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A thematic analysis of self-reported teacher perceptions and management of atypical student behaviours and their relation to the student self-concept

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ABSTRACT

Teacher responses to student behaviour directly influence numerous factors including student self-concept and later behaviour. Students with SEND tend to have a worse self-concept than their neurotypical peers, perhaps due to teacher expectations being lower and this informing the feedback given. However, the potential link between teacher response and student self-concept has not been definitively explored in research. Therefore, the following questions will be qualitatively explored; what are the recurring themes outlined by teachers when considering the management of atypical student behaviours in the classroom and how may the themes identified relate to the students' self-concept? Twelve secondary school teachers in Northern England were selected through snowball sampling and interviewed once in a semi-structured format over a digital medium to determine their perceptions and management of atypical student behaviours. There were four themes found: individual adjustments, behavioural management strategies, classroom dynamics and classroom assistance. The findings are novel in that they suggest that the feedback given by UK teachers to students focus on the remediation of a perceived deficit and may therefore be construed as negative feedback, which could have negative implications for the students' self-concept.

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Introduction

Teacher feedback to students is influential in the development of a students' academic self-concept (ASC; Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Ma et al., 2022; Marsh & Hau, 2004; Spinath & Spinath, 2005) which in turn directs behaviour, academic functioning and achievement (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008; Marsh et al., 1988). Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that students with a special

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educational need or disability (SEND) have a worse academic (ASC) and general self-concept (GSC) than their typical peers (Doyle et al., 2000; Foley-Nicpon et al., 2012; Hay & Ashman, 2003; Houck et al., 2011; Marcum & Pond, 2007; McCauley et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2020; Nishikawa et al., 2010; Perifanou, 2020). This could be because teachers have lower expectations of students' they consider to be SEN (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Bianco & Leech, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006) which informs the feedback given to those students and therefore self-concept formation.

Despite the link between teacher feedback and the student self-concept there has been no research which has attempted to explore teachers own accounts of how they support students with atypical behaviour in the classroom and the implications this may have for the students' self-concept. This research seeks to address this lack of understanding through qualitative interviews with teachers by addressing the following questions:

(1) What are the recurring themes outlined by teachers when considering the management of atypical student behaviours in the classroom?
(2) How may the themes identified relate to self-concept theory?

To explore the implications of teacher behaviour on the students' self-concept, it is first important to outline relevant concepts in the literature. Firstly, the literature review will outline what the self-concept is according to past research and its implications for academic functioning before discussing role the teacher plays in self-concept formation and finally student behaviour in the classroom in relation to SEND.

Literature review

The self-concept and its importance in education

The self-concept is a multi-faceted, hierarchical, evaluative, descriptive and malleable construct (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Marsh et al., 1988; Smith, 2019). At the apex is the overall self-concept which in turn is comprised of the academic self-concept and the non-academic self-concept. The ACS and non-ASC are created from specific domains such as mathematics, for the ASC or same-sex peer relationships for the non-ASC. These specific domains are comprised of behaviours at the base of the model. The overall ASC/non-ASCs are relatively stable, but specific domains (such as mathematics or same-sex peer relationships) are more malleable (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

The ASC directly informs academic achievement and school functioning, such as school attendance, motivation, and task engagement (Pullmann & Allik, 2008; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008; Suldo et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2021). Studies have shown that there is a significant relation between the ASC

and academic performance and achievement and wider school functioning such as motivation and attendance and ASC in primary students (Burger & Naudé, 2019; Jaiswal & Choudhuri, 2017; Sánchez & Sánchez-Roda, 2003; Talsma et al., 2018). The relation between the ASC and academic achievement and functioning is due to the self-adjusting nature of the ASC, where students adjust their behaviour to become congruent with their self-concept.

The role of the teacher in the student self-concept

The ASC is informed by the information we receive from others and social comparative effects (Gniewosz et al., 2012; Ma et al., 2022; Marsh, 1986, 1987, 1990; Marsh & Martin, 2011; Marsh et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated that teachers are particularly involved in the self-concept formation of students. Indeed, teachers provide both overt feedback (such as grades) and covert feedback (such as behaviours to be interpreted) to students (Bouchey & Harter, 2005; Marsh & Hau, 2004; Spinath & Spinath, 2005).

Feedback given to students are usually informed by a teacher's expectations of the student (Smith et al., 1998). Teachers' expectations are based on the knowledge they have about their students, including previous achievement, in-class performance and teacher stereotypes and biases (Chen et al., 2011; Friedrich et al., 2015). Teachers have been demonstrated to have lower expectations of those individuals with SEND conditions (including disabilities), certain racial origins, socioeconomic status or problematic classroom behaviour (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Rubie-Davies & Peterson, 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Smith et al., 1998; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Lower teacher expectations of students with SEND have been suggested to be a failure to recognise giftedness or talent due to their behaviours contradicting the teacher's perception of gifted students (Bianco & Leech, 2010).Thus, as the feedback given to low-expectancy students has been suggested to differ to the feedback given to high-expectancy students (Brophy & Good, 1970) this poses a real consideration of the impact of differential feedback on student self-concept (Friedrich et al., 2015; Rosenthal, 2010).

Differential student feedback could therefore account for the reason why students with SEND have a worse self-concept than their typical peers. However, a consensus has not yet been agreed on the nature of teacher feedback to higher and lower expectation students. Indeed, some research has suggested that teachers provide more attention, interaction time, responsivity and support to those whom they have higher expectations of (Friedrich et al., 2015; Rosenthal, 2010), although, contrary research has suggested that lower student expectations result in teachers providing greater help and support (Blöte, 1995). Regardless of the directionality of teacher expectations and feedback, there is clearly evidence of a difference in feedback and treatment amongst. Thus, it is

possible that the difference in student self-concept lies in the differential feedback given to students.

Student behaviour in the classroom and the conceptualisation of SEND

Despite their being clear differences in the self-concept, expectations of and feedback to students with SEND compared to typical ones, there is a fundamental discrepancy between perceptions of SEND and actual SEND categorisation. Indeed, the spectrum of student behaviour in the classroom is often dimensional with some students portraying typical behaviours and some atypical and many falling somewhere along a bell-curve distribution.

In the UK education system, there is an emphasis on the inclusion of students with SEND in mainstream education as much as possible unless it is not feasible for them to be education in mainstream education. The SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015) and Teacher Standards (Department for Education, 2013) outline specific ways in which students with SEND should be supported in the mainstream classroom. Indeed, the Teacher Standards (Department for Education, 2013) outline that teaching should be adapted for the needs of all students in the classroom, usually through reasonable adjustments which have been demonstrated to be beneficial for academic achievement and performance (Bernard et al., 2019).

However, in some instances forced inclusion in mainstream education can lead students to develop a worse perception of themselves and their abilities (Marcum & Pond, 2007; Perifanou, 2020; Tracey & Marsh, 2000). Indeed, the SEND Code of Practice is fundamentally deficit focused, identifying perceived weakness within students and attempting to remediate these weaknesses at an individual level (Kirby, 2017) rather than focusing on the disabling nature of certain environments. As Harry and Klinger (2007) suggested, problems exhibited by children and young adults in school functioning lead educators/teachers to automatically question 'what is wrong with the child?'. Indeed, difficulties in education are often seen as pathology rather than an example of human variation (Reid & Valle, 2004). Due to this assumption of pathology by educators, the automatic response is to assume the presence of SEND which informs the subsequent responses teachers convey to students. Feedback and support delivered from the perspective of weakness remediation may implicitly send a message of difference or lack of capability which could be harmful to the students' self-concept (Marcum & Pond, 2007; Perifanou, 2020; Tracey & Marsh, 2000).

To conclude, teachers are likely to consider students with atypical behaviours as indicative of SEND due to the guidance stipulated in UK educational codes of practice. The SEND model is deficit focused and as such orients the teacher to perceive that by supporting a student with atypical behaviours they are 'fixing' a perceived weakness. This informs the expectations they have of the student

and therefore the feedback given to both typical and atypical students or students with SEND. This difference in feedback could account for the difference in self-concept between typical and atypical students and students with SEND. However, it is important to explore this further and explore the narratives of mainstream teachers who are presented with atypical behaviours in the classroom to determine how they support and consider these behaviours in context. To the authors knowledge, there is an absence of research both in UK educational practice and international education practice exploring this with reference to self-concept theory.

Method

From the research presented in the literature review, it is apparent that teachers may have lower expectations of students they believe to be SEND and this influences the feedback given and, therefore, subsequently the student self-concept. However, it is unclear at which point teachers consider certain student behaviours to be indicative of SEND and how they respond to these behaviours. To explore this absence of understanding, current UK secondary school teachers took part in semi-structured interviews exploring their perception of common, atypical classroom behaviours that may be indicative of SEND problems and how they would support them.

Participants

The sample consisted of 12 secondary school teachers from five schools in Northern England. Snowball sampling was used to approach prospective participants with one teacher in the sample providing contact with the other participants through connections within their own professional network. All teachers interviewed were aged between 25 to 40, were white British and had been teaching for a minimum of five years (male = 2, female = 10). To determine the estimation of appropriate sample size, interviews were conducted until the point of data saturation when recurring themes were evident and little new data was achieved (Boddy, 2016). However, as our sample is homogenous (all secondary school teachers from the United Kingdom education system) data saturation should occur around 12 participants according to Boddy (2016). The interview was conducted through a digital medium (Whatsapp) due to social distancing measures in the UK due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, this caused an inability to conduct interviews through face-to-face contact.

Procedure

A contact of the lead researcher at a school in Northern England was contacted to determine their interest in taking part and asked to disseminate the project including the information sheet, consent form and brief introduction of the project through their academic network. Following agreement to take part, a scheduled time to conduct the interview was arranged following receiving the signed consent form.

Participants were interviewed once through an online medium (WhatsApp) using a semi-structured format with questions focusing on consideration specifically of behaviours that could be indicative of common SEND conditions such as ADHD, Autism or attachment difficulties, without specifically mentioning a diagnosis. For example, this was framed as 'how would you manage hyperactivity in the classroom?', 'do you believe this behaviour would have an impact in the classroom' or 'how would you manage a student who has difficulties in social interaction?'. These behaviours were chosen as they are common in the classroom and are dimensional (see Coghill & Sonuga-Barke, 2012; Fraley & Spieker, 2003a, 2003b; Frazier et al., 2007; Georgiades et al., 2013; Graby, 2015; Marcus & Barry, 2011; McLennan, 2016) and are successfully measured as such in psychometric instruments (see Bodfield et al., 2020, 2022; Sochos & Lokshum, 2017; West et al., 1998).

Online interviewing was necessary at the time of the project due to the worldwide COVID-19 global pandemic. Given the high degree of digital competence in teachers it was deemed appropriate to interview over a messaging format to allow teachers time to reply and to avoid an adverse impact on their time during a stressful period for their practice. As teachers would often reply around their schedules it would often take a period of days for the interview to be completed.

Data analysis

Following the completion of the interviews, the transcripts of the conversations were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis scrutinises qualitative data for either latent or manifest themes that are present and consistent in the data and is one of 'the most systematic and transparent forms' (Joffe, 2012) of qualitative work. Braun and Clarke (2006) conceptualized thematic analysis as a method in which a researcher can explore meaning in data. In the analysis of the teacher interviews each transcript was read to make initial interpretations, identify interesting points and explore significant elements. From the first read through the transcript was then reread with emerging themes documented, the initial notes were transformed into concise codes that captured the quality of what was found in the transcript. The themes were then explored with connections between them identified and compiled into a table with supporting

quotes and codes. The compiled table was then used to orient the analysis of the other transcripts.

Ethical considerations

There are no significant ethical issues to report within this study. Teacher identities were anonymised and pseudonyms given when reporting the results of the interview, thus preserving their confidentiality. Informed consent was collected from all teachers who took part in the interviews and the topic discussed were not sufficiently sensitive or distressing to warrant the need for any further support. Teachers were fully debriefed following taking part in the study.

Ethical approval was granted by Liverpool John Moores University research ethics committee (20/EDC).

Results

The exploration of teacher themes in student behaviour in the classroom allows an insight into teachers' perceptions of atypical student behaviour and how they respond to these which gives some insight into the potential impacts on the student ASC.

Teachers were asked to consider the management and impact of hyperactivity, inattention, impulsivity, social and communication difficulties and relationship problems. Although these behaviours may be indicators of ADHD, Autism and attachment difficulties, no specific reference was made to these conditions by the interviewer. Nonetheless, in some cases, participants explicitly referred to these conditions in their replies.

There was a total of four themes identified post thematic analysis. These were individual adjustments, which were the compensatory strategies and techniques to support students, behavioural management strategies such as modelling, sanctions, praise and rewards, classroom dynamics such as the atmosphere and relationships between students and finally classroom assistance, which represents the demands on the teacher and the need for support.

Individual adjustments

Individually focused adjustments were a common theme identified in the interviews and are a specific approach to facilitate maximum engagement and functioning in class. Actual adjustments differed between teachers and were informed by the specific subject the teacher taught. One such example of an individual adjustment utilized by Julie and Sarah was giving hyperactive students jobs to positively channel their energy:

> 'Give them lots of jobs to do! Could be the 'teachers' helper". Get them as involved as possible!'

This reflected a consistent sense that teachers attempted to direct students towards positive behaviours by working towards students' strengths, even if these were weaknesses within certain elements of the classroom context.

The adaption techniques used varied in complexity and resources used. Some teachers spoke of easily utilized techniques with minimal resources, such as Sophie who stated she would make use of:

> . . . coloured cards to represent different things

Coloured cards would simplify communication and provide a tangible object to facilitate communication for students who struggled in this area.

Sarah said that for the management of poor communication skills they would be reliant on the school system scaffolding the student before the lesson, with simple resources used in lesson for adaption:

> 'Hopefully, the school would provide some support for that student. . . If not possible, I would find ways in which they feel comfortable to communicate, e.g. use of colored cards to represent different things. . . If communication were an issue with other students, I would try and pair up with a student they are comfortable with'.

Emma, however, stated that to manage a student with poor communication skills she would adjust the method she communicated with them in class:

> 'the strategies I use . . . are using simple gestures/signs. Giving pupils appropriate time to process and articulate their answer . . . using timers etc. . . Simply requiring them to point'.

Finally, one of the frequently referenced methods for adjusting students to the classroom was capitalizing on positive relationships with teachers acting as advocates for struggling pupils. Sophie said that they would look for opportunities to provide genuine praise and facilitate a good relationship with home in addition to utilizing positive relationships pupils may have with other staff members:

> 'look for opportunities to praise but try not to make it superficial . . . the key with this one is building a relationship with home. Passing on nice comments to a member of staff that the child does trust can help . . . restorative conversations'.

Sophie elaborated on this further and referenced being a mediator in facilitating relationships between students, encouraging mentalization and empathy. Other teachers took this advocacy for specific students further and integrated a multidisciplinary approach to adapting students to the classroom. For example, Sarah said that that would:

> 'work with the SEND department to create ways in which the student feels comfortable with social interactions. . .'.

Behavioural management strategies

Behavioural management strategies took the form of modelling, sanctions and rewards, which are forms of social learning and positive/negative reinforcement. Modelling was usually offered as the primary strategy used by teachers for behavioural management. This was because teachers believed that they could only reasonably expect their students to behave in a certain way if they demonstrate it themselves. Charlotte said that modelling gives them an example of how they should behave:

> Basically, you want to be modelling to students how you want them to behave. There's no use being lethargic or stern if you want them to be enthusiastically going around talking to each other. . .

Modelling was even used by teachers for the management of specific behaviours in the classroom. Both Emma and Nicola said they would model how to make friends, politeness, kindness and forge template relationships with students for them to use with their peers.

Teachers would also utilize both positive and negative reinforcement strategies such as praise and sanctions. Positive reinforcement was always the preferred choice and was used to affirm and encourage desirable behaviour and good academic progress. Indeed, Samantha said that positive reinforcement is achieved through various strategies including praising the right behaviour and making sure that they 'catch pupils doing it right'.

As a last resort for behavioural management, negative reinforcement was used by teachers for the management of disobedience and non-compliance. If positive reinforcement did not work, Emma cited that de-escalation was preferred in their school before moving to negative management strategies. If teachers needed to resort to negative behavioural management, many referred to applying the school's behavioural policy. Sarah specifically explained that she would refer to the behavioural policy for the management of impulsivity:

> ' . . . Follow behaviour policy. And if that resulted in them leaving the class, that would have to happen . . . Wouldn't hugely impact the class as following the behaviour policy shouldn't affect the remainder of the class'.

Therefore, although positive reinforcement is preferred and the first strategy used by teachers, teachers appear to fall back on negative reinforcement if necessary to maintain the order in the class to support other students learning.

Classroom dynamics

Given the nature of the classroom and the function of group-based learning, teachers referenced class dynamics as useful to expose difficulties as well as supporting positive outcomes. Teachers referenced implicit methods of utilizing classroom dynamics to their advantage. For example, when was asked about the relationships between students and peers influencing learning, Sophie, Charlotte and Alice both said that they would make use of pupil premium by seating different abilities together. This was done to capitalize on higher ability students helping lower abilities and supporting those with atypical behaviours such as poor communication skills.

Michael also mentioned the use of students in the class as tools for managing classroom performance:

> '. . . When grouped together pupils will complete work to a high standard when they support one another . . . having a shared team effort towards an end goal usually results in good learning'.

Michael's reference to grouping students together seems to suggest that it is used to support learning and possibly maximise the use of the resources available.

The dynamics in the classroom contributed to the overall atmosphere during the lesson. The class atmosphere and how pupils feel in class was frequently referenced as being pivotal to good classroom functioning. Teachers specifically referenced feelings of safety or competition. A feeling of competition was referenced by teachers as influential in learning. Alice said that competition between peers is healthy and encourages learning, with Rachel also referencing a feeling of competition as particularly beneficial for managing inattention and distraction. Although competition was deemed by some teachers as important and beneficial, feelings of safety were much more prevalent and emphasized by the teachers interviewed. Charlotte contextualized this feeling of safety as conduciveness to learning in her subject of foreign languages:

> '. . . Speaking tasks need students to be comfortable enough in the lesson to be able to speak to each other without getting embarrassed, which can only really be done by making sure from day 1 that they know mistakes are fine . . . '.

This feeling of safety permeated the management of behaviour. Julie said that for children with additional considerations, such as poor social interaction skills, there would be an emphasis on routine to foster a feeling of safety, and hopefully facilitate engagement. Alice outlined that class atmosphere affects all students, not just those with specific considerations or atypical behaviours. she noted the need to consider the needs of all students and the atmosphere in class when managing atypical student behaviour:

> 'I also find students who witness poor communication between student to teacher or student to student – feel uncomfortable and then do not complete tasks to the best of their ability (I'm thinking about my bottom set Y9's here)'.

Classroom assistance

This theme relates to the various support that teachers utilized in class. Classroom assistants were the preferred and required form of support, although the terminology may differ from teaching assistant to learner support assistant between the teachers interviewed. Classroom assistants were deemed pivotal to the ability of the teacher to meet their lesson plans. Consequently, their absence was keenly felt. When asked about what was the most challenging about managing a class, Alice said that in her discipline (art and design) the lack of an assistant can mean that the entire lesson is thrown off track. However, due to budget constraints, she rarely has such assistance. Samantha echoed this when asked about the difficulties in managing a class of students and expressed that the lack of an assistant made this especially difficult:

> 'The hardest class to manage are the ones are the big groups of 30-32 that have lots of needs with no LSA presence particularly late in the day'.

Furthermore, according to Michael, classroom assistants were important in supporting students with atypical behaviours in the classroom, including the management of communication issues:

> 'If we are talking about a specific student who finds it difficult to communicate on a personal level I would usually ask a teaching assistant (if available) to work with the pupils for small portions of the lesson to help them if possible'.

Discussion

Before discussing the results, it is important to recap the aim of this project, the research questions and findings of the project. Past research has not explored teachers accounts of how they support students in the classroom who demonstrate atypical behaviours and considered the implications this may have for the student self-concept. To address this gap in knowledge, this research sought to answer the following questions:

(1) What the recurring themes are which are outlined by teachers when considering the management of atypical student behaviours in the classroom?
(2) How may the themes identified relate to the students' self-concept?

The themes present following thematic analysis seem to suggest that individual adjustments and behavioural management strategies were the specific methods teachers referenced for the management of atypical student behaviours that were indicative of ADHD, Autism or maladaptive attachment respectively. In past educational research, individual adjustments have been a common theme relating to SEND in classrooms specifically. For example, research by Finkelstein et al. (2021) outlined three specific themes related to SEND in the classroom including individual adjustments, organisational practice, instructional practice and social, emotional and behavioural practice. Indeed, themes which research relate directly to some of the strategies mentioned by teachers in this research.

Behavioural management strategies outlined by the teachers interviewed tended to focus on positive strategies. However, if positive strategies failed to achieve the desired outcome, teachers would escalate their response strategies to impose sanctions or implement behaviour policies. Past research in education has highlighted that positive, relationship-focused behavioural interventions are appropriate, adaptive, and successful in the classroom and preferred as a first-line response to student behaviour (Browne, 2013; McCready & Soloway, 2010; Närhi et al., 2017). Despite the support for positive behavioural management, some critics have argued that some positive strategies, such as self-oriented praise, rarely contribute to any positive or meaningful change in functioning in the classroom (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). The persistence of positive strategies in the classroom despite criticism is likely due to the negative outcomes that can arise from negative behavioural management strategies. These may include a reduction in student incentive to comply with classroom norms, which may create a cycle of disobedience and punishment (Singh, 2011). Likewise, they can lead to further disobedience and disruption by the student if the teachers' reprimand is viewed as unfair, insensitive, or negligent (Miller et al., 2000; Tirri & Puolimatka, 2000; Wentzel, 2002).

Both behavioural management strategies and individual adjustments implemented by teachers perhaps have the most implications for the self-concept as these are direct forms of feedback. The use of behavioural management strategies and individual adjustments by teachers confirms that teachers perceived the hypothetical student behaviours through the SEND lens. As the SEND model works from the remediation of deficit (Harry & Klinger, 2007; Kirby, 2017), any adjustment taken could be inferred by students as an implicit message of incapability of success without intervention. This could appear to students as a form of negative feedback because it is not immediately apparent as a positive interaction. Indeed, students with atypical behaviour are more likely to receive negative feedback (Loe & Feldman, 2007) and therefore perhaps already have a negative self-concept which primes them to be more sensitive to information that confirms this or even falsely interpret positively intended support negatively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Swann & Hill, 1982). Therefore, this could

account for why students with SEND have been demonstrated to have a worse self-concept than their typical peers.

Classroom assistance as a theme was highlighted by the challenges teachers experienced in managing and supporting students. As such, a classroom assistant, who could devote time and energy to those students in the class who were struggling, was deemed important by teachers. This mirrors the findings of the recent independent review of behaviour in schools by Bennett (2017). Bennett's (2017) report found that 850 teachers believed there were inadequate resources in their school for the management of student behaviour. Arguably, recent cuts in UK school budgets may have exacerbated this situation (Williams & Grayson, 2018). Concerns over a lack of support for teachers in school have been a consistent feature of educational research for some time, for example, both Margot and Kettler (2019) and Axup and Gersch (2008) reported that teachers felt there was a lack of available practical support in the classroom, ranging from both peer collaboration to institutional/council support. The persistence of these concerns may indicate that teacher work demand is simply too much to be easily achieved, regardless of recent budget cuts. This would outline a need for more resources and support for teachers to adequately support the diversity of student needs and behaviours in the classroom.

The final theme to be discussed is that of classroom dynamics, specifically, feelings of safety or competition. Competition in the classroom could relate to social comparative processes whereby students compare themselves with others' performance. Upward comparison between the self and better performing peers has been suggested to raise motivation to achieve better due to increased feelings of self-confidence and self-efficacy from success. Indeed, perceiving oneself as being better than their peer(s) increases self-esteem, reduces anxiety, and creates positive affective states (Dijkstra et al., 2008). However, while competition can lead to positive academic behaviour and functioning, it may also be a risk to some students who struggle to compete or continually underperform. No matter how the effort some students exhibit, they may never be able to compete or achieve to the same level as better-performing peers. As such, struggling students are instead consigned to a cycle of negative feedback and unpleasant social comparative processes with their more academically able peers (for example, Marsh & Hau, 2003; Marsh & Martin, 2011).

References to safety in the classroom align with common themes in the literature around trauma and culturally sensitive educational practice. The work by Bell et al. (2013), Brunzell et al. (2015) and Minahan (2019) all reference the need for safety and belonging in the classroom to support students and foster growth. The fact that teachers identified the classroom climate as an important theme in student behavioural management demonstrates an understanding that student behaviours can be a response to their environment and their own experiences. For example, disruptive behaviours such as hyperactivity

and impulsivity can arise from and even be exacerbated by inaccessible content in lessons (Cothran et al., 2009). This aligns with awareness in the teachers interviewed of how their actions influence the environment in the classroom and their students' behaviours.

Limitations and future recommendations

One of the primary limitations is the lack of objective evidence demonstrating that certain teacher approaches to student behaviour are associated with a negative effect on the self-concept. The aim of the research was to explore teacher responses to student behaviours in the classroom and apply this to self-concept theory, therefore, due to the emphasis on qualitative data assumptions about the relations between teacher feedback and student self-concept cannot truly be drawn. However, the findings demonstrate a need to explore the relation between teacher management and the ASC in closer detail through quantitative means to empirically prove a hypothetical relation.

Furthermore, the entire sample of this research was comprised of teachers from secondary schools in Northern England that are in deprived areas according to the English Indices of Deprivation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019). Deprivation is associated with lower perceptions of parental warmth in attachment (Stansfeld et al., 2008), poverty with a greater risk of externalizing problems in children on the Autistic spectrum (Midouhas et al., 2013) and finally greater prevalence of ADHD diagnosis when compared to less deprived areas in England (Prasad et al., 2019). This means that children in these schools are perhaps more likely to demonstrate atypical behaviour and therefore the teachers more frequently encounter and manage atypical behaviour in the classroom. This could have informed the teachers' perception and perhaps explain the relative easiness with which the teachers reached for the SEND label during the interviews.

Furthermore, the localization of these teachers to Norther England do not appropriately representative the different countries within the United Kingdom such as Wales or Scotland in addition to regional differences within England itself. However, given that educational practice in the UK is highly regulated through guidance such as the Teacher Standards (Department for Education, 2013) and SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department for Health, 2015) there should be significant similarities in teaching practice between educational professionals. Despite this, future research should attempt to include a more representative sample of teachers from across the UK.

As a final limitation, the interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and as such were carried out online using a digital medium. The defense for this has been highlighted previously and there was good engagement from teachers despite the digital medium. Therefore, in this instance there is little evidence that the use of online interviewing had any significant negative

impact on the results. However, future research could recreate the study without distancing measures to determine this.

Future research would benefit from exploring the suggested relation between teacher responses to student behaviour and the self-concept from a quantitative approach. This could be conducted through an independent groups design whereby one cohort of students receives typical SEND based support and the other receives a more neurodiverse, strengths-based approach to detect if there is a difference in relation to the self-concept between the groups. Further future research could also focus on the student voice and interpretation of teacher feedback. Indeed, it would be illuminating to determine how teachers consider and interpret the feedback teachers give to support their behaviours in class and if they refer to an adverse impact on their self-concept.

Conclusions

To conclude, the themes identified appear to be commonplace in educational research, with the teacher strategies for the management of atypical behaviours largely falling within the parameters of current practice and current guidance/legislation. However, these strategies may have unintended consequences for the student's ASC as they work from a deficit-oriented perspective. Furthermore, there is the added consideration that these techniques are closely related to the classroom dynamic and resources that a teacher has, in some cases giving teachers little option but to use the strategies they do. Thus, teacher responses and conceptualizations of student behaviour are largely informed by their role, training and the school environment/climate, with responses to student behaviour perhaps unintentionally more harmful than good. Thus, it is important to explore further from other perspectives the implications that teacher responses to student behaviour may have for the students' self-concept and their own interpretation of the feedback given by teachers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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