approaches - sometimes on a daily basis - to fit with the changing needs of the learners they have been charged with. Whilst classroom management knowledge and know-how remain essential, good outcomes are contingent on teacher tone and manner – both of which directly impact whether teacher strategies are ultimately successful. With this understanding, it seems primordial for teachers to be made fully aware of which attitudes these pupils presenting with SEBD have, herein, linked to effective classroom management.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the pupils who so generously offered their time and their views on their teachers' classroom management proficiency. Their testimonials confirm that we have a lot to learn from student voice and student insights and that we should carry on listening!

Declaration of interest statement / Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Tables

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristics	Average (full range)
Age	15 (14 – 17)
Number of schools attended throughout all schooling	4 (2 – 7)
Years in full-time special education placement	3 (1 – 7)
Number of formal diagnoses received (excluding school-system codes)	2 (0 – 4)

Table 2. Teacher Classroom Management Attitudes as Stated by Participants

Overarching dimensions	Positive attitudes which correlated with sound classroom management	Negative attitudes which correlated with ineffectual classroom management
Respect	− Shows respect invariably for all pupils. − Is discreet; tactful. − Is self-composed; calm.	− Is disrespectful; mean-spirited. − Is inconsistent; unfair. − Is biased or "against" students.
Authority	− Is clear-cut, firm and fair. − Is genuine and kind.	− Is permissive. − Is authoritarian or controlling. − Uses threats; is confrontational.
Supportiveness	− Believes in all students' potential. − Is a good listener and is empathetic.	− Is indifferent and unsympathetic to some pupils' support needs.
Differentiation	− Is attentive to everyone's needs. − Is flexible.	− Is impatient, rigid and uncompromising.