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Keywords

challenging, knowledge, behaviour, teachers, confusions, preservice, study, practicum, final, during, conundrums

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Introduction

Defining challenging behaviour ... has always been an unsatisfactory enterprise.

(Visser & Cole 2003, p. 10)

Australian Professional Teaching Standard 4.3, "Manage challenging behaviour"

(AITSL 2014, p. 3)

Considering the two quotes together, one is left with the paradox of teachers having to 'manage the non-definable with professional certainty'. The juxtaposition of these opening quotes becomes even more problematic when one contemplates their origins. The first quote featured in a study of children and young people who present challenging behaviour (Visser & Cole 2003), a literature review commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), in the United Kingdom. Ofsted commissioned the literature review to 'determine the range of characteristics and definitions of challenging behaviour used by academic researchers and practitioners' (Ofsted 2005, online). That Ofsted perceived an ambiguity in definitions of challenging behaviour is noteworthy. That the educationists commissioned to conduct the literature review deemed their task an 'unsatisfactory enterprise' is important. The complex, multidisciplinary nature, fractious definitions and varied applications of 'challenging behaviour' necessitated an 87-page literature review. By contrast, the second quote positions challenging behaviour as a defined and mandated domain of teacher knowledge. This second excerpt is from the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2014), the document that governs preservice teacher education and teacher accreditation in Australia. Here, 'students with challenging behaviour' are positioned as a mandatory object of teacher knowledge. This begs the question: If there are many ways of understanding

challenging behaviour, which knowledges do teachers 'buy into', which do they resist and to what effect on their pedagogy?

Our study found that teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour is characterised by contradictions and confusions. We will argue that the contradictions and confusions inherent in the participants' knowledge of challenging behaviour centred on a blurring of discursive boundaries. Broadly speaking, behaviour is conceptualised in different discourses as either 'externally' or 'internally' located, or in some combination of these. The notion of a combination of causes seems a balanced, almost common sense, knowledge claim. Indeed, it is the most common conception of behaviour in teacher education coursework and educational policy contexts (McMahon 2013, Harwood & McMahon 2014). However, it also presents a difficult theoretic middle ground to engage with. As Murphy (1994, p. 53) explains: 'for those working with children or adults with challenging behaviours, the most difficult task may be to develop an integrated view of how biological, operant and ecological factors interact'. We found that rather than achieving an integrated view, preservice teachers more often used misconceptions of the bio/psycho/social trio as a covert epistemological springboard to mutually exclusive discourses with confounding effects for pedagogy. This chapter begins to describe how psy-knowledges impact on how teachers come to understand challenging behaviour. We explore psy-knowledges' capacity to both support and confound pedagogical reasoning.

In this chapter we briefly provide some contextual notes regarding preservice teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour, generally. Then we describe the study and deploy Foucault's archaeological analytics so as to impose some discursive order on this messy knowledge referent: three discourses of challenging behaviour. Finally, we explore the epistemic processes of two preservice teachers engaging with the psy-centred discourse of challenging behaviour (the biopsychosocial discourse). This chapter construes the biopsychosocial discourse of challenging behaviour as a dangerous 'theoretic middle ground'. It is dangerous insofar as it attends at once to biological, psychological and social aspects of behaviour and this seems easily misunderstood and misappropriated by teachers, often with undesirable results for their pedagogy.

Teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour

There is little consensus on exactly what challenging behaviour is, why it might be troubling and where it comes from in the literature on behaviour management. The teacher however is implicated in the detection, diagnosis and treatment of challenging and disorderly behaviours. It is interesting to note, then, that critical analysis of educators' (and more specifically, preservice teachers') knowledge of and attitudes towards disorderly behaviour accounts for only a small portion of literature on the subject.

There are potentially many ways to understand the behaviours that teachers find challenging. 'Challenging behaviour' has been used to describe all manner of behaviour: from a specific description of a triad of aggressive, self-injurious and/or destructive behaviours presented by individuals with a disability (Emerson et al. 1997); to a catchall description for behaviour, from any child, that individual teachers might warrant 'challenging'. Examples of this 'catchall' usage are commonly found in teacher education textbooks that variously posit challenging behaviour as: synonymous with 'problem' and/or 'inappropriate' behaviour and characteristic of general classroom management concerns (e.g. Allen & Cowdery 2009; Lovat et al. 2009); synonymous with 'severe and/or frequent inappropriate or problem behaviours' (e.g. Allen & Cowdery 2009; Conway 2005; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007; Sleishman 2005); and a barrier to student safety, engagement and learning (e.g. Allen & Cowdery 2009; Groundwater-Smith et al. 2007; Sigafos & Arthur 2005).

It is the subjective and subtly changeable nature of these 'catchall' and 'commonsense' usages that underscores our investigation. As Qureshi (1992, p. 23) explains, "On an every day basis the term challenging behaviour is socially defined. Different people, or groups of people, will have different ideas about what is meant by challenging". Indeed teachers may adopt 'any of many' socially and discursively defined recognitions, 'labellings' and understandings of challenging behaviour. The impact of such variations on students' educational experiences is keenly noted in the literature (e.g. Harwood 2006; Humphry 2013; Laws 1999; MacLure et al. 2012; McMahan 2012; Millei 2005).

Studies of teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour typically focus on in-service teachers' perceptions of what is challenging (e.g. Axup & Gersh 2008; Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp 2007; Carter, Clayton & Stephenson 2006; Ford 2007; Grieve 2009) and causal attributions for challenging behaviour (e.g. Mavropoulou & Padelidu 2002; Miller 1995; Poulou & Norwich 2000). By 'causal attribution' we are referring to studies drawing on a particular tenet from the discipline of psychology:

Attributions are inferences about the causes of events and behaviour. Individuals make attributions to understand their social world. Attributions can be classified as internal or external. Internal attributions ascribe behaviour to personal dispositions and traits, whereas external attributions locate the cause of behaviour in the environment (Weiten 2001, p. 664).

As it is maintained in a diverse (and sometimes contradictory) literature, how a teacher understands behaviour will impact on how s/he responds to challenging and disorderly behaviour in a classroom setting (Ford 2007; Grieve 2009; Harwood & McMahan 2014; Hughes & Cooper 2007; Kos, Richdale & Hay 2006; Mavropoulou & Padelidu 2002; Quinn & Wigal 2004). Moreover, different

teacher-responses may result in varied educational and diagnostic experiences for children described as presenting with challenging or 'disorderly' behaviours (e.g., Alban-Metcalf, Cheng-Lai & Ma 2002; Kauffman & Wong 1991, Jordan et al. 1993, Podell & Soodak, 1993, all cited in Mavropoulou & Padelidu 2002; Miller 1995; Poulou & Norwich 2000). These arguments signal the importance of critically analysing how causal attribution impacts preservice teacher knowledge, especially within the context of an increasing rate of behaviour disorder diagnoses (Harwood 2006). It is necessary to investigate from what sources and by what means teachers create their knowledge of challenging behaviour and how this, in turn, may impact on their teaching practices.

About the study

This was an in-depth, qualitative study of how five final-year preservice primary teachers re-constructed their knowledge of challenging behaviour before, during and after their final Professional Experience (PEX). PEX is an appropriate context for studying preservice teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour as it is commonly held that 'behaviour management' is best learned 'within the framework of professional experience' (Ramsey 2000, p. 81), yet little seems to be known about how such knowledge construction takes place. Each of the five preservice teachers engaged pre- and post-PEX concept mapping and related hour-long interviews, weekly day-long observations of their four-week PEX and participation in a post-PEX focus group (with all the preservice teacher participants). The preservice teachers also provided copies of their PEX teaching programs, assignments and reports for document review. As part of understanding the participants' knowledge of challenging behaviour there was a need to understand the types of knowledges of challenging behaviour that they could access to construct their own understandings. To this end, there was extensive document review (described in the next sub-section) and interview and observation data was collected from the supervising (mentor) teachers in an attempt to discover how the mentor teacher and preservice teacher's knowledges related to and impacted on each other, during PEX.

Because behaviour may be understood from several mutually exclusive perspectives, it was necessary to adopt an approach capable of supporting multiple understandings of a given concept. Therefore, the study drew on a critical, post-structural framework, specifically Michel Foucault's theories of knowledge. Working within the post-structural paradigm accommodated the possibility of questioning 'the idea of transparent or universal truth' (Ropers-Huilman 1999, p. 23), thus allowing the development of multiple understandings through the analysis. This approach is appropriate as Laws (1999) points to the utility of a poststructural approach in opening up different possibilities for considering and responding to disorderly behaviour in school contexts.

Positing three discourses of challenging behaviour

Our intent is to deploy a Foucauldian conception of knowledge as at once archived and 'dynamic' (Rouse 2003). This framework concurrently considers both an archive of knowledge that exists at the discursive level and 'goes on without us [humans]' (Kendall & Wickham 1999, p. 36), and how individuals

may position themselves in relation to this archive. This positioning work of individuals is relational, dynamic and often in a state of flux. It is evidenced in an individual's talk and texts insofar as each of their statements can be identified as belonging to one particular discourse or another. So, in order to map participants' positioning movements and subsequent changes in their knowledge and subject position(s), the critical reference point of 'the archive' must, at least metaphorically, be static. Thus, our initial task was to construct an archive. This was achieved by positing three discourses of challenging behaviour.

We have given detailed descriptions of our method for positing three discourse of challenging behaviour elsewhere (Harwood & McMahon 2014; McMahon 2013). This method included the review of hundreds of documents regarding challenging behaviour. These documents included literature, Australian print media, the compulsory and recommended readings of an undergraduate initial teacher training program, educational websites, including the NSW DEC, NSW Institute of Teachers, NSW Government, and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Participating schools' welfare and discipline policies, university professional experience documentation and participants' written assignment work were also reviewed. To this extensive textual dataset, we applied Foucault's (1972) 'rules of discursive formation' to discern discursive regularities in an archive that transcended traditional disciplinary boundaries. From this analysis we posited the existence of three distinct and mutually exclusive discourses of challenging behaviour: the biomedical, biopsychosocial and ecosocio discourses presented in Table 1. Whilst it is the biopsychosocial discourse that is the focus of this chapter, it is necessary to briefly describe each discourse and its function for pedagogy.

Insert Table 1. somewhere here.

The speakers' causal attribution of the 'challenge' they perceive from the child is critical to demarcating the three discourses of challenging behaviour posited in this chapter. Firstly, the challenge could be construed as one that was innately part of the child's biology and so the child was not responsible for behaving in challenging ways, this is the 'in-actively challenging child'. Secondly, the challenge could be seen as constructed by the child to willfully serve his or her own purposes, including to fulfill a psychological function, to gain or resist power, or otherwise – this is the 'pro-actively challenging child'. Finally, the challenge could be seen as mostly reactive to environmental and structural 'supports' or lack thereof surrounding the child – this is the 're-actively challenging child'. Table 1. summarizes the first point of differentiation between the three posited discourses, that is, each speaks of a different discourse object, a child that is challenging in a specific way.

These three, unique discourse objects transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, *both the psy sciences and education disciplines variously deploy all three discourses of challenging behavior (see Table 1. 'educational literature' row)*. Specific areas of interest in education and psychology consistently map against

each of these discourses. This mapping gives rise to 'fields of regularity' (Foucault 1972) that make possible certain 'teacher' subject positions associated with each discourse. First, teachers who speak of the 'in-actively challenging child' position themselves as 'non-expert' regarding children with challenging behaviour. Their sense of non-expertise stems from the knowledge of the challenge as biologically innate and so irreparable by means of teaching. The uptake of this discourse is typically discernable in teachers' talk when they express helplessness and/or compassion for the child's condition (for example, "he's got ADHD, he can't help it"). Second, teachers who speak of the 'pro-actively challenging child' position themselves along a continuum of management expertise, taking up different subject positions of 'teacher as manager'. These teachers consider whether they have the 'behaviour management' knowledge and experience to successfully carry out functional behaviour assessments, identify reinforcers, design and employ token economies, promote positive feedback, discriminate appropriate use of extinction strategies, know the appropriate set of pedagogies to respond to behaviours inherent in certain medical and psychological diagnoses. This focus on 'managing challenging behaviours' features in the standards governing teacher accreditation in Australia (AITSL 2014). Finally, the teachers who speak of the 're-actively challenging child' position themselves along a continuum of possible subject positions as 'teacher as supporter'. These teachers prioritise evaluating whether their decisions as teachers ensure that children's positive behaviour is supported. They do this by primarily by evaluating whether the physical environment, classroom routine, relationships, lesson design, timing, pacing, content and resources are supportive, if lessons are engaging for individuals, if teachers are culturally sensitive to their students' lives. They constantly reflect on curriculum and pedagogy.

Each of these discourses offers unique and consistent understandings of pedagogical possibilities for responding to challenging behaviour. So, why are pre-service teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour characterized by contradictions and confusions? In order to answer this dilemma, we sketch-out different discourses of challenging behaviour used by participants and map those against each of these three posited discourses highlighting instances of inconsistencies and confusions.

The biopsychosocial discourse and preservice teachers

Arguably, the biopsychosocial discourse for understanding challenging behaviour functions as an ideal quasi-partnership of medicine and psychology. The point of conceptual overlap in this quasi-partnership is essentially a biological one. The biomedical discourse asserts that the problem is biological and this premise accepted in the biopsychosocial discourse. This biological point of agreement however, is also a point of schism. Critiquing the medicine/psychology conceptual overlap, Graham (2006) illustrates how the discipline of psychology deploys a unique 'theorisation of agency, reason and control with an effect towards perceptions of responsibility and culpability' (Graham 2006, p. 12) that divides the biomedical and biopsychosocial

discourses. For example, the biomedical discourse holds that behaviour is symptomatic of biological dys/function and it follows that a person, or their environment, is not to be blamed or held entirely responsible for their behaviour. By contrast, on the topic of responsibility, the biopsychosocial discourse utilizes the psychological concept of ‘faculty’ to position the individual as capable of learning self-control (Graham 2006). Thus, unlike the biomedical perspective, the biopsychosocial perspective holds that learning from teachers, peers, home-life and psychotherapy can positively impact on dys/functional behaviours. So then, the central defining tenet of the biopsychosocial discourse of challenging behaviour (as identified here) rests on the distinctly psychological maxim that, although biology is a factor, ultimately, behaviour can be learned.

Considering the pervasiveness of biopsychosocial discourse in contemporary educational contexts (McMahon 2012, 2013; Harwood & McMahon 2014), it is perhaps unsurprising to note that in the pre-PEx concept maps and interview texts, all participants drew on the biopsychosocial discourse to construct the bulk of their knowledge of challenging behaviour. Their uptake of biopsychosocial discourse was overwhelming, but rarely total.

Working within the biopsychosocial discourse

Each of the three posited discourses in and of themselves offers epistemic rest¹ via their internal consistency. This is because each set of discursive limits sets out an internally consistent continuum of possible teacher subject positions and related pedagogical responses (see Table 1). Epistemic rest becomes possible when the knowledge of the preservice teacher is discursively consistent and/or mirrored the discursive positioning of the knowledge base encountered (e.g. university studies, or mentor teachers’ knowledge). The only participant for whom this seemed the case, was Ella.

Ella’s knowledge was consistently biopsychosocial. In the pre-PEx empirical material (concept maps, interviews, written university assignment work) there were no discernable contradictions. Ella’s uninterrupted uptake of the biopsychosocial discourse was especially noticeable because she was the only preservice teacher who consistently aligned her knowledge with the biopsychosocial maxim that behaviour can be managed and learned, regardless of biological disorder. Moreover, she consistently demonstrated the uptake of the biopsychosocial subject position of ‘teacher as manager’:

E: I think they’re all behaviours that can be managed. So I think, um, a challenging behaviour can be managed and so can um, a behaviour disorder diagnosis ... oh, I think the disorder one managed by the teacher ... You know, so I think a kid, all behaviours can be managed [pause] in some way and I think by the teacher in regards to, the disorder.

¹ ‘Epistemic rest’ is a term we’ve used to describe the opposite of ‘epistemic dissonance’. It is not, in any way, intended to frame the knower as lazy or unmotivated.

...

S: So, like, do you then think, um, if behaviour can be managed, if a kid has a behaviour disorder, do you think they can manage themselves, do you think they're capable of doing that?

E: To an extent, yeah, everyone can. ... I think they just need to know how to, as well. ... Not in all cases though. That's hard, that question's hard. Not, not in every case can a [pause] behaviour be managed, by both, external and internal influences [pause]. ... I don't know, I don't like that question. ... It's a contradictory question, yes and no.

(Ella, pre-PEx interview)

Ella's consistent deployment of the biopsychosocial premise that behaviour can be learned is in stark contrast to the other participants, who all expressed uncertainty, as to exactly 'how much' a child diagnosed with a behaviour disorder is able to personally control and/or learn behaviour, and so be managed (see an example in the following section). Ella's confusion, evident in the above excerpt, does not seem to lie in whether or not all behaviour can be managed, or controlled, but instead on whether the locus of that control is 'external' and/or 'internal'. Interestingly, she believes that the teacher can manage the child with a behaviour disorder but only 'to an extent' can the child learn to manage his/herself. What is interesting is that although her account of biology's relationship to behaviour takes a singular discursive position, her questioning of the obvious assumptions inherent in that discourse, namely the medicine/psychology overlap, leads to some uncertainty.

At the beginning and end of her final Professional Experience Ella's knowledge remained solely biopsychosocial sustaining pedagogical decisions during PEx consistent with this discourse. For example, she did not report (or appeared to experience) any great difficulties or epistemic tensions. Working entirely within the biopsychosocial discourse was, for Ella, supportive of pedagogical decision making. That Ella experienced epistemic rest via discursive consistency did not inhibit her learning during PEx. During her PEx Ella was observed to encounter new experiences of students' challenging behaviour and developed new management strategies for responding to this. This learning occurred in a discursive context that built seamlessly on her existing and consistently biopsychosocial knowledge and pedagogical performance of 'teacher as manager'. In this sense, although no pedagogical quandaries resultant from epistemic tension were encountered, drawing entirely from one discourse delimited learning from the pedagogical possibilities afforded by other discourses, especially the ecosocio discourse.

The problem of traversing discursive boundaries

Unlike Ella, the other participants experienced epistemic dissonance unsupportive of their pedagogic decision-making. The following example shows the epistemic and pedagogical tensions experienced by Monique when she oscillated between two, mutually exclusive discourses to understand the challenging behaviours she encountered during her final professional experience. In Monique's case, her attention to biology present in the biosychosocial discourse was erroneously conflated with (and we would say 'squished' against) tenets of the biomedical discourse.

During her PEx, Monique sustained an overarching positioning of her knowledge as biosychosocial. She consistently used the subject position of 'teacher as manager' as her point of reference and reflection. However, Monique seemed to struggle to reconcile with her pre-PEx biosychosocial understanding what she saw and heard on PEx. Much of this struggle centred on the possibility of 'biological, psychological and social factors' at once impacting behaviour. Monique experienced epistemic dissonances during PEx that led her posing a new, epistemologically and pedagogically significant question. This subsection examines the conditions that led her to such questioning. First, the dissonance generated by what Monique saw on PEx will be described, then the epistemic move outlining the posing of the question follows.

Post-PEx, Monique talked of 'seeing' the behaviour of children in her class who had behaviour disorder diagnoses and how that challenged her knowledge:

I had a lot of emphasis on social [understandings of behaviour in the pre-PEx concept map] influences on behaviour. But then, after prac, *after seeing the boys who couldn't help themselves*, couldn't sit still, no matter what they did ... biology has so much more of an impact than I've ever given it credit for.

(Monique, focus group, original emphasis)

Like talking to Katherine [mentor teacher], she would explain that 'yes, this [inattentive behaviour] is intrinsically part of him. This is what will happen'. But then *also seeing it for myself, seeing [Daniel], that he just couldn't concentrate* ... It was kind of a bit of a 'moment' for me ... I was like 'okay, I see it now' whereas it was something I hadn't really experienced before. Um [pause] and just kind of like although all these [reward/discipline] systems were in place that I've seen [elsewhere] that have worked ... but even with them in place, these children still didn't [pause] respond ... like every other child that I've seen, or the other kids in the class.

(Monique, post-PEx interview, emphasis added)

I guess in past weeks, I'm like, 'Daniel, you're doing the wrong thing. Why?' ... Then this last week, when he didn't have his medication, I could just see him. Yeah, 'pay attention!' then just the change in his face, I'm like [pause] it

kind of took that moment for me to realise, 'you can't help what you're doing, [trails off]

(Monique, post-PEX interview)

In these recounts of what she *saw* of challenging behaviour on PEX, Monique moves from biopsychosocial preoccupations of reasoning and self control ('why?'), to biomedical understandings that the child 'can't help' their behaviour. These biomedical understandings were at odds with the almost solely biopsychosocial knowledge presented to Monique in her university studies (and previous PEX).

In her new insights, Monique was inadvertently oscillating between discourses. Oscillating between discourses is different to psychological notions of eclecticism that support drawing from many theories or methods to provide the best understanding for a problem or solution. Eclecticism infers intent on the individual to understand multiple theories or resources and conceptually synthesise these for improved outcomes. Whilst we contend that there is potential benefit for teachers to take an intentionally discursively eclectic approach to understanding challenging behaviour (particularly considering the relationships between the biopsychosocial and ecosocio discourses), inadvertently oscillating between discourses results in confusions and conundrums. As McMahon (2013) demonstrated, oscillating between discourses is an epistemological act. It is made possible, we argue, due to an inability to identify the boundaries of the three distinct discourses of challenging behaviour and their related pedagogical affordances. A key reason why these discursive boundaries are difficult for preservice teachers to identify is that only one discourse dominate their formal teaching knowledge resources, the biopsychosocial discourse (McMahon 2013). However, the biopsychosocial discourse on its own is insufficient in disrupting, challenging or expanding preservice teachers' existing and apprenticeship-acquired knowledge. Instead, it functions as a malleable theoretic middle ground that the preservice teachers can manipulate via an epistemic process, such as oscillating between discourses in order to sustain their apprenticed knowledge. This kind of epistemic dissonance was expressed by Monique and manifested with the generation of a new question.

Through, I guess, I don't know, the theory that we've learned at uni, it's like 'okay, yeah, that's what makes most sense to me' ... but being in the practical field, so much of that doesn't fit.

(Monique, focus group)

I guess what I had understood [from university studies] is that, okay here's the biological but you can influence it and control it by giving these [psychological and] social things. Whereas, and so I'm like, 'okay, yeah, that's fine but it doesn't necessarily work'. And yeah, and that's what I found conflicting is [pause] Where is it [the behaviour]? *Which one's showing* [biological, psychological or social]?

(Monique, post-PEx interview,
emphasis added)

We suggest that this is an excellent example of how the university's almost singular presentation of the biopsychosocial discourse provided a covert springboard for concurrently considering other, mutually exclusive discourses of behaviour. The biopsychosocial assertion of 'three at once' (biological and psychological and social factors) became a different question for Monique: 'which one of three?'

Monique's recount of the dominantly biopsychosocial university knowledge presented a coherent set of possible pedagogical responses and subject position of 'teacher as manager'. By asserting understandings of behaviour as 'three at once', behaviour was framed as ever and always a combination of biological, psychological and social factors. Or, as Monique put it, 'there's the biological but you can influence it and control it by giving these social things'. But the epistemic dissonance encountered on PEx caused her to re-frame this knowledge with a new question 'which of three': 'Which [behaviour] is showing?' (Monique, post-PEx interview), is it biology, psychology or social? Without clear understanding of the discursive boundaries between biopsychosocial, biomedical and ecosocio discourses of behaviour (and their implications for pedagogy), this new and powerful question allowed scope to oscillate freely between contradictory knowledges. When knowing 'all three', the pedagogical responses and subject positions afforded by the biopsychosocial discourse are clear. When asking the question, 'which of three?' quandaries arose regarding choice between the conflicting pedagogical responses afforded by each discourse. This 'squishing' epistemic move, this posing of a new question and subsequent covert oscillating practices, resulted in pedagogical quandaries for Monique when teaching 'children with challenging behaviours' during her final PEx.

Pedagogical quandaries

One pedagogical quandary Monique encountered during PEx was whether or not to punish a child for challenging behaviour:

One of the biggest things he [Daniel, diagnosed ADHD / ODD / IM] got in trouble for, and was in Reflection [detention with a focus on explicit teaching of behaviour], for most days, was his swearing and his language. Which, he learnt from his ... Dad in particular, um, [pause] particularly the use of like, the 'F' word ... And he'd been told that it's not appropriate language, so he knew, that at school it wasn't appropriate language ... So, that was a difficult thing 'cause like Katherine's like, 'I know he can't help it ... he doesn't know', like we couldn't tell if he just didn't know [because of his disorders] that it was inappropriate, or if he knew but just kept using it because [pause] he wanted to.

(Monique, post-PEx interview)

Here tensions appear between knowledge that behaviour is learned (via assertions of learning swearing from parents and teachers' efforts to educate Daniel that 'it's not appropriate') and that 'he can't help it ... he doesn't know'. Or, tensions between biopsychosocial and biomedical understandings, respectively. What is important is that these tensions manifest in a real pedagogical quandary regarding whether or not to punish Daniel based on the problematic question 'which of three?', indicated by the 'if/or' language deployed.

Another of the pedagogical quandaries facing Monique on PEx was whether or not to expect children with behavioural disorders to do their schoolwork. For example,

... particularly Justin, when he would just, he wouldn't do the work. I'm like well, 'is this something that is socially learnt?' like, [pause] like the, this was what Katherine was saying, 'he's not doing his work'. But, I couldn't tell if that was just because it was, he didn't want to because he had ODD and was just saying he didn't want to or if that was because he'd, Katherine said he was getting scared of like, failure because you know he's not as bright as the other kids - he knows that and he didn't like getting things wrong, so is that something that is biological and it's hard to tell, I'm like 'well?!?'.

(Monique, post-PEx interview)

The confusion around whether Justin's resistance to seatwork was either a 'socially learned' fear of failure or 'because he had ODD' became an issue of exasperation: 'well?!?'. The exasperation rested, it seems, on indecision about whether it was reasonable to demand compliance from a child who had a disorder that rendered him innately 'oppositional' and 'defiant', whereas 'avoidance issues' may be ameliorated by all manner of pedagogy. Likewise, she recounts the quandary of whether or not to expect a child with ADHD and ODD diagnoses to participate and/or achieve in scheduled learning experiences:

When he wasn't paying attention ... he would go over and play with the dollhouse ... when he did that, I was conflicted by that. I'm like, well, do I make him come and sit back down because he's not paying attention, he's not learning [pause] But yeah, I don't know whether to push it and try and make him sit down or if I should just let it go. And on the other hand, Katherine has been saying a lot of the behaviours you just need to ignore them. And I'm like, well, is this one I ignore or is this one I get on ... Which one's this one?

(Monique, post-PEx interview)

In the focus group, Monique expanded on this quandary by expounding concerns and fears regarding how the behaviour of a child diagnosed with ODD might affect the rest of the class by interrupting their learning:

Like, I'm stopping the learning, I'm stopping the flow of the lesson to talk to him and then I know if I tell him to come and sit back down, he's most likely to say no ... and he's probably going to start throwing chairs, and he's probably going to start screaming and squealing ... and so I'm like, I'll just let him do it. But then, I'm like, he's not learning now. So that was a bit of a conflict that one.

(Monique, focus group)

Here, Monique took on biomedical understandings and resolved a pedagogical quandary by relieving expectations of students with known behaviour disorders to engage and learn, because they '[can't] help themselves' (Monique, focus group). But, within a single teaching session, Monique would both 'ignore' children she assessed as displaying innately dysfunctional behaviours, and inform them that they could do their work 'now or recess, that's your choice' (field notes, 15 November 2010). This demonstrates the possibility of different outcomes to the same quandary based on oscillations between discourses. When she 'saw' the biology of the 'in-actively challenging child' she relieved the child from all requirements to engage with learning experiences. Concurrently, when she 'saw' that same child as 'pro-actively challenging' she offered a compliance/consequence ultimatum.

Dangerous answers - 'its biological when social doesn't work'

What is concerning is that despite inherent contradictions and being unsupportive of pedagogical decision-making, Monique's new 'squished' question offered its own and indisputable solutions. In discerning 'which of the three' is showing, Monique now 'knows' that the biological is the 'base-line' (Monique, focus group) and the social is either going to change it, or not. The new idea developed during PEx that sometimes 'nothing works' (Monique, focus group) assists in answering her self-devised question 'which is it [biology, psychology or social factors], which one's showing?':

When you've tried, when you've implemented everything that you know: you've tried the social, you've tried the motivation and nothing seems to be working. I think, well okay, there's something maybe more [going on] than what I can do [because the behaviour is biological].

(Monique, focus group)

Deeming behaviour biological and therefore existing beyond teacher intervention or assistance, we would argue, is a precarious position for a pedagogue and her students. It is a dangerous 'answer' to the question 'which of three' insofar as it permits the teacher to non-reflexively oscillate to a 'teacher as non-expert' subject position at their own discretion. Children, under this reasoning, could be deemed 'unable to help their behaviour' and 'beyond help' purely because their teacher felt they had exhausted their 'teacher as supporter'

or 'teacher as manager', thus expert understandings. This should be troubled and questioned by teacher educators.

Conclusion

As we have outlined, the key problem in preservice teacher knowledge of challenging behaviour is not the dominant application of biopsychosocial discourse itself. The biopsychosocial discourse has very clear discursive limits set by very clear axioms, and is characterised by internally consistent continuums of possible teacher subject positions and pedagogies. The problem is when the biopsychosocial discourse seemingly stands alone - as it does, for example, in university coursework and school policy documents (Harwood & McMahan 2014; McMahan 2013). In these contexts preservice teachers potentially misconstrue its discursive limits erroneously believing its accommodation of challenging behaviour as at once biological, psychological and social, as 'limitless'. For this reason, we make the argument that the biopsychosocial discourse is a *dangerous theoretic middle ground* for teaching and teacher education. This place is dangerous insofar as it gives one the false sense of knowledgeability; one that leaves teachers ill-equipped to respond to the children they meet in classrooms.

The notion of constructing and re-constructing a personal knowledge base very much involves the individual in perpetual and dynamic relationship with knowledge, but with which knowledge and from where does the knowledge come? Drawing on Foucault's theory of 'knowledge as archived', as something that circulates (at least in part) at the level of discourse, produced new possibilities for understanding preservice teachers' knowledge of challenging behaviour. As our analysis demonstrated, the posited discourses of challenging behaviour in the archive were the knowledges that the preservice teachers variously and dynamically accessed to re-construct their knowledge of challenging behaviour during their final PEx. With the three posited discourses setting discernable limits of the sayable and repeatable about children with challenging behaviour, it became possible to set aside definitional debates and instead, discursively 'map' participants' statements and so knowledge and knowledge-change. Such mapping allowed us to identify which discourse/s the preservice teachers adopted, rejected and negotiated and to note the effects of this on their knowledge, pedagogy and teacher subjectivities.

As we have shown, the preservice teachers in this study seemed unable to see the limits of the biopsychosocial discourse because they couldn't easily compare it to its discursive counterparts, the biomedical and ecosocio discourses. These discursive counterparts were rarely represented in the teacher preparation coursework and educational policy and teaching standards. 'Limitless discourse' is an impossible and juxtapositional notion that is unhelpful to knowledge re-construction. The biopsychosocial discourse (seductive though it may be for preservice teachers with no clearly defined alternative theoretical resources at their disposal) can't accommodate knowledge beyond its own discursive limits. Paradoxically, whilst a 'limitless' biopsychosocial discourse is a notion unhelpful to knowledge re-construction, via its role in enabling epistemic oscillations

between discourses, it renders inaccurate and dangerous knowledge re-construction entirely possible.

What is important here, and is indeed dangerous, is that the reasons for their confusions and the contradictory knowledges they have deployed did not seem 'obvious' to the participants. This can manifest, as we have described, in a preservice teacher demonstrating both undetected and explicit 'confusions' about how different bodies of knowledge is being used about 'challenging behaviour'. Such confusions and their consequences seen in pedagogies applied and questions raised indicate that there is a strong need for preservice teachers to critically analyse the very 'knowledges' they draw on and which rest, often unquestioned, at the centre of education and teaching. There have been strong connections made between students' epistemological beliefs and learning and ensuing calls for students' epistemological beliefs to be 'brought out into the open' (Schommer 1994, p. 315) and for 'ways of knowing' to be explicitly taught in teacher education (Lyons, 1990). We join this call for explicit teaching about 'knowing' in teacher education programs. As a way forward, we call for teacher educators to reflect on their own discursive positioning on the matter of challenging behaviour and make this transparent to their pre-service teachers. We also suggest that teacher educators make a concerted effort to present and clearly demarcate different discourses of challenging behaviour in teacher preparation coursework and their respective implications for pedagogy.

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Table 1.

