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Investigating Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Practicum Experiences

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the ways in which the experiences gained during practica influence the developing self-efficacy of Canadian preservice teachers in relation to inclusive classrooms. Questionnaires were issued to participants in teacher education programs at 11 institutions of higher education across Canada and the resultant data subjected to content analysis. Several themes emerged from the participant responses which were found to be influential in preservice teachers' feelings of efficacy, with behaviour management having the greatest influence, regardless of whether participants felt successful or challenged. Academic outcomes, other school adults, relationships, diagnoses, individual education plans and resources were also identified as themes which influenced feelings of success and challenge in practica. The data also revealed attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and the impact these may have on teacher behaviour. The implications of these findings for both further research and teacher education programs are discussed.

Key words: Preservice, self-efficacy, practicum, inclusion, behaviour management, academic outcomes, other school adults, relationships, individual education plans, diagnoses, resources, attitudes and beliefs, professional collaboration, course content, teacher preparation programs.

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Introduction

Since the issuance of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), governments globally have increasingly focused on the development of inclusive education systems. For example the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) code of practice in the United Kingdom (Home Office, 2015), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2006) in the United States, the Disability Standards for Education (Au.gov 2005) in Australia. Within Canada the circumstances are slightly different in that education is provincially mandated, however, all provinces have inclusion within their mandate. Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Government of Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) is one example. As a result of this commitment to inclusion, classroom populations are becoming increasingly diverse and it is incumbent on institutions of higher learning to equip those who intend to teach in these classrooms with the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the demands of education systems today. To ensure future educators are efficacious, inclusive practitioners, it is vital that we understand the myriad influences which may act as facilitators or barriers. Research has shown that the beliefs an individual holds about learners with additional needs will influence the attitudes they develop towards such learners and ultimately influence their classroom behaviours (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). It has also been shown that an individual's beliefs about their ability to teach in diverse classrooms, i.e. their teacher efficacy, may also be influential in the development of their attitudes towards diversity and consequently their classroom behaviours (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2011). The beliefs held about inclusion generally and our individual ability to manage diverse classrooms will also be influenced by personal experiences (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) and the observed behaviour

of others, (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). It may be posited therefore, that practica will provide a significant phase in teacher preparation, as all of the stated elements come into effect. Practicum placements remain a fundamental part of most teacher preparation programs (Sokal, Woloshyn, & Funk-unrau, 2013), therefore it is essential that we understand the ways in which practica influence preservice teachers' efficacy together with their attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. It is acknowledged that this is a complex undertaking as efficacy, beliefs and experiences will have a bidirectional influence on each other. In order to begin to understand these complexities, this study examined self-reported experiences during practica which engendered feelings of success or challenge in a cohort of preservice teachers attending institutions of higher learning across Canada. It is envisaged that these descriptions of success and challenge situations shall serve to illustrate commonalities among the experiences gained. It is also envisaged that, as the descriptions were self-reported, it will be also be possible to identify beliefs about efficacy together with commonalities among more broadly held attitudes and beliefs about inclusive classrooms.

Literature Review

In their review of the Statement five years later, UNESCO described the transformative inclusion agenda as one “based on the assertion of the same right to a quality education within their communities for all learners.” (UNESCO, 1999, p. 21). With a focus clearly designated in a rights based perspective, inclusion became the topic of much research and debate. However, whilst inclusion is the stated aim of governments globally, many had, and still have, dual systems of education in which students with disabilities or additional educational needs are separated from the ‘main’ education system. Inclusion therefore, as envisaged by UNESCO, requires a transformation and one which has not been without controversy but it is necessary to have a

broad understanding of these debates and controversies as they have been influential in shaping the beliefs and attitudes about inclusion which individuals may still hold today.

The very definition of inclusion has been the subject of debate, with no clear consensus leaving the interpretation of the term to the reader's discretion (Ryndak, Jackson, & Billingsley, 2000). A succinct summation of this debate can be found within the literature on the subject; over ten years ago inclusion was comprehensively defined as pertaining, not merely to physical location, but to the relevance of curricula and the social inclusion of the individual; inclusion which reflects a whole school community ethos (Ferguson, 1995). However as recently as 2015 other definitions in which inclusion is defined as all learners with disabilities being taught in general education classrooms, in their local school and with their peers, no matter how severe their disabilities have been described (Shyman, 2015). Many other definitions of inclusion exist and indeed the search for a definition has itself become a field of research (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014).

A definition is not the only area of research relating to inclusion which has led to debate. One area of concern appears to be whether inclusion should focus on ensuring all students experience a sense of belonging and feel valued or whether inclusion should improve student outcomes (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). A meta-analysis showed that students with learning difficulties and those deemed to be functioning at a lower academic level experienced more social difficulties (Nowicki, 2003). Others have found that, socially, those with learning difficulties experience both positive and negative outcomes. Concerns have also been raised regarding the academic achievement of exceptional students in general education classrooms. This is centred primarily on the fact that learners who have been identified as having a 'special' education need and require specialised instruction (Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino,

2009). Conversely there is evidence to suggest that the education received in resource rooms does not necessarily ensure improved academic outcomes either, as often such rooms are not equipped to provide high-quality instruction and that both the delivery and content may differ markedly from what happens in the general classroom (Bentum & Aaron, 2003).

The discourse on inclusive schooling has also resulted in the emergence of several separate, but interlinked elements which act as facilitators of, or barriers to inclusion. Some of the main issues emerging from the research include leadership and organisation (Ainscow, 2005; Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Edmunds, Macmillan, Specht, Nowicki, & Edmunds, 2009), classroom management and instructional strategies (Polirstok, 2015; Savage, 2006; Schmidt, Rozendal, & Greenman, 2002) and attitudes and beliefs (Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997; Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013). Much research has also been conducted into the impact of inclusion in relation to those with specific disabilities, however the main themes identified herein remain as relevant to specific disabilities as they are to the discourse on inclusion generally. Students with disabilities are individuals and will therefore experience unique challenges throughout their education, which is also true of their typically developing peers. Ergo, educators who recognise and value the individuality of all students would seem the best equipped to meet the challenges of diverse classrooms. Indeed, there is a growing belief that schools can be both effective and inclusive (McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2014). Several authors have identified key characteristics of effective inclusive schools ensuring that the discourse surrounding inclusion is moving from why schools should be inclusive to how we make them so (Loreman, 2007). These debates serve to illustrate both the complexity of concerns relating to inclusion and the differing perspectives about inclusion which may serve to influence the beliefs and subsequent attitudes individuals may hold about the ethos of inclusion.

As inclusion maintains a central focus in the development of future school communities, it has been said we have an opportunity to teach children not only to accept diversity but to respect it; “the opportunity to act on the singularity of the person and openness to others” (Thomazet, 2009, p560). However, in order to do so, we must first endeavour to instill in our future educators that same ethos, to ensure they leave teacher preparation programs with the belief that all learners are individuals and all belong in the school community. Paramount to achieving this goal is developing an understanding of the attitudes and beliefs held by preservice teachers, their beliefs about their own teacher efficacy and how all of these are influenced by their lived experiences during practicum. Teachers have been described as having a pivotal role in realising the goal of inclusion (McGhie-Richmond, Irvine, Loreman, Cizman, & Lupart, 2013). Several studies have found that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion can be the most influential factor in the development of inclusive schools and classrooms (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003; Sharma et al., 2008; Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). It has also been shown that resistance to inclusion is one of the biggest barriers to creating inclusive school environments (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Brighton, 2003; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). The ethos and ecology of a school has been shown to directly influence how effectively inclusive it is (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007). In light of this it is important to understand how the professionals with which preservice teachers interact and observe, together with the communities in which many will gain their first real teaching experiences, influence the development of their beliefs and, in turn, future classroom behaviour.

There shall now follow a review of the three areas within the literature considered to be most relevant to the professional development of preservice teachers during practica; attitudes and beliefs, teacher self-efficacy and practicum experiences.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Attitudes and beliefs are perhaps the areas in which the greatest amount of research has been conducted (Sokal et al., 2013). Beliefs have been defined as the cognitions, or thoughts, an individual holds about specific principles or outcomes (Kerlinger, 1972). Attitudes are the “enduring emotional, motivational, perceptual and cognitive organisation of beliefs” (Kerlinger, 1972, pp2). It has been further shown that our attitudes and beliefs influence our intended and actual behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1972). Several studies have found that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion can be the most influential factor in the development of inclusive schools and classrooms (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003; Sharma et al., 2008; Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). Resistance to inclusion is one of the biggest barriers to creating inclusive school environments (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Brighton, 2003; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). In her discussion of the implications of inclusion, Murphy (1996) made the salient point that if preservice teachers leave teacher preparation programs with negative attitudes towards inclusion it will be very difficult to change these attitudes over the course of their careers (Murphy, 1996). It has been stated that initially professional development programs need to address beliefs and attitudes with regard to inclusion (Mcleskey & Waldron, 2002) and challenge those which are not conducive to inclusive practices. It has been posited that it is necessary to create cognitive dissonance by presenting course content which challenges misconceptions (Male, 2011). It is necessary for preservice programs to encourage individuals to consider their personal philosophies with regard to inclusion (Loreman, 2007) as attitudes about disability may be indicative of a wider set of beliefs (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Research has found that the attitudes of some preservice teachers are not in keeping with inclusive principles (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006), however teacher preparation programs are in a unique

position to address such concerns by encouraging the development of positive attitudes and equipping teachers with the skills they need (Hobbs & Westling, 1998; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). It has been shown that some teacher graduates are unsatisfied with their preservice training and feel unprepared to work with diverse student populations (Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Palmer, 2006), therefore it is necessary for university programs to remediate these feelings of unpreparedness (Smith & Tyler, 2011). Conversely, teachers who are well prepared to deal with the breadth of student needs they are likely to encounter have been shown to be happier in their chosen profession and have lower attrition rates (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). They are also more likely to receive positive feedback from their principals (Futernick, 2007) and make a significant difference in the lives of those they teach (West & Whitby, 2008). The research clearly illustrates the symbiotic nature of positive student – teacher interactions. However attitudinal issues remain a well-documented barrier to inclusion and given that one of the major contributory factors to positive attitudes is the belief in oneself to be able to meet the challenge of diversity in the classroom, it is necessary to consider what the research reveals regarding teacher efficacy.

Teacher Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is seated in social cognitive theory and has been described, and is widely accepted as, belief in your personal capabilities (Bandura, 1977). Bandura depicts a bidirectional triadic relationship between personal factors, environment and behaviours, in which each element has a reciprocal relationship (Bandura, 1986). Specifically, he states “Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, pp 122).

Evidently teacher self-efficacy is the beliefs one holds about whether one is able to meet the needs of all learners within the classroom, or not. Teacher self-efficacy has been shown to be influential in teacher professional commitment (Klassen et al., 2013), resilience (Bobek, 2009), teacher performance and student achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Klassen & Durksen, 2014) and job satisfaction (Høigaard, Giske, & Sundsli, 2012). It has also been shown that efficacy can influence classroom behaviours, particularly with regard to learners with additional needs (Palmer, 2006). It is apparent that much of the research regarding teacher self-efficacy to date has focused on those who are qualified and working within the field. Much less research exists on those factors which are influential in the development of self-efficacy in preservice teachers, and in particular how practicum experiences impact developing teacher-efficacy (Specht et al., 2016). However, as research informs us that teacher self-efficacy is crucial, not only for the well-being of the individual but also in relation to their classroom behaviours and student outcomes, it is of paramount importance that we gain a greater understanding of how efficacy develops. According to Bandura, our beliefs about self-efficacy are informed from four main sources; enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, physiological factors and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1977), therefore it is apparent that practicum experiences could be crucial for preservice teachers. Indeed, research has shown that while preservice teacher self-efficacy can increase during course work it often decreases during practicum (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). If we can better understand the perceptions of preservice teachers of their performance within inclusive classrooms, the performance of others they see modelled and the feedback they receive, we may be better able to tailor initial teacher education to ensure these are positive experiences. From the existing research some factors can be identified for example, which negatively impact self-efficacy. One of the most cited concerns

regarding inclusion is that teachers feel ill prepared to meet the needs of the students they encounter (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009; Smith & Tyler, 2011). Teachers report feeling overwhelmed by the diversity of student needs in their classrooms (Bryant, Linan-thompson, Ugel, Hamff, & Hougen, 2001) and feel they lack training in strategies to meet these needs (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Whilst preparation program content can go some way to alleviate these concerns, it is impractical to assume teacher preparation courses are capable of ensuring that every participant is equipped to deal with every instance of diversity they may encounter. It is apparent, therefore, that content be designed in order to develop a set of skills which will increase teacher efficacy rather than focus solely on developing an understanding of specific disabilities or needs. Courses which develop both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge have been shown to increase teacher efficacy and attitudes towards inclusive schooling (Sharma et al., 2008). Developing teachers who view their students holistically and are equipped with a range of strategies to support diverse needs is essential to promote inclusive schools and improve student outcomes.

Practicum Experiences

Research relating to practicum experiences has increased markedly in the last two decades, however there is a scarcity of research relating to the influence of practica on the developing attitudes and beliefs of preservice teachers towards inclusive classrooms. Given that the topic of inclusive schooling is itself relatively new within the literature this is unsurprising. Of the research that is available, it has been shown that, whilst most studies find teacher preparation programs do not change firmly held beliefs of preservice teachers, those with high quality practica rooted in collaboration between university and school can be successful (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Given that, in an American based survey of teacher

preparation programs, 89% included inclusive placement practicums it is clear this is considered a vital element of teacher preparation (Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010). However, it must be acknowledged that this element of teacher preparation programs may not always be successful in supporting preservice teachers to become inclusive practitioners. Several studies have shown that whilst good quality course content on inclusive education it is essential, increasing the awareness of teacher candidates to the diversity of today's classroom which may happen as a result of their time within the classroom, may also serve to increase anxiety (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Oswald & Swart, 2011; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). An insightful study by Brackenreed and Barnett (2006), found that within the first semester of teacher preparation, candidates were already expressing concerns about the levels of stress associated with classroom teaching. The same study highlighted that, even at this early stage of their careers, preservice teachers were beginning to reveal perfectionist traits, be unreceptive to the idea of another adult working in 'their' classroom and demonstrated unwillingness to seek help. The authors considered the practica of these teachers would provide experiences which were vital in preparing them for the classroom (Brackenreed & Barnett, 2006). A further study of early childhood preservice teachers for whom practica comprised a significant part of the course content and who were accompanied in placement by faculty staff, found that candidates became both more skilled and more efficacious in inclusive settings (Voss & Bufkin, 2011). Whilst it may not be realistic to expect university faculty to accompany every teacher candidate on practicum, the research suggests that programs which demonstrate effective collaboration between university and school are more likely to provide successful placements (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; O'Toole & Burke, 2013).

Intrinsically interwoven into the concepts of practica and professional collaboration are the classroom teachers who play a vital role in relation to the preservice teachers' experiences. For many preservice teachers, practicum may be their first experience of 'real' diverse classrooms, therefore it is apparent that the classroom behaviours they observe and the attitudes they are exposed to will be influential during this time. Several studies have found that positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion can be the most influential factor in the development of inclusive schools and classrooms (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003; Sharma et al., 2008; Stanovich & Jordan, 2004). It has also been shown that resistance to inclusion is one of the biggest barriers to creating inclusive school environments (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Brighton, 2003; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). The literature therefore, illustrates eloquently the possible implications of the influences preservice teachers may be exposed to during their practicum experiences. However there remains a paucity of research in relation to this crucial aspect of teacher education which is worthy of continuing research.

As identified earlier within this review, providing preservice teachers the opportunity to identify their most serious challenge and supporting them to find strategies to meet that challenge, can have a significant positive impact on their self-efficacy beliefs (Sharma et al., 2008). If we can also understand the mechanisms within practica which influence our preservice teachers and develop ways to mitigate the more negative influences, this too can only serve to develop teachers who are better equipped to facilitate inclusive educational ecologies. It has been said that the 'effort' to be an inclusive educator can challenge the desire to do so (Ryan, 2009). It has also been said that it is necessary to believe wholeheartedly in the 'purpose and importance' of inclusion in order to have the conviction to uphold inclusive practices (Baglieri, 2008). It would seem that in order to change negative attitudes and beliefs which may

exist around inclusion, it is necessary to bring about cognitive dissonance (Male, 2011), by challenging negative view points (Brownlee & Carrington, 2000) and providing opportunities to experience effective inclusion (Sokal, 2013). This raises the supposition that practicum placements which are less effective at inclusion may negatively impact the views held by preservice teachers. Given the importance shown within the literature of the attitudes and beliefs in the development of inclusive practitioners, it is necessary to make every endeavour to understand these processes. As stated by Loreman (2007), it is necessary to develop teachers who view themselves as teachers of children rather than content.

Introduction to Current Study

As highlighted within the literature, it is necessary to support preservice teachers to leave teacher education programs as efficacious, inclusive practitioners. To do so we must understand all aspects of teacher education programs and the influences they have on the efficacy and beliefs held by beginning teachers. A larger study investigating those elements which are influential in the development of preservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs and self-efficacy for inclusive classrooms was conducted (Specht et al., 2016). This study utilised data from the larger research to report on those practicum experiences which have engendered feelings of success or challenge within the cohort of preservice teachers.

The data utilised by this study was taken from a large study by the Canadian Research Centre in Inclusive Education which collected data from 11 faculties of higher education across Canada. This large study revealed that, generally, the teachers involved in this research report leaving their programs with high levels of efficacy for teaching in inclusive classrooms. This study reports on responses to two open ended questions from that data relating to experiences of

success and challenge during practicum and consider how these may indicate attitudes and beliefs that influence their classroom efficacy. By doing so it is envisaged that a greater understanding of the processes which can support beginning teachers to become efficacious inclusive practitioners shall be gained together with insight into directions for further research.

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of 1490 preservice teachers participating in university based education programs in 11 faculties at various Canadian locations. The ages of those participating ranged from 20 to 56 years of age with a *mean* of 25.9, (*SD*=5.4). The sample comprised 74.2% female and 25.8% male participants.

Procedures

Distribution of the surveys took place during one of the final classes concerning special/inclusive education which formed part of the preservice teachers' university course work. Information regarding the procedures and goals of the research was read to potential participants and survey packs were then distributed. The regular instructor left the room and administration of the survey was undertaken by an instructor not currently teaching the cohort or a graduate student. Those who did not wish to participate either returned blank surveys or left the room. Those who did wish to complete the survey were allowed 30 minutes of their regularly allocated class time. The survey itself consisted of four questions designed to be intentionally broad in their scope. As stated, the focus of this report were those questions relating to practicum experiences. Specifically, participants were asked:

Give one example of a situation in which you felt particularly successful in meeting the needs of a student with an exceptionality while on your practicum. Explain why you felt successful. What resources did you use to help you determine how to meet the needs?

(Question 2 of the survey).

And:

Give one example of a situation in which you faced particular challenges in meeting the needs of a student with an exceptionality while on your practicum. Explain why you found it challenging. What resources did you use in trying to work through the situation?

(Question 3 of the survey).

By requesting descriptive responses and soliciting additional information, we sought to gain genuine insight into the lived practicum experiences of this cohort of preservice teachers. We sought to gain a greater understanding of the impact, if any, these experiences have on the development of beliefs, attitudes and self-efficacy with regard to inclusion.

Analyses

Experts in the field of inclusive education utilised a content analysis approach when reviewing the data. Given the complexity of the elements involved, a coding system evolved which comprised codes for the main elements identified in the responses, followed by sub-codes identifying relevant secondary information and, where necessary, further codes identifying pertinent information relating to either the primary individual or grade/subject area (Appendix 1). As the data were coded by members of the research team, inter-coder reliability was improved by having two researchers code independently (Neuendorf, 2002). This resulted in over 80% agreement which has been found to be acceptable in content analysis (Ryndak, Lehr,

Ward & DeBevoise, 2014). When coding of the data was completed and the primary themes identified, further review of the data was undertaken to identify any latent themes which existed within the statements of participants and to elicit those statements which richly describe the experiences of preservice teachers. This form of analysis, which comprises six phases: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming of themes, and production of the final report, is an accepted process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Analyses of the data revealed the emergence of several main themes which were shown to be apparent in response to both Question 2 and Question 3. That is, the same themes emerged whether participants were describing situations in which they felt successful or situations in which they felt challenged. These were: behaviour management, academics, relationships (with students) and other school adults. Some themes were more apparent in one situation than the other which was true for the use of individual education plans, which was more apparent in success situations, and the impact of specific diagnoses and resources which were both more apparent in challenge situations. The distribution of responses did differ to a small degree across these themes according to successful or challenging situations, but the themes themselves remained consistent. Further analyses of these findings follows and is supported by quotes from the data which are representative of the responses received and not exhaustive. The findings in the data relating to feelings of success among preservice teachers will be presented first, followed by what makes them feel challenged.

What Makes Preservice Teachers Feel Successful? (Q2)

Successful experiences could be grouped into the themes of behaviour management, academics, relationships, other school adults and the use of individual education plans.

Behaviour management. One of the most commonly identified successful outcomes for students were increases in engagement and participation. The ways in which preservice teachers achieved improvements in student engagement were complex but a reoccurring theme was that of behaviour management. It was apparent from the participants' responses that times when they felt they had provided students with the skills and support needed to successfully manage their behaviour made them feel successful. However even within this main theme of improving student outcomes through behaviour management, there were some distinct differences in the ways in which this was achieved. Some preservice teachers implemented specific strategies to provide support. An example of this is described by one participant:

“One of my students fidgeted a lot and had severe behavioural issues. In order to successfully hold and maintain her attention, I gave her a ball to fidget with when she began to feel anxious.”

Another participant reported utilising the same strategy:

“Exceptionality: ADHD. Why: I was successful in getting that student to calm down, focus and complete their assigned work. Resource: gave the student a fidget toy and allowed for him to be given choice for his work.”

This use of kinesthetic strategies was also echoed by other participants:

“Behavioural. Had him involved in active and very Kinesthetic and experiential learning experiences. Ex. Geometric shapes- questions on characteristics. Had him play with shapes, build, move, and manipulate while answering.”

“I felt I was successful meeting the needs of 2 ADD students by seating them near the front, checking for understanding, reducing their work volume, and allowing them to take a quick walk if they were restless. This was successful because it helped them deal with the challenges of their exceptionality (restlessness, distracted) yet still work at the same level of complexity as their peers.”

These responses illustrate that preservice teachers feel successful when they are able to establish behaviour management techniques which supported the needs of their students. They were able to identify successful outcomes which may appear unrelated to academic success but which will ultimately support the student throughout their academic career.

Academics. In comparison with behaviour management, a relatively small number of descriptions relate directly to academic success. For example, one participant described the following:

“I gave a student with a learning disability the choice of writing their test in a resource room or in the class. This markedly improved their test scores as they were less distracted. I felt successful as this helped the student to pass the course.”

Another participant described succinctly the strategies used to support successful student outcomes:

“I have one student who had ADHD. He was identified by the IPRC with this exceptionality, yet the teacher didn’t accommodate. I did the following:

1. Placed him in the middle front of the class.
2. Asked his opinion in class, included him and encouraged him to attempt answers.
3. I provided checklists to keep him organized and fill in the blank lessons and homework guidance.

His marks improved from low 50’s to high 70’s when I finished the practicum.”

Through the following description it can be seen that this preservice teacher was able not only to identify the need for accommodation which extends beyond in-class differentiation, but to also identify a strategy to meet that need successfully:

“One of my students had a very difficult home life. She and I devised a plan where she could always make up for late assignments and tests. Her grade improved drastically as the term progressed.”

These statements clearly describe preservice teachers who care a great deal for the well-being of their students as well as their academic achievement, and who are also able to recognise that well-being and achievement are not mutually exclusive but rather intrinsically linked.

Relationships. Several responses from participants indicated their understanding of the need to support student well-being and that one of the primary ways to do so was through the development of positive student-teacher relationships:

“I had three LD students in one class. I took the time to get to know them and their interests. Over time I noticed them making a much stronger effort in the class, and they would stop me in the halls to discuss the lessons. As a result, their grades improved significantly.”

For other participants, it is clear that developing a relationship is an important element in the management of student behaviours:

“I spent a lot of time working with a student with behavioural issues. The first day he kicked shoes at me. The last he brought me a picture of himself. By building a relationship with him, he was able to trust me. He could cooperate with me and would complete the work with help through non-traditional methods - computer, visual.”

And:

“Several students on my practicum are on an IEP with similar struggles such as anxiety, aggression, ADHD. What I have done is connected with each student on a personal level, showed interest in them and have varied my teaching styles so that we are moving around a bit, we are out of the classroom and we are doing projects where there is student choice.”

However, it is perhaps the following response which describes so well the depth of caring individual teachers often show their students, and the difference this level of caring and attention can make:

“I took time during a school break to talk to a student who had been sent to sit outside the principal’s office because of disruptive behaviour. This student had fairly severe behaviour issues and sometimes had angry and violent outbursts in class. We sat and talked for a really long time about all the things that “made him angry” and how he knew when his behaviour was escalating. We came up with a private signal he could give me to show he needed space and time to calm himself. It worked very well.”

Participants were asked within their responses to provide details of the resources, and several resources were identified which were utilised by preservice teachers and contributed to their feelings of success. Whilst some responses identified specific programs or equipment, by far the majority related to the use of other professionals within their practicum placements.

Other School Adults. As this question relates directly to practicum experiences it can be expected that the classroom teacher would feature as a commonly used resource and indeed this is true as demonstrated by the responses that follow:

“When on my first block I felt successful meeting the needs of a student on an IEP when I had the guidance of my classroom teacher. She had established a routine with the IEP student based on accommodations and modifications. When I began to teach the grade 5 class I followed her routine and saw firsthand how I could include all students in their classroom.”

“One student who had an IEP on a mild intellectual disability had trouble learning new concepts. I supported the student’s process of learning. My Associate Teacher was my main resource.”

However, one of the most commonly cited school adults which this cohort utilised were educational assistants (EA). Many described incidences when they had spoken with the EA to gain a better understanding of the student, insight into their interests, or specific strategies which were known to be successful in supporting their learning as can be seen in the following responses:

“I felt successful in meeting the needs of a student with autism by working with a SEA to tailor projects to make them meaningful and relevant to him. Having the support of the SEA was extremely valuable in forming learning opportunities that met his needs.”

“I was lucky to work with many exceptional students in the classroom. We had a brilliant EA who was helpful in assisting with developing alternate learning plans to the students.”

“While designing a final project I successfully provided adaptations so the student felt confident and was able to demonstrate the same objectives as the class. I used the EA support as a go-to person to find out more about the student’s needs as well as consulting his IEP and the previous strategies used by my SA.”

Participants reported using learning resource teachers together with teachers from other classes and on occasion senior school staff such as the Principal as sources in both a practical sense for specific strategies or resources or in the wider context of accumulating more knowledge and information which they could utilise.

Use of Individual Education Plans. Among descriptions of the resources used to the data showed that influential in engendering feelings of success in preservice teachers was the use of individual educational plans (IEPs). Preservice teachers also used their understanding of identified diagnoses to support their students and this also contributed to their feelings of success. This participant summed up the use of IEPs succinctly and simply:

“I was able to meet the needs of the student because his IEP allowed me to gain insight into their needs”.

This was also the means of use described in the following response:

“In one classroom I was teaching a grade 10 applied class of 12 students, many of them on IEPs. I was able to teach the majority of them by doing a bit of hands on activities and by keeping the actual instruction times low. I was also aware of each student’s limits and abilities by reading their IEPs.”

This use of IEPs to identify student strengths and limitations in order to support learning was a technique mentioned several times throughout the questionnaire responses, for example:

“I was able to have a student with an MID (and limited attention span) participate fully in a math lesson on conducting a survey (the only accommodation he needed was for someone to scribe his survey question down). I learned what his capabilities and limitations were from the classroom teacher and his IEP.”

Within this cohort of preservice teachers, some also mentioned using IEPs to identify student interests or methods and strategies previously identified as successful:

“I worked with a student on a modified curriculum and helped her gradually do better on her science tests. I used her ISSP and her known interests to engage her in class.

ISSp = Individual Support Services Plan - Similar to an IEP but written to facilitate communication and collaboration amongst ministries.”

“I had a student with a learning disability who learned better by using technology. I knew I was successful because the student began to participate more in class when I brought technology in. He also spoke to me after class to explain that he understood and to thank me. I used the SMARTboard, LCD projector, computer, and speakers. I also used the student’s IEP and past comments from teachers to find out what has worked in the past.”

“I had a student with Autism in my class and through his IEP, I discovered he is a very visual learner. I ensured that I always included visuals in my lessons and gave many assignments that included visuals and colours. He was very successful and was able to understand concepts and ideas due to the visuals and colour coding.”

In the broadest terms, this cohort of preservice teachers feels successful when they are able to connect with their students at some level, and witness positive outcomes as a result of this connection. It must be emphasised that positive outcomes are those which are perceived in light of the students' needs and not merely academic improvement in grades or other forms of standardised assessment. The ways in which these outcomes are achieved are as individual as the student themselves, however behaviour management is a frequently occurring theme. This is an important area for preservice teachers as it is apparent from the data that when they feel able to identify and provide appropriate support to enable students to manage their behaviour, this directly impacts their feelings of personal success. This is also true when they increase student engagement. From the data it would seem that knowledge of a range of strategies to support students and the ability to identify the need for, and sources of, additional support are also crucial in ensuring student success and consequently feelings of personal success.

Having identified the elements which contribute to feelings of success in preservice teachers, we shall now consider the data relating to situations in which our cohort felt challenged and the elements involved therein.

What Makes Preservice Teachers Feel Challenged? (Q3)

Themes which emerged from situations in which preservice teachers felt challenged were behaviour management, academics, relationships, other school adults, diagnosis and resources.

Behaviour Management. When considering the data relating to behaviour management several participants, unsurprisingly, described feeling challenged when confronted with aggressive behaviours:

“Behavioural problems scare me. These kids can be very aggressive and I don’t know what the best way to respond is, and there is a lot of “physical” stuff involved. Physical anger, tears, shouting, during instruction time is really hard, as the class is interrupted and the problem has to be handled. Cooperating teacher helped both times.”

“I had a grade 2 boy which was particularly aggressive with other students as well as me. I tried different ways to get through to him but over the five weeks I don’t believe I made any headway with him.”

The feeling of making little or no progress described by the above participant was echoed in other responses:

“I feel challenges when working with aggressive students. I do not have the skills or knowledge to help them.”

“On my last practicum there was a child with autism who was physically aggressive towards his aid. I spoke with his EA often to try to find solutions, especially to his distractions to the class. There was little success for me.”

Within the above responses there is a suggestion that these preservice teachers not only feel challenged, but also that they have somehow failed. This is not always the case as is demonstrated in the following response:

“I had a student who was very inattentive and aggressive. Every day was a challenge trying not to come off talk to address his behavior. I offered him a lot of extra assistance inside and outside the classroom. By the end of my internship he did settle down a little.”

What is of particular interest in this response is that the behaviour is not described as the challenge, but rather the participant’s response to it. The participant also goes on to describe the strategies they utilised which may go some way to explain the more positive conclusion to their description.

Behaviour which is aggressive was not the only cause for concern among the participants. Many reported feeling challenged by out of seat behaviours and those who had difficulty maintaining focus:

“I found challenges in having a student with exceptionalities who had a behaviour exceptionality to sit down and focus. This took a lot of extra attention on my end and persistence and reminders but I was successful in the end.”

“One specific student had oppositional defiance behavior issues and would physically stay seated and challenge my authority. I found this challenging to handle and did not always have success in reaching this student.”

Participants also described difficulties when dealing with students who demonstrated difficulties in emotional regulation:

“When a student would burst due to little things like dropping crayons. He was offered help but would refuse it. Sometimes when trying to “warn” or redirect behaviour/attention he would escalate because he thought it meant he was in trouble. This was hard because finding ways to re-direct behaviour where he wasn’t feeling punished was difficult.”

“I had a student who was on a behavioural IEP. He had constant melt downs, difficulty with transitions, and social interactions. Unfortunately, I let this get to me and often got frustrated because I didn’t know how to deal with him. I gave him warnings when we would be moving on, gave opportunities to work with 2 boys he got along with or by himself. I gave time to calm down and tried to talk to him to find out what could be done to make things better. However, day after day it was the same thing. I did not handle this student’s situation well and often looked to my associate for assistance and to intervene. It was a new experience for me and I need to continue to reflect on my teaching to handle situations better in the future.”

As indicated by the above participant, challenges such as these often leave the preservice teacher feeling they have not managed the situation very well or that there is something else they could have or should have done. This response is indicative of practitioners who are not only deeply concerned to meet the needs of all their students, but are also reflective practitioners who look to their own behaviours in the classroom in relation to the challenges they meet. They also show concern for all of their students not only those with exceptionalities, and the ways in which they

may be impacted by challenging behaviours. An example of this was described by the following participant:

“We had one young boy who had extreme behavioural issues. He often threw objects, which put other students in a state of anxiety. The environment was very unpredictable and there was no extra support for him because I was not aware of his home life/medical, etc. As a student teacher, I often felt helpless.”

This feeling of helplessness is echoed by other participants including the following:

“One extremely challenging task was working with a student with behaviour issues and a suspected (undiagnosed) LD. For this student I made adaptations on assessments and had him work independently when he was disruptive. It did not seem to solve many learning issues when he worked alone and seldom had successes.”

“A boy on a behavioural plan in my grade 2 practicum was very challenging to teach! I did not come across any examples in my course work to help me with this. It also seemed that teachers would just send this boy to the resource?”

“One student was eating inedible school supplies at the front of the classroom during a lesson. They did not respond to any of my suggestions for taking some time at the thinking wiggle chair or to come sit near me, but decided to run and hit anyone in their path. Ultimately after trying to use class management strategies and communication with no success, I had to ask my sponsor teacher for help. My mentor teacher removed the

child from the room. I felt like a failure because I still don't know how to deal with that situation.”

But it is perhaps the response of this participant which succinctly highlights the feeling of some preservice teachers when encountering challenging behaviour:

“I have difficulty dealing with behaviour problems in the classroom such as outbursts, throwing objects, or yelling. It's one thing reading in a text book or role playing with your peers how to respond but it is a whole new world when it happens in real life.”

Academics. It is clear from the above examples that these preservice teachers are concerned with their ability not only to manage the behaviours they are presented, but also to ensure that their students are engaged and learning. However, the data also showed that at times this desire is hindered by actual or perceived lack of the necessary strategies or expertise to ensure student engagement:

“I felt I did not fully meet a student's needs in my science unit on electricity. I had them use a lot of hands-on materials in small groups/pairs, but my exceptional student mostly sat and watched her partner do the work. This was challenging but I couldn't find resources to help me change the situation.”

“I designed a unit without thinking of students with exceptionalities and they felt frustrated and left out. I must remember that every student is important.”

“There were numerous times I felt that I only learned the basics in my exceptionalities course and I was always asking other teachers and trying to figure out what to do. I didn’t feel confident at all.”

These concerns are also apparent when dealing with gifted students as preservice teachers often feel they do not have the necessary knowledge to extend the learning of these students in a meaningful way:

“I found it challenging to meet the needs of a gifted student who was much more educated in the topic I was teaching (ancient Rome).”

“I find it difficult to authentically challenge gifted students. I don’t want to give them more of the same, or ask them to help struggling students, but it is easy to “ignore” them because they often do everything you ask without complaint or trouble. I try to use effective questioning to challenge them.”

There are also descriptions in which the preservice teachers describe trying multiple strategies which do not appear to have the desired effect and they report feeling that they have somehow failed or should have done more:

“There were several low achieving students in my Gr. 1 class practicum, along with one IEP student. I found that I had trouble finding the time to always provide them with the

correct assistance that they needed in such a busy class. I did spend extra time, re-taught (in different ways), used visuals, prompts, but I didn't feel I had done enough."

"I had an experience working with a grade 3 student while the whole class was doing math. I tried using different ways to explain the content and manipulations, but neither seemed to work; the math was just too far beyond her level. It was challenging because I felt like I couldn't help her, no matter how much I tried. I felt I was a failure because it is my job to teach her."

On still other occasions it is the benefit of reflection that have led participants to question their actions in certain circumstances:

"A student did not want to learn and did not want to be at school and would not do anything. I ended up having to just let the student wait it off on his/her own in the hall and come back in later. It worked, but the student missed the learning experience. I was not sure if I handled it as best as I could have."

"I had a few students who were not diagnosed or have PPP's but I struggled with some students being tested for ADHD-the whole time I kept researching classroom management topics/techniques. Now I know I should have looked at how/what I was teaching and how I could have engaged them so there was no behaviour problems."

It is clear from these examples that preservice teachers often feel frustrated when they are unable to meet the needs of their students. For some this frustration stems from feelings that they are ill-equipped to meet the challenges they face as shown in some of the previous examples. For others this frustration comes as a result of putting a strategy in place and then not having the resources to implement it as was described by the following participants:

“It was challenging to try and teach math to a student with a learning disability because I did not have enough resources or know any other ways to teach the concept. It’s hard to not just give the student the answers in these cases.”

“The student had already failed the credit twice and refused to do anything. I convinced him to do work if it was on a computer, but then I was unable to get access to a computer for him and he stopped coming altogether after that.”

It may be a result of these frustrations, or the sense of having failed in some way, which have also led some of this cohort to make statements regarding the appropriateness of placement for some of these students:

“ODD and CD student presence. Teaching in a meaningful manner all but impossible due to constant disruptions. No resources available. Students should have been in a separate institution.”

“I found it very difficult to communicate with a student with autism. She often did not answer my questions and I had a student with un-medicated ADHD who had a very hard time sitting down for more than a few minutes. This student was very disruptive to the learning of others and I believe should not be in a regular classroom. However, I gave him a corner at the desk with a computer where he was able to play an educational game to help with his focus.”

Relationships. Despite these challenges, preservice teachers continue to describe challenging situations in which they endeavour to form and maintain meaningful relationships with their students, some of which are more successful than others:

“My most recent practicum with a grade 6 class had 8 IEPs and 3 pending, so there were many challenges. I had particular challenges with one student, who showed bullying and was overtly attention-seeking, but also suffered from severe anxiety. I had challenges in trying to build his trust and make connections with him, while trying to manage his behaviour at the same time.”

“For my first 3 week practicum I encountered a student with an exceptionality that was extremely difficult to work with. I tried my best to build a relationship with this student but struggled to make a connection with him in the short time I was at the school.”

“A student with argumentative behaviour caused lots of difficulties. I built a good relationship with her and it helped me a lot.”

“It was very challenging in the beginning as most of my students, and in particular 3 with learning disabilities, believed they had nothing to offer to the assignments. Through encouragement and the development of relationships, this began to change. Build classroom community.”

The use of positive student-teacher relationships for classroom management remained much more apparent in descriptions of success than challenge which may speak, to some degree, to the apparent outcomes as those who were able to form positive relationships appear to have had many more experiences of success.

Other School Adults. The role of other school adults differed significantly in descriptions of challenge situations compared to those of success. It was also apparent that when preservice teachers felt in-service teachers perceived a student as ‘beyond help’ or when staff were appeared unable or unwilling to offer support, this directly impacted their own behaviours, either positively or negatively:

“Same kid. Teacher had already “written him off”; hard to work against the grain when advances are sabotaged.”

“I had one student who was in foster care and had some psychological issues. It was the third time she took the course and she rarely came. I couldn’t fit her needs because she

never came. I tried talking to her. The office knew exactly who she was. My teacher said she was a lost cause.”

“There was a student who had ADD. My associate was not particularly helpful in addressing the situation. I tried to keep the student on task during seatwork by encouraging and refocusing him on his work but I was unable to provide any strategies or tips for him. My AT just saw him as a problem and didn’t take an active approach in assisting him to stay on task. Because of this there was very little I was able to do.”

This participant went so far as to describe their experience as a whole school issue:

“Disagreement in removal policy, strategies involved punishing consequences instead of helping student. Difficulty was with schools plan of action. Claim to be inclusive, but student was “disrespectful” to staff. Behaviours were taken personally.”

It must be noted however, that even in terms of feeling challenged, many participants described positive interactions and much support from the school staff they communicated with:

“In the beginning I was lost with some of my intensive resource children as it was never really talked about at (university). Needed to learn on the fly and it was stressful. Again, my cooperating teacher was awesome and helped me through this.”

“I had a student in my class who was incredibly gifted, and I found I had to challenge her in meaningful ways without giving her more work than the other students. I used my cooperating teacher as a resource in this situation and she gave me great ideas of ways to work around this type of challenge.”

“During one of my practicums, I had difficulty focusing the attention of a student with ADHD on the task at hand. I didn’t want to discipline the child because I knew that he was working through his ADHD. My co-op teacher was a great resource for me. At the beginning of the school year her and this particular student had sat down and elaborated a list of strategies the child could use to help him focus in class.”

Diagnosis. As can be anticipated, it is those diagnoses associated with more challenging behaviours which appeared to cause the most concern among this cohort of preservice teachers. In particular Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) were frequently cited in relation to situations participants found challenging:

“Student with ADD/ADHD: Attendance issues, disruptive behaviour, attention-seeking behaviour. In a small class, caused huge disturbances; hard to engage because he always missed out on lessons from previous day. Challenge in addressing disruptive behaviours without taking away from learning environment.”

“Student with autism and ODD. Asked him to stay at desk and try to do his work. He refused, ran around room, screamed, stood on top of desk. Tried talking. Had to call the principal. Felt I had no connection and no control.”

Other participants reported similar challenges but also noted strategies they had developed which went some way to addressing their concerns for these students:

“One student I have currently has Tourette’s and ADHD. His focus is severely limited. We try to manage his behaviour by adapting tasks, by allowing him to work quietly in a back room alone, and by giving him occasional passes so he can go out and walk around or run in the gym.”

“The student I worked with was identified as having ADHD and an anxiety disorder. It was challenging because he was easily overwhelmed by new information and struggled staying on task. Tools included letting him run errands to other classes (moving), planned grouping, and giving him a heads-up on new material before the lessons so he was prepared to talk about a new topic and felt comfortable in front of his peers.”

“A student who had ADHD found it very difficult to focus on math, however, he loved reading. When math was becoming increasingly harder for him I gave him his questions in a story problem. This continued to be a challenge but did gain his interest in trying to learn.”

However, for some participants it is apparent that they felt there was very little they could do to support the needs of the student and it is also apparent that this caused them great concern:

“There was a few students who had ADHD in a math class. They were supported by a Teacher Assistant, who generally answered their questions and got them working. I followed my co-operating teacher’s lead and let them be. I felt like I should have done more, but wasn’t sure what.”

“One student had ADHD and was extremely misbehaving in class all the time. He made accusations against teachers and TAs which limited one on one work. He was taken out of school by his parents and they looked for a new school. My heart goes out to him.”

Resources. Whilst resources did not present a major theme for either success or challenge situations, when they were identified within challenge situations it was almost without exception due to a lack of resources, be they physical, practical, technological or knowledge based. The implication within several of resources related responses was that it was these deficits that lead to feelings of failure:

“It was challenging to try and teach math to a student with a learning disability because I did not have enough resources or know any other ways to teach the concept. It’s hard to not just give the student the answers in these cases.”

“The lack of resources available to teacher/students living in rural communities. Haven’t figured this one out yet but used some personal resources with students like my ipad.”

“Students that were nonverbal were challenging. There weren’t many resources.”

“The student had already failed the credit twice and refused to do anything. I convinced him to do work if it was on a computer, but then I was unable to get access to a computer for him and he stopped coming altogether after that.”

As can be seen from the data given above, not all circumstances in which preservice teachers feel challenged have negative or unsuccessful outcomes, it is the situation itself which engenders a feeling of challenge. As can be expected situations involving management of behaviour feature frequently in responses relating to challenging situations. The theme of behaviour management is often interlinked with that of diagnosis in relation to challenging situations. As with all of the themes which describe situations regarded as challenging, the specific circumstances themselves and even the outcomes are not necessarily negative, however when they are the described impacts are at times profound.

Analyses of these data have identified areas which have interesting implications for the development of self-efficacy in preservice teachers and a discussion of these shall now follow.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine responses relating to practicum experiences in order to ascertain if there were specific elements that influenced developing self-efficacy in Canadian preservice teachers. The descriptions provided frequently described complex interactions between a range of elements, indeed even in some of the most truncated descriptions, the influence of multiple elements was apparent. As demonstrated by the results

section of this study, individual themes were identified. Whilst these themes are discussed individually herein, it is acknowledged that there is often a relationship between these themes which is bidirectional. There are also some themes which were specific to either challenge or success, these too shall be discussed with the potential implications of why each are not apparent in both circumstances. The most recurrent theme within the data was that of behaviour management which was closely linked with academic outcomes. Both of these were linked with the role of forming positive relationships. Interaction with other school adults was also apparent within both success and challenge situations, highlighting the importance and potential influence other professionals have during practica. Some themes were more apparent in one situation than the other which was true for the use of individual education plans, the impact of specific diagnoses and resources. In many descriptions, the same information occurred, for example the mention of specific diagnoses occurred in both success and challenge situations, however it was the emphasis, or lack therefore, placed on the diagnosis which was most striking. The distribution of responses did differ to a small degree across these themes according to successful or challenging situations, but the themes themselves remained consistent. When considering the data relating to situations in which preservice teachers felt challenged, it was apparent that the responses described circumstances which were in many ways more specific than the descriptions of success. The data on success could be seen to relate *directly* to positive outcomes in many of the descriptions, and whilst it is true the data on challenges could be extrapolated to negative outcomes, the relationship is far less direct. The data revealed situations which were often complex and the result of more than one factor as described by this participant:

“Behavioural needs within and outside the lessons. Difficult to manage (argued that this student should be diagnosed). Challenging because: no communication or consistent behavioural plan, no support from home + admin, no extra resources for the student, 27 other students, no information/diagnosis/assessment of student.”

Despite this, some direct contrasts with descriptions of success were evident, particularly in relation to behaviour management and strategies to engage students. These findings, and those relating to each theme specifically shall now be discussed in greater detail.

Behaviour Management

Of the reoccurring themes apparent within the data, that of behaviour management was one of the most cited, regardless of whether in relation to success or challenge situations. This is unsurprising considering that unwanted student behaviours have been frequently cited as a perceived barrier to inclusion in the general education classroom and a cause for concern among teachers (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It was also apparent from these descriptions that behaviour management had the potential to directly influence feelings of efficacy both positively and negatively. In instances when behaviour was managed effectively using specific strategies or the participants’ own problem solving skills, preservice teachers reported feelings of success. However, in those circumstances where behaviour management did not appear to have the desired result, where preservice teachers felt overwhelmed, or where additional support was required from other school adults, many expressed very negative views. Preservice teachers in these circumstances often directed this negativity at themselves, describing how they felt they “should have done more”. One remarkable insight from the data in relation to behaviour

management is the attribution of success and failure. Successes were often linked with successful student outcomes; increased engagement and/or improved academic outcomes. Situations in which the participant felt unsuccessful in many instances led to personalised perceptions of 'failure'. This distinct contrast in the attribution of success and failure may be overstated given that descriptions were limited to questionnaire responses, but nevertheless is striking and warrants further consideration. It is not possible from this data set to ascertain all of the elements influential in making individuals feel they have failed. However, it is reasonable to posit that these feelings may arise from personally held constructs, not having the knowledge of appropriate strategies or the skill set to employ them effectively, or an inconsistency between their expectations and reality.

Regarding knowledge of, and ability to utilise strategies it is difficult to ascertain the impact of teacher education course content in these circumstances without more data. It is envisaged that those who had participated in courses relating to inclusive schools would have received some content on behavioural difficulties and strategies to support learners. Given that some participants stated explicitly that they felt the instruction they received did not adequately prepare them for the reality of the classroom, it may be necessary to give consideration to the depth, duration and timing of courses which include behaviour management strategies. It may be that some of this cohort did indeed have insufficient theoretical knowledge of strategies which they could translate into practical strategies to support behaviour management in the classroom. It is also acknowledged that research has shown that theoretical knowledge is not always transferred into teacher behaviour in the classroom (Almog & Shechtman, 2007). The delivery of theory to preservice teachers and their ability to transfer that knowledge to classroom experiences may be worthy of further research.

Within the data it was possible to ascertain that in many circumstances, situations in which preservice teachers faced challenging behaviours in the classroom did not always have negative outcomes. This was apparent from a simple comparison between those situations reported as success or challenge as often participants described very similar situations with similar outcomes but some saw them as success and some as challenges. Wholly within descriptions of challenge situations, similar situations were perceived differently with some participants describing situations where they persevered with different strategies and felt they did ultimately have some success and others simply reporting that they ‘tried everything’ but ‘nothing worked’. As can be seen, these descriptions contained greatly nuanced understandings of success and challenge, the implications of which may be two-fold. Personal differences may offer one explanation; some people see a challenge as positive and use it as motivation for personal growth, whilst others may not have the self-efficacy to believe they can surmount the challenge. Or, in these particular circumstances, it may speak more to personal beliefs and attitudes about inclusive classrooms. Some preservice teachers may see behaviour challenges as part of a diverse classroom and have the belief that it is within their job role to meet the needs of all learners to the best of their ability, regardless of whether that need is social, emotional or academic (Specht et al., 2016). Others may hold the belief that their job role is to ‘teach’ subject matter and that managing behaviours is a distraction from that. This was ostensive within the data from comments expressing concern about time spent managing behaviour that wasn’t spent ‘teaching’. It is apparent from such comments that ‘teaching’ is defined wholly within the framework of curriculum content with, perhaps, no conceptualisation of the importance of lifelong learning. It is as incumbent upon teachers to equip children with skills such as emotion regulation which will support them throughout their lives as it is to teach them academic content

(Hallam, 2009). It is imperative for all concerned that teachers enter the profession understanding the demands of diverse classrooms. Friedman (2000), uses the term professional efficacy discrepancy to explain the difference in an individual's expectation of their professional abilities and professional experiences and the actual lived reality. As described by Friedman, the consequences can be devastating for the individual who experiences extreme stress, which can lead to 'burnout', but also for their future classroom behaviours which can become more focused on attaining academic outcomes required by the school and the 'marginalisation' of practices to meet special education needs (Friedman, 2000). Research tells us that teachers who feel unable to meet the challenges of diversity will be less committed to developing and sustaining inclusive classrooms (Glazzard, 2011) and as such will be less willing or able to meet the needs of their students. When designing programs to meet the needs of beginning teachers, teacher preparation programs may need to consider ways to mediate the effects of professional efficacy discrepancy and to ensure teachers enter the profession with an expectation to teach all children.

Academics

As can be expected, descriptions relating to academic circumstances featured in many of the responses for both challenges and successes. Concerns regarding, or success in supporting, academic outcomes were closely intertwined with other elements such as behaviour management or forming a relationship with the individual. Therefore, identifying specific elements relating to teacher efficacy and student outcomes was not a simple endeavour. It was apparent that responses in both success and challenges situations described similar circumstances but, as with behaviour management, it was the perspective of the preservice teacher that attributed these to success or challenge.

Again this appeared to be based on their perceptions of what constitutes academic success and whether this relates to a specific individual or a class group. For example, participants described introducing different supports for students with organisational challenges until they found the one which worked best. These supports resulted in increased student engagement and were therefore considered successful. Conversely, other participants describe giving students something to put their work into but as it was not filed appropriately they still had to 'waste' time helping the students find the correct piece of work which 'took time away from the rest of the class'. There is much within this example which raises concerns about the preparedness of some preservice teachers to become inclusive practitioners as it clearly illustrates a difference in attitudes and beliefs about those who require additional accommodations and their placement in the general education classroom. It could be argued that supporting the organisational needs of a child in order for them to access the curriculum is an expectation not a challenge. There is also the implication that supporting one child to succeed is somehow of less value than teaching content to a class. Implications such as this also relate to individual attitudes and beliefs about what constitutes education in the inclusive classroom.

The contrast in attitudes and beliefs was apparent in other areas as those who reported successes often described having more than one student with an exceptionality within their class group but went on to describe various strategies they had utilised which, on occasion, they reported resulted in improved whole class learning. In challenge situations, having more than one student with an exceptionality appeared to leave preservice teachers feeling overwhelmed. Challenging situations consistently saw the participants questioning the ability to teach the whole class while meeting the academic needs of those with exceptionalities which again speaks to their beliefs about where students with exceptionalities belong. One other striking contrast lay in

the use of other school adults; within success this appeared to be an acceptable source of support but within challenge it appeared to be perceived as an inability to ‘solve the problem’ independently and appears to be a ‘last resort’. Such perceptions may indicate that those who feel they are successful in meeting student needs are more prepared to utilise a range of strategies to do so.

Within the descriptions of challenge an area which seemed to consistently present challenge was that of working with students considered gifted. Many participants expressed concern regarding their ability to authentically extend the learning experience of students considered gifted and felt challenged in these circumstances. The research supports this finding and cites several different reasons why this may be so including a lack of knowledge to modify content, the time required to modify the curriculum, difficulty in finding appropriate resources and attitudinal barriers (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). As acknowledged by VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh, these barriers may be identical for all students with exceptionalities. What is of interest in this data set however, is that when describing challenges related to students considered gifted, participants did not cite time taken away from the rest of the class as a concern. Nor, when they have spent time acquiring additional resources, do they mention concerns regarding the time spent doing so and only rarely mentioned seeking advice from other school adults. This appears to speak to a distinct, and what would appear to be uniform, difference in the perception of meeting the needs of students considered gifted. This is an area in which further research would be helpful in order to ascertain if this is true in a wider context as, should this be the case, it may be necessary for institutes of further education to broaden preservice teachers understanding of students considered gifted and challenge their perceptions of giftedness as opposed to any other exceptionality. It may also be necessary for teacher preparation programs to

give more consideration to providing knowledge and strategies to authentically challenge students considered gifted in the general education classroom.

Relationships

As stated previously, the themes identified do not exist in isolation. Behaviour management and academic outcomes are closely interlinked as the data showed that preservice teachers who felt successful in managing behaviour often related this to positive academic outcomes. What also became apparent within both of themes, at least in relation to descriptions of success, was that participants often used a range of strategies to develop positive relationships with students. Of particular interest were situations which may initially have been considered challenging. In these incidences, participants describe taking the time to converse with students as a means of developing a connection. In some circumstances preservice teachers utilise resultant knowledge of student interests to modify materials or delivery in order to increase engagement and interest. On other occasions, discussions with students have enabled both parties to identify mutually agreeable strategies which support the student with behaviour management thereby increasing their engagement or supporting self-regulation of behaviour. Others report that students appear to respond positively simply because they feel someone has listened. It is clear that some of this cohort consider developing positive relationships as a significant means to support positive student outcomes which is in keeping with the research. Indeed, it has been shown that student-teacher relationships may be even more important for students who are considered at risk due to disadvantaged economic backgrounds or those with learning difficulties (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Within situations when participants felt challenged there were also a few incidences when attempts were made to form a relationship with the student but

there is little evidence of success. As relationship building was identified more in success than challenge situations, this may again speak to differences in attitudes and expectations within this cohort.

Other School Adults

Interactions with other school adults were apparent across both success and challenge situations and descriptions of these interactions provided a valuable insight into the experiences gained during practicum placements. Regardless of the situation the participants were describing, the nature of their interactions with other school adults remained broadly the same. In both situations, some descriptions contain details of other school adults providing excellent support through direct action, by providing strategies or further sources of information. Within a practicum placement it may be expected that the classroom teacher would respond to preservice teachers in this way. The data also shows positive interactions with educational assistants (EAs), learning resource staff and, on occasion, school principals with participants describing staff as ‘amazing’ and ‘so supportive’. In particular, educational assistants were referenced as a source of additional information or strategies, and preservice teachers described instances of collaboration with the EA to enhance student outcomes. This ability to form positive working relationships, establishing mutual professional respect indicates that many of these preservice teachers were not only able but also willing to have additional adults working within the classroom. This finding is in contrast to that of Brackenreed and Barnett (2006), who found that even in the first few years of their careers, teachers were resistant to having other professionals in the room. This finding may indicate that collaborative working practices are somehow deemed more acceptable during practica as there is an acceptance that this is a learning experiences and the expectation of

other adults in the room already exists. On the other hand, this could speak to a gradual change in perspective among preservice teachers who now more readily accept concepts such as professional collaboration and co-teaching. In order to ascertain which of these theories reflects reality it would be necessary to carry out further research, following a cohort of preservice teachers into their in-service careers and obtaining data on the types of collaborative practices they undertake together with data regarding their attitudes towards collaboration.

Within the data there are also scenarios which describe situations which are far from positive experiences. Some preservice teachers describe incidences where staff have withheld Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or other information relevant to the teaching of the student. Given that such documents are there to support the education of the student, it is difficult to understand why a teacher would feel it is necessary to withhold such information although it must be acknowledged that the descriptions in the data may not contain all the pertinent information and are written from the perspective of the participant. Within this cohort, it was apparent that when school staff did withhold information, the preservice teacher often felt bewildered as to why and that they had not been given an opportunity to succeed in that particular situation. Feeling unsupported and unsure of what to do was also reported in situations where preservice teachers asked for advice regarding particular students and the response was 'just include them'. In these circumstances it can be seen that there is a negative impact on preservice teachers' feeling of efficacy.

In relation to situations in which the preservice teacher reported students whom the teacher explicitly or implicitly appeared to have 'written off' the outcomes were mixed. In some situations, this led to increased feelings of efficacy as the preservice teacher felt they had succeeded where perhaps the class teacher had less success. In other circumstances the

preservice teacher describes situations in which they too appear to have reduced their efforts, or feel that they will be unable to make any difference in the situation. This demonstrates the significance of the attitudes and behaviours of in-service teachers on the developing beliefs and practices of preservice teachers. This influence extends beyond the classroom teacher as one participant also described concerns with the whole school approach to inclusion which they felt was more concerned with exclusion as behaviours were 'taken personally' and school strategies involved 'punishing consequences' rather than student support. This was echoed at teacher level by another participant who felt that many of the in-service teachers they encountered either did not believe in inclusion or did not have the 'professional development' to be inclusive practitioners. The impact of these experiences cannot be overstated. Research has shown that classroom teachers can be more influential than university course work in areas such as teaching practice, planning and behaviour management (Landrum, Cook, Tankersley, & Fitzgerald, 2002) and that preservice teachers generally perceive their practicum experiences as a means of developing their own professional practice (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Walker, 2013).

Diagnosis

With regard to specific diagnoses, although they were mentioned in both success and challenge, they were a much greater focus within challenging situations as opposed to successful ones. Again, this was not a theme which existed in isolation of others and diagnosis was often mentioned in relation to behaviour perceived as challenging. In particular students with a diagnosis for attention deficit disorders were frequently cited as a source of challenge, primarily in relation to behaviour management and difficulties in engaging students in content. Again,

there is a striking difference in the emphasis placed upon the diagnosis according to whether situations are perceived as challenge or success. Within descriptions of success, while the diagnosis may be relevant and used by the preservice teacher to identify strategies or support their understanding of the individual, the primary focus is on the strategies used and the outcome for the student. Within challenge situations the emphasis is often on the diagnosis with unspoken implications as to why the situation was so challenging. Participants report feeling unsure “how to talk” or “how to control” students with diagnoses which may present with challenging behaviours. This again speaks to personally held beliefs that students need to be ‘controlled’ or that those with certain diagnoses need to be spoken to, or interacted with, differently from any other individual. If beginning teachers are to enter a profession in which they are required to interact with increasingly diverse populations, then it is imperative that beliefs such as these are challenged. The emphasis on diagnosis may also indicate that the ‘label’ is of more relevance than the individual. As previously stated, the focus of descriptions relating to diagnosis differed markedly between success and challenge situations which may be indicative that the interactions of some participants are influenced by their understanding of, and expectations relating to specific diagnoses. It is not possible to tell from this data set how much course content each participant has received regarding specific exceptionalities, nor how much course content may have influenced preservice teachers’ professional practice in the classroom. Information regarding the duration and content of courses held by each individual higher learning institution did not form part of this analysis but may be shown to be influential in the development of efficacious and inclusive beliefs and would therefore warrant further research.

What the data does tell us is that some participants are able to utilise specific strategies or support from other school adults when faced with students with exceptionalities, regardless of

what those exceptionalities may be. Others appear unable to do this to the same extent and have experiences which are much less positive. Not only do these experiences impact teacher efficacy during practicum placement, but may also have implications for future classroom management and student interactions. In order to ascertain if this is true, longitudinal research which explores preservice teachers' experiences from initial practicum experiences and beyond into teaching experience may add to our understanding.

Use of Individual Education Plans

Whilst individual education plans were mentioned in both success and challenge situations, they predominately appear in descriptions of success. Among this cohort of preservice teachers, there is frequent mention of using IEPs to obtain more information about students' exceptionalities and the best methods of meeting their educational needs. That these preservice teachers are able to identify and successfully utilise information relevant to improving student outcomes may indicate that the purpose and use of IEPs has been the subject of course content, equipping preservice teachers with knowledge of a useful resource. Conversely, in challenge situations when IEPs were mentioned this was usually in relation to the absence of such a document or an insufficient amount of information contained therein to provide a useful resource. There is no suggestion within the data that the absence or quality of an IEP negatively impacts teacher efficacy. However, it is apparent that IEPs were used as an effective tool to enhance teacher understanding of individual needs, and that information contained in the IEP was used to enhance the learning experience. This in turn, combined with other elements, often resulted in improved student outcomes leading to increased teacher efficacy. Again, it is the combination of elements which combine to create successful outcomes and subsequent feelings

of teacher success. Research suggests that IEPs are increasingly utilised by teachers in the general education classroom and when well written in collaboration with other professionals can be an invaluable resource which identifies the needs of the individual (Lee-Tarver, 2006). The data from this research would support this finding and indicate that, for many of this cohort, IEPs were a useful resource.

Resources

The identification of resources utilised was requested in both questions and therefore it was anticipated that this would have provided a surfeit of information for analysis. However, when taken in situational contexts this was not the case as no one overarching theme became apparent. The data did reveal frustration at times when identified resources could not be provided, which primarily linked to technology, but again this related to a small amount of responses. The use of other school adults was the most commonly cited resource in each situation, however this has been dealt with separately within this section of the study are the implications of the findings were more complex that human resources positively or negatively impacting teacher efficacy. Historically, it has been suggested that physical resources and time have acted as barriers to inclusion with teachers reporting they did not have time for the level of differentiation needed for diverse classrooms nor had they the physical resources required (Glazzard, 2011; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010). The data from this study did support these findings to a degree, however this was again more closely related with situations in which participants felt challenged. In descriptions of success situations, perceptions regarding differentiation and resources do not appear to support these findings which may indicate that,

generally, teachers are entering the profession with different expectations of the demands they will face.

One pattern of particular interest that did emerge from the data relating to resources indicated that more resources of various kinds were contained within descriptions of success situations than in challenge situations. However, within challenge situations, participants cited referring to text books as a resource on several occasions, but this is not cited within success situations, despite more descriptions of resources used. The use of text books in this way may indicate that when feeling challenged, participants returned to theoretical concepts in an attempt to gain an improved understanding of the circumstances or to identify possible strategies to utilise in the classroom. It is not envisaged that in-service teachers would utilise text books in the same way and therefore this may speak to preservice teachers' perceptions of their knowledge levels or lack thereof, which may have implications for their feelings of efficacy within the classroom.

The data revealed several patterns which, though they do not represent themes necessarily, do speak to the differences between each situation. When considered in totality, descriptions relating to student outcomes described in success situations were double those described in challenge situations. In situations describing the instructional behaviours of preservice teachers and student responses, descriptions were described as making the participant feel successful three times more often than when they felt challenged. However, the most apparent difference lay in the focus of the descriptors; in success situations those descriptions which had the preservice teacher as the focus equated to less than one percent of those in challenge situations. This may speak to personal differences together with attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and would be an area worthy of further research.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the data is that the information is self-reported and contains only that which the participants considered relevant. The data also only contains a ‘snapshot’ and perceptions, attitudes and beliefs may change over time. Therefore, the assumptions obtained speak to the efficacy of this cohort of preservice teachers at a given time, but this is a fluid concept and may change over time which warrants further study. As stated information regarding the duration and content of courses held by each individual higher learning institution did not form part of this analysis but may be shown to be influential in the development of efficacious and inclusive beliefs and would therefore warrant further research. Bias may also influence the interpretation of the data as those involved in the research are proponents of inclusive schooling and therefore, whilst striving to consider all perspectives and interpretations, view all of the information obtained through that lens. Another limitation of the data is that it pertains specifically to Canadian preservice teachers, therefore while many of the findings may hold true in an international context, wider implications for interpretation of the data cannot be made. Information regarding demographic data, attitudes and beliefs, and personal or professional experiences which may have influenced the descriptions given by the cohort were unavailable and did not form part of the analyses.

Conclusion

It is apparent from this research that the elements influencing the professional efficacy of teachers as they prepare for the work place are closely interwoven. In the broadest terms, the findings were in keeping with Bandura’s theories of self-efficacy in that perceptions of success and challenge were related to the individual’s beliefs surrounding their ability to effectively

implement successful strategies, and their perceptions of the subsequent outcomes. However, judgements regarding effective strategies and validity of outcomes may stem from personal beliefs about inclusion. These beliefs may be influenced by theoretical knowledge of specific exceptionalities and effective strategies, together with legislation and policy relating to inclusion. In keeping with the knowledge base on teacher efficacy, classroom management is a crucial aspect of maintaining efficacious beliefs in that those who were able to instigate successful solutions for managing behavioural challenges reported feeling successful. The same was also true in other areas of the professional arena such as academic strategies, the ability to utilise resources effectively and forming positive relationships either with students or other school adults. The data clearly showed that challenging situations did not necessarily leave the participant feeling unsuccessful. However, the data also showed that some participants utilised many of the same strategies and resources but felt the situation was not resolved and this then challenged their self-efficacy. Perceptions such as this raise concerns regarding the expectations some participants may hold about their professional experiences and the outcomes they hope to achieve. Embedded within these expectations it would appear that some of this cohort may have beliefs and attitudes which are not conducive to inclusive classrooms which was illustrated by their concern that supporting a student with an exceptionality somehow 'takes away' from time spent 'teaching the rest'. This would indicate that they view the child with the exceptionality as separate from 'the rest'. Conversely those who viewed students with exceptionalities as an expected part of the student cohort appeared more able to bring about positive outcomes as they were invested to try multiple strategies and form positive student-teacher relationships. Practicum experiences in which preservice teachers do not have positive experiences with students with exceptionalities may cause them to question the validity of inclusion. These

concerns can then be further impacted by the ethos of the school, and in particular the attitudes and beliefs of the classroom teacher. The data illustrated that in-service teachers who held less positive views of students with exceptionalities sometimes influenced the preservice teacher's classroom behaviour towards those students.

In summation it is apparent that several elements can positively influence self-efficacy and these include theoretical understanding gained from good quality university instruction, the ability to identify and utilise resources, the ability to form supportive professional relationships with other school adults, and the ability to recognise achievement as it pertains to the individual rather than prescribed norms. It is acknowledged that these elements can be in place and self-efficacy still be negatively impacted by the perception that the outcome was not positive. This would appear to indicate therefore, that it is the individually held beliefs and understanding of diversity that is pivotal in defining perceptions and attribution of success and failure.

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Appendix 1

Efficacy Study Codes Question 2 & 3

Main Codes	Sub-Codes	Sub-Codes' Codes	Notes
Situation	1. Success 2. Challenge 3. No experience/opportunity to work with students with exceptionalities/ Unsure		Code depending on the question not what they say about the situation
Context	1. Grade 2. Academic 3. Social	1. Grades 1a) JK-3 1b) 4-6 1c)7-12 2. Academic: 2a) Numeracy 2b) Literacy 2c)Arts 2d)Tech 2e)Other Subject Area	Code if mention grade or a situations that involves class work or social interactions
Diagnosis	1. Learning disability 2. Intellectual/ developmental disability (e.g., Down Syndrome) 3. Gifted/Advanced 4. Autism Spectrum 5. Behaviour (ADHD, OCD, OCC, etc) 6. Visual 7. Hearing 8. Other 9. Undisclosed/ General "IEP" 10. Undiagnosed 11. ESL		Must mention a specific diagnosis or that they knew the child had a disability or IEP but were not sure of the diagnosis for codes 1-9. If mention symptoms like a diagnosis use 10. If mention ESL code 11

Circumstance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student 2. Teacher Candidate 3. Peers 4. Other school adults (e.g., teacher, principal, EA, resource) 5. Parents 	<p>Sub Codes related to each individual. Assign number related to individual and letter if the following information is present</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) participation/engagement (can relate to involvement in activity) b) affect (e.g., happy, sad, confident, frustrated) c) motivation d) achievement (knowledge/skills) 	<p>This code relates the major issue presented and the main individual affected.</p>
Response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Instructional – related to the learning of the student 2. Environmental – related to a change in location or feel of the setting 3. Assessment – related to the measurement of learning and must mention product or outcome performance 4. Assistance from others, texts, websites etc. 		<p>This code corresponds to what action was implemented with respect to the circumstance</p>
Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Human 2. Materials 3. Technology 4. IEP 		<p>This code relates to anything that was used in order to address the circumstance and used in the response</p>
Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student 2. Teacher candidate 3. Peers 	<p>Sub Codes related to each individual. Assign number related to individual and letter if</p>	<p>This code relates to what happened whether the</p>

	<p>4. Other school adults (e.g., teacher, principal, EA, resource)</p> <p>5. Parents</p>	<p>the following information is present</p> <p>a) participation/engagement (can relate to involvement in activity)</p> <p>b) affect (e.g., happy, sad, confident, frustrated)</p> <p>c) motivation</p> <p>d) achievement (knowledge/skills)</p>	<p>circumstance was resolved or not</p>
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Curriculum Vitae

Education

University of Western Ontario

London, ON, 2014 -

- Masters Degree in Education Studies.
- Research Assistant to the Director for the Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education.

University of Greenwich

London, UK, 2010 - 2013

- Bachelor's Degree in Education Studies: First Class Honours.
- Foundation Degree in Learning Support.

Professional Summary

Teaching Instructor, District Special School 2005 - 2014

Teaching Assistant, Secondary Special School, 2001 – 2005

Teaching Assistant, Secondary School, 2000 – 2001