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An Evaluation of the Initial Teacher Training Professional Resource Network (Iprn): Behaviour4learning

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Introduction

Early in 2002 the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) created a new directorate, the Teaching Training Support directorate, with the Effective Practices and Research Dissemination (EPRD) Team as one of eight teams within this directorate. The EPRD was directed to work with initial teacher education (ITE) providers to build the professional knowledge base in ITE through:

- identifying, systematically, effective practices and relevant research;
- disseminating this information to stakeholders;
- commissioning research and development where gaps in knowledge and practice were identified;
- using ICT to support the dissemination of effective practices in ITE.

The EPRD team proposed that the most beneficial way to enhance professional learning was by expert groups working together in a professional network which had also been a recurring theme in other change initiatives (Holmes *et al.* 2001; Scrimshaw 2002; Leask and Younie 2002). The communities of practice research (Lave and Wenger 1991; McNamara *et al.* 2001; Cordingley 2003) stressed the value of professional networking where experts in their field critique the evidence base, identify effective practices and develop the knowledge base. The focus of the work was to provide a research and evidence base to support teacher trainers and develop the ITE knowledge base. Collectively these networks were known as Initial Teacher Education Professional Resource Networks (IPRNs).

There was also recognition that the professional knowledge base would need to be continually updated. All of these considerations led to the development of electronic networks for providing opportunities for collaborative knowledge-building, with effective practice already being demonstrated in this area by projects such as the National College of School Leadership and the British Education Communications Technology Agency. This was supported by other research (Holmes *et al.* 2001; Leask and Younie 2002; Scrimshaw 2002) that identified the contribution to professional learning that electronic networks can provide in supporting professionals in collaborating to create new professional knowledge.

The IPRN concept was piloted in 2002-2003 by developing the ITE professional knowledge base in Citizenship which was then a new subject area for teacher trainers and schools (Arthur and Davison 2003). The second IPRN was developed

from concerns expressed by many newly qualified teachers (TTA NQT survey 2002) who felt that their initial teacher education had not sufficiently equipped them to effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds. This led to the development of a Diversity ITE Professional Resource Network.

These newly qualified teachers also expressed the view that they did not feel confident in dealing with student behaviour in the classroom. Findings from the TTA NQT survey (2002) reported that NQTs:

- felt they did not have enough input on behaviour management whilst in training;
- would feel more confident if they were more competent in dealing with behaviour in the classroom;
- felt that tutors and mentors should make more explicit links between the theory and practice of classroom management;
- said that teacher behaviour that supports positive behaviour needs to be more extensively modelled on courses of ITE;
- requested more inputs on the management of groups as well as individuals;
- wanted more input as trainees on how to deal with specific behaviours e.g. autistic spectrum disorders/ADHD/emotional difficulties.

The TTA recognised that there was good practice in behaviour management in ITE establishments, but that this practice was inconsistent. In recognition of the potential benefit for trainees who would be enabled to experience increased levels of competence and confidence in the area of behaviour (Tod 2004), the TTA proposed the development of a capacity-building network to enable ITE providers to address behavioural issues on their courses. This led to the development of the IPRN for behaviour (<http://www.behaviour4learning.ac.uk/>). The remit was to build a resource of expertise that could be a reference point for tutors and mentors; to increase awareness of behaviour management and techniques, and also to increase research in that field. From the beginning it was decided that activity in this area had to be appropriately targeted to build ownership and support sustainability within the sector.

The notion of ownership was to be encouraged by inviting tutors and mentors to be involved in the creation of new professional knowledge in ITE pedagogy and content through research in their subject area and by being involved in systematic review groups synthesising the evidence base in their area. 'Their work is expected to extend the boundaries of knowledge.' (Leask and White 2004: 6) This aspect would be facilitated through the inclusion of regional co-ordinators '*to act as focal points for these development activities*' (IPRN Planner B). The aim for each regional cluster was to develop initiatives to increase capacity across ITE and with local authorities in their region. Regionality was also seen as a key feature to ensure sustainability.

Evaluation of the IPRN B4L Website

It was the author's belief that if this new venture was to have any impact, it must rehearse the argument for more long-term approaches to behaviour management, to look beyond the immediate and the pressing and consider the wider context. There is a need to move away from seeking short-term solutions and simple remedies for what are actually complex social problems (Cartwright 1991; Cook 1991). If this is to be achieved the project needed to be seen as an attempt to move away from narrowly focussed one-dimensional reductionist policies to more encompassing approaches with a humanistic agenda.

The evaluation in this study of the IPRN website Behaviour for Learning (B4L) sought to determine whether the planners had a clear idea of what the consequences of their activity would be for the tutors who experienced using the materials and resources (Jones and Asensio 2001) and how effective they were. The IPRN planners were interviewed to provide data for the two research question:

1. *What were the aims of the web-site planners?*
2. *Did the project planners achieve their goals?*

The third research question for this project was:

3. *Did the IPRN make a difference to trainees and tutors?*

Aims of the Planners

The aims of the planners can be summarised as:

- developing resources that would enhance knowledge in behaviour management via subject specialisms in ITE;
- extending the range of ITE resources and positive approaches to classroom management;
- heightening the status of ITE research in behaviour for learning.

When asked about his own initial thoughts on the project, Planner A stated that he had been motivated by an awareness that trainees in his own university:

...were receiving a very partial coverage of behaviour issues and it was something that I'd identified certainly on a personal level and it was a pretty fortuitous thing that the whole notion came together in the form of a response to a tender document (IPRN Planner A).

He had previously acted as an external advisor to an EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre) review of recent research on strategy effectiveness for supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Evans *et al.* 2003) and had been critical of the outcomes:

I just felt that it didn't get anywhere really near to where the trainees that I was then working with actually wanted to be, it didn't give them the nuts and bolts stuff a kind of down view of the field so that they could operate using guidance from appropriate people, they could operate a pic n' mix thing so that they could identify things which suited them and they could play to their strengths via materials which they felt secure in because they'd been especially validated by others (IPRN Planner A).

He was also critical of 'an awful lot of stuff being pedalled round in the behaviour field' which was advocating controlling authoritarian approaches which he described as:

...dangerously moving towards some pretty brutal and ultimately I think professionally self-serving positions. I'm thinking about the Assertive, Discipline type approach which I think the basis of that approach, like a lot of things, is sound but unfortunately once it gets holds, if an extremist gets hold of a particular idea and they then start to fashion it as the solution, the magic drop for a particular phenomenon then you have all sorts of chaos and mayhem reigning and I felt pretty concerned about that (IPRN Planner A).

He was very conscious of the fact that many books on behaviour management had been produced but he felt that:

They don't actually get to grips with the realities of things and where they do, or attempt to, they have an unfortunate capacity to descend into tripe (IPRN Planner A).

Advising on a second EPPI review of how theories explain learning behaviour in school contexts (Powell *et al.* 2004), Planner A was attracted to a new behaviour for learning humanistic conceptual base that was:

...linked very clearly with the stuff that I really saw as a major cornerstone of the practical things I did as a teacher, based loosely around the Rogerian approach and the notion that in order to understand kids you've got to understand yourself (IPRN Planner A).

Planner B also noted that the conceptual framework (Powell *et al.* 2004) was highly significant to the development of the IPRN:

It wasn't just focussed on the instrumental issues to do with compliance or issues of authoritarian control but was about developing behaviour that enabled learning to occur so it was a much more long term view (IPRN Planner B).

There were four areas of activity underlying the development of the B4L network:

- articulating the knowledge and understanding of B4L;
- embedding this knowledge and understanding at classroom level;
- embedding this knowledge at the level of the trainer and trainee within the context of classroom practice;
- providing resources for this to occur.

Included in the articulation of knowledge was the notion of providing tutors with the necessary knowledge to support trainees in gaining an understanding of the causes of behaviour to facilitate more appropriate intervention selection:

A metaphor that I tend to always have in the back of my mind is that it's like you go to a doctor and the doctor needs to get to the bottom of what is causing the complaint, they don't just simply reach for the prescription and dole out any old sort of medicine (IPRN Planner A).

The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the IPRN (see Figure 1) was influenced by a TTA- funded systematic review led by Powell and Tod (2004), that emphasised a series of interrelationships between self, others and curriculum experiences which underpin behaviour for learning.

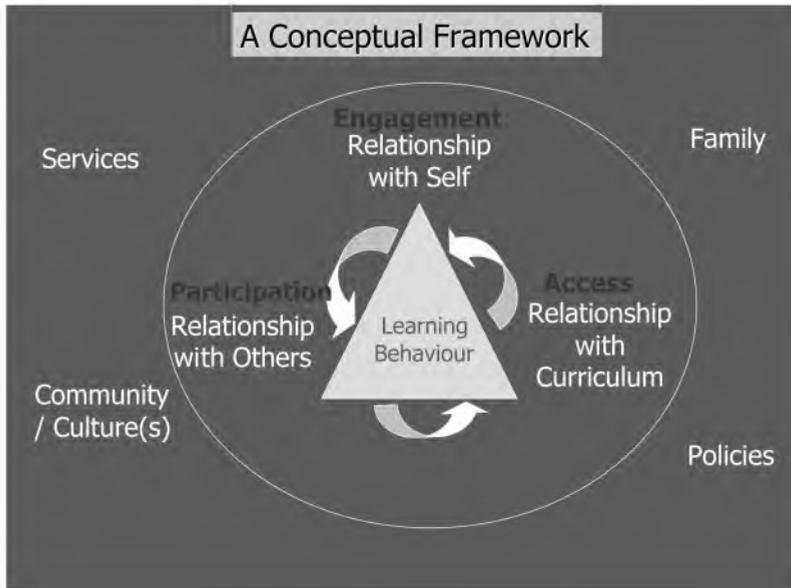


Figure 1. The conceptual framework for the IPRN

Source: Powell *et al.* (2004)

The conceptual framework is based on Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1989), which asserts that human development cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider contexts of an individual's interactive relationships in social and cultural environments. The original model which associated learning and behaviour with the affective, social and cognitive domains was then further developed whereby the affective domain was linked with the enhancement of self-esteem; the social domain with socialisation and participation; and the cognitive domain was linked with curriculum access. The model which described learning behaviours in school contexts also illustrated the triad of relationships:

- **Relationship with self.** When a student feels confident and has an internalised view that they are able to succeed as a learner, they are more likely to engage in the challenge of learning. Research (Norwich and Rovoli 1993) has shown that students' behavioural intentions are mainly derived from perceptions of their past learning behaviours.

- **Relationship with others.** Unacceptable behaviour is a product of the dynamic relation between individuals and their environmental contexts. Positive relationships can enhance self-esteem by giving students a sense of being valued and worthwhile.
- **Relationship with the curriculum.** Student behaviour and learning are inextricably linked. Students who are motivated through a perceived meaningful curriculum are less likely to present with inappropriate behaviour.

In examining research on pedagogy for students with behaviour problems, Davies and Florian (2004) concluded that there seemed to be an increase in strategies that addressed cognitive, social and affective behaviours such as emotional literacy, multiple intelligences and learning styles. The review also indicated a number of key terms arising from the literature that underpin learning behaviour, such as engagement, participation, responsiveness, responsibility, collaboration, communication, independent activity, motivation and self-esteem. Deficits in any of these areas are likely to affect a student's abilities to develop learning behaviours (Powell *et al.* 2004).

The IPRN, in common with other research (Schechtman and Leichtentritt 2004), supported the humanist orientation in the education of students with behaviour problems. It recognised the social, emotional and behavioural components of learning and was concerned with promoting learning behaviour through the development of effective teaching and management:

The behaviour for learning approach was a very viable thing and I really do have a powerful affiliation with a notion that if children are self-actualised learners they will still misbehave and hopefully so too. You want kids to misbehave in a kind of perverse constructive way because they are challenging boundaries, they are finding out about themselves and you don't find everything out by toeing the line all the time (IPRN Planner A).

The IPRN has clear synergies with other national developments and initiatives such as the behaviour and attendance strands of the Key Stage 3 Secondary Strategy (DfES 2003) which emphasised the importance of social, emotional and behavioural skills:

We were in tune with a review on social and emotional competence which was done by the DfES which I think was a vital background for the DfES developments because they were very wary of ideas such as social and emotional literacy etc. Elements like that which have a misconception of you've either got it or you've not. If you use the term social literacy, it can lead to ideas such as we do it in an hour alongside literacy and numeracy strategy. Unfortunately then it's not seen to be the responsibility of everybody (IPRN Planner B).

Key principles

The key principles of the IPRN were founded on the consideration of a conceptual framework for learning that would allow trainees to explore and understand

the determinants of learning behaviour and make sense of, and evaluate the efficacy of, the many strategies offered during training and school experience (Parsons and Hodgkin 2006). There was to be a shift away from authoritarian controlling behaviourist approaches towards more humanistic methodology, which emphasised terminology such as 'behaviour for learning' as opposed to behaviour management. This signalled that trainees would be encouraged to consider teaching behaviours that would enhance the learning context and give responsibility for behaviour to the student. This is in contrast to reactive punitive approaches and terminology such as 'managing behaviour'. This proactive approach was linked with the promotion of effective learning behaviours, knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of behaviour, and positive approaches to behaviour located within the policy context of inclusion.

These principles were concerned with introducing trainees to issues related to behaviour for learning. The development of behaviour for learning is essentially a responsive process during which the learner seeks to make sense of the learning situation from their perspective.

Methods of Evaluation

In this study, the IPRN was evaluated through a questionnaire to trainees at the end of their training, a questionnaire to tutors, a questionnaire to regional co-ordinators and interview responses from trainees, tutors and planners as well as national evaluation documentation. The second questionnaire, which was administered in January 2006 half-way through the PGCE programme following the trainees' first teaching placement and prior to going out into schools and colleges on their second placement, included a final question asking whether they had accessed the IPRN Behaviour4Learning website and if yes what issue prompted their search and did they find the site helpful.

Mid-point Data Analysis

The first questionnaire was issued to trainees in the third week of their induction but as they were not officially introduced to the website during that period, it was decided not to include a question on access and effectiveness as the responses were likely to be mostly negative.

Responses from trainees half-way through their training (see Table 1) in terms of level of access were particularly low e.g. out of 22 Mathematics specialist trainees only three had actually accessed the IPRN despite having been shown the website at a cohort lecture, given publicity cards and the resource being referred to in Professional Studies seminars. Reasons given for non-access related to lack of time and more immediate concerns: *Just haven't either thought of it or had time to try. Probably due to more pressing things - lesson planning, assessment, assignments, QTS tests etc. (Trainee).*

Table 1. Visits to B4L website (mid-point of trainees' course)

	Mathematics specialist trainees n=22	Business Studies specialist trainees n=27	English specialist trainees n=27
Yes	3	9	13
No	19	15	14

In considering why so few of the Mathematics specialists had not even accessed the site the subject tutor commented:

They knew it was available because I even showed them some things on it in a session. I think I've said this to you before, I don't think they take an academic approach to behaviour management. If they're having problems in school and the chips are down, they're not going to go and read something. There's this assumption they'll battle away or say 'I can't teach this class any more, will you sit in with me?' They're not going to go away and read something that will give them some ideas of how to understand what is happening, or how to make sense of it, whereas if they come unstuck with the topic they've got to teach in maths of course they'll go and find a book and find more about it (Subject Tutor).

End of Training Responses

A dedicated questionnaire was distributed to all the trainees in the sample in June 2006 on the last day of their course, to ascertain their perceptions of the effectiveness of the resource in supporting them and providing advice on the issues that were of most concern. Trainees that had used the website were predominantly positive in their comments: *I found the site helpful and was able to relate a lot of the scenarios to the classroom environment (Trainee)*. Several found it particularly useful in relation to assignments: *I looked at the website as part of the directed study tasks during the placement and found lots of useful information and journal articles to read (Trainee)*. Question one in both trainee and tutor questionnaires was designed to enquire into frequency of usage of the website. All of these trainees had been introduced to the site in cohort lectures, tutors had provided additional references to the site during Professional Studies sessions and subject specialism lectures, and there were numerous posters around the education faculty. Despite these endeavours, 61% of trainees questioned at the end of their training programme said that they had not yet used the site that was specifically designed for them (see Table 2), with comments such as: *No, to tell you the truth I completely forgot about it. No, I have been too busy planning*

Table 2. Responses to B4L access (end of trainees' course)

	Mathematics specialist trainees n=19	Business Studies specialist trainees n=22	English specialist trainees n=22
Yes	10	16	14
No	9	6	8

This should not be entirely surprising, given that out of the 18 responses from tutors only seven had ever accessed the website and only two had accessed the website whilst working with trainees. None of the respondents had specifically instructed the trainees to use the B4L website as a part of an assignment, although most had mentioned that it could be useful when completing essays on behaviour management. This response from a Professional Studies tutor was typical of the reasons given for not using the resource:

I know we talked about this website but I have to confess I haven't even looked at it. However, I am sure I would have done if I had needed some resources for any of my sessions. As you know I have done a lot of work on behaviour management so I already have lots of resources and personal anecdotes to use so perhaps my use of a website might be different from that of less experienced users. Doing this questionnaire has made me realise that I should have at least looked at the site in order to keep myself up to date and also to be familiar with its contents in order to be able to recommend it to trainees (PS Tutor).

There was also an assumption by a few tutors that behaviour was the province of the 'expert' and should be taught by a specialist:

Well we have [name of lecturer] to talk to the trainees about behaviour issues. I never seem to have the time to explore new websites.

In discussing issues of access with the planners, both mentioned statistical data which records number of hits and number of registered users as measures of impact:

We can see that the main measure at that time was numbers of hits of the downloaded documents. According to the title of document downloaded we could see whether or not we were having an impact (IPRN Planner B).

Whilst recognising that statistical data of this type does indeed record details of access there is no evidence that this was having an impact on trainee behaviour in the classroom or changing any attitudes. By December 2006, statistics from the national audit revealed a daily average of 850 article retrievals, amounting to 6,000 a week, indicating that users had not only visited the site but were actually downloading materials. The period between September and November 2006 saw an increase in registered users from 6,500 to over 8,000. More sophisticated data analysis methods meant that the management team could not only classify the users according to the institution but also examine each institution according to their TDA allocation and ascertain a percentage of impact for each institution. This was divided further between trainees and tutors but the numbers also include dormant accounts:

So it could be trainees who did a PGCE two years ago who were registered and not been to the site since so there's a rough and ready part of that (IPRN Planner B).

Some institutions encouraged all trainees to register as well as other undergraduate students:

The reason why [name of institution] are near the top is they've got a big educational studies programme and so you're getting people registering as part of educational studies who are not teachers (IPRN Planner B).

A number of trainees in this study made use of the website when needing references or articles to support assignment writing. Some trainees made use of the resource whilst on placement in seeking solutions to behaviour problems experienced in class. However typical responses stated that they were frustrated at not finding instant answers: *'I had an initial look but found it hard to find the tips that I was looking for'* When asked what they would like to be provided, there was a demand for packages of 'tips for teachers' to deal with every eventuality:

All the kinds of scenarios we could be faced with from students and all the strategies we could use. It would be good to suggest different activities that can be 'pulled out of a hat' when required (Trainee).

Whilst not denying that a range of strategies are clearly helpful as part of a developing tool-kit, it is unrealistic for trainees to be able to anticipate and prepare for the entire extent of student behaviour likely to be experienced in a classroom (Powell *et al.* 2004). Data from the final national survey of the IPRN (Davies 2006) indicated similar issues:

One respondent suggested that the inclusion of 'model responses' to assignment questions would have been appreciated whilst a few others would have welcomed the addition of more advice on practical issues when confronted with challenging behaviour (Davies 2006: 12).

The IPRN response from the planners to the inclusion of such resources was that this would defeat the objectives of the initiative, as it did not set out to encourage trainees to merely follow set 'tips' or 'answers' to complex tasks and challenges. The report acknowledged trainee anxiety when required to complete assignments and their desire to access direct support to help them in that task. However, it was argued that:

...the appropriate and frequent use of the resource, together with relevant tutorial/mentor support would be likely to cater for the practical and academic needs of most trainees (Davies 2006: 12).

This highlights the tension between trainee needs and what it is realistic or ultimately helpful to do in response.

When asked how 'user friendly' they found the website, most trainees said that it was moderately friendly although some said they had problems registering and others were confused about the benefits:

I registered with the site, but wasn't aware of gaining anything extra. It looked the same to me (Trainee).

The seven tutors that had viewed the site said that they found it either very or moderately user friendly. In response to this question one tutor commented:

Never looked at it – apart from when you displayed it at a seminar – this means I cannot really fill in the remainder of questionnaire!!! Sorry! (Tutor).

Suggestions for improvements from trainees included more colour, more interactive activities, more practical ideas on behaviour management, more videos and case studies and better navigation:

I didn't find anything useful on the web site despite looking for it. I think you need to think about navigation in the site. I think the information was there, but I couldn't find it. There seemed to be a lot of information/links that weren't relevant to what I was looking for, so I didn't spend time looking through everything (Trainee).

A few trainees also indicated that they would have welcomed more suggestions from newly qualified teachers and practising teachers together with an opportunity to exchange ideas and views.

Conclusion

The IPRN has adhered to its initial humanistic philosophy and steered away from encouraging trainees to merely follow set tips or answers to complex tasks and challenges (Parsons and Hodgkin 2006). The website has been designed to include critical commentaries and links to research to enable trainees to reflect on their practice and understand the interplay between theory and practice in the area of behaviour for learning. Factors involved in learning behaviour are linked to the theoretical models of affective (the self), cognitive (curriculum access) and social (participation) proposed by Vygotsky (1987), with an acknowledgement that 'a combination of theoretical perspectives may be needed to understand the relationship components of learning behaviours' (Tod 2004: 22):

We're giving trainees a range of things under one roof with one hit which can be commentaries, they can be provocative questions but they equally can be documents which have been released from government or whoever and which we think trainees need to know so to get a more three dimensional view than say other government affiliated sites (IPRN Planner A).

Evaluation of qualitative data from the national survey (Davies 2006) described an increased awareness of behavioural issues and that there was an increase in understanding types of behaviour that would support learning. Follow-up questionnaires to newly qualified teachers showed that they reported an increased confidence in relation to behaviour management:

However, the questionnaire could have been viewed as a catch 22 because if you make trainees more aware of the complexities of the issue with behaviour management they feel less confident than if they've got a little knowledge (IPRN Planner B).

Asked about the limitations or inhibitors to meeting intended aims, Planner A cited 'A crass lack of awareness shown by the DfES'. He was referring to the latest consultation document (The Steer Report DfES 2005b) and the fact that throughout the report there is continual reference to behaviourist approaches such as rewards and sanctions and to terminology such as discipline. There is no mention of emotional health and well-being and no mention of behaviour for learning.

Planner B also referred to the Steer Report:

...which has fuelled an authoritarian view of behavioural issues and this is built onto by the way that the unions comply with the media to address those issues of manipulating agendas to denigrate children which is intriguing (IPRN Planner B).

This is after three years and about £6b worth of spending on behaviour and attendance and all the SEAL material etc. and they're still pedalling discipline in school. So that's making our task with the trainees doubly hard as it is driven very much by the political shop window (IPRN Planner A).

His feeling was that the government wanted to present as 'tough on discipline and tough on making kids behave and all that stuff because it's a very highly sensitive political aspect':

So it seems that two organisations which have got the most substantive stake holding in the education of our children are not really talking to one another and certainly I've been party to the efforts that TDA have made, at a fairly senior level, to have that dialogue but the problem also is that the closer you get to the DfES the more controlling they wish to be. It's quite tough (IPRN Planner A).

'Behaviour for learning' is entering the vocabulary of new trainees but is in danger of becoming an easy catchphrase. As referred to earlier, some tutors have assumed that behaviour is the province of an 'expert' colleague who has been asked to deliver a lecture to the whole PGCE cohort:

Now you've got the behaviour for learning people to come in and do that but there's no conceptual change, it's only the words that have changed (IPRN Planner B).

The national survey (Davies 2006) concluded that this new initiative is a useful tool for both trainees and tutors and has a wealth of information and resources, but the findings from this study highlight issues of limited usage and application. If the IPRN Behaviour4Learning is to fulfil its rich potential it is clear that trainees first need to be directed to the site and then encouraged to use it.