

## DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT: TURKISH PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PRACTICES

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### ABSTRACT

Behaviour management is vital to the establishment and maintenance of a positive classroom environment and to children's development of self-control. In the classroom-management literature, there have been numerous studies of sub-topics such as rules, classroom-management strategies, and reward-and-punishment systems. This study looked at the actual practices of Turkish preschool teachers related to developmentally appropriate behaviour management, considered as a dimension of classroom management. Twenty teachers working in public schools were observed for 10 hours each on various days of the week, guided by the Developmentally Appropriate Classroom Management Observation Form (Şahin, 2013). Many of these teachers' developmentally inappropriate practices were related to rules: e.g., establishing too many, not presenting them in the classroom, and not creating opportunities to discuss them. Developmentally appropriate practices mostly related to empowering children, focusing on positive behaviour and showing consistent reactions to children's behaviour. However, teachers usually exhibited developmentally inappropriate practices when it came to coaching children to solve their conflicts and exemplifying pro-social behaviours.

**Keywords:** developmentally appropriate practice, classroom management, behaviour management, actual practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is an important skill that all teachers should have, but its effectiveness does not depend on their teaching skills (Kamarulzaman & Zhi Siew, 2015). Nonetheless, it is taken to mean more than keeping children on-task and reducing disruptive behaviour (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). If effective as a classroom manager, a teacher will arrange the physical environment in a manner that supports the children's whole range of developmental skills (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006); establish and maintain good relationships with the children (Weinstein & Mignano, Jr., 2007); plan and conduct appropriate instructional activities (Martin & Sass, 2010); and manage children's behaviours effectively (Martin & Sass, 2010; Weinstein & Novodvorsky, 2011; Weinstein, Romano & Mignano Jr., 2011).

Managing these dimensions effectively is not easy, especially in preschool classrooms where children's attention is easily deflected, e.g., by conversations with their peers (Thompson, 2011; as cited in Kamarulzaman & Zhi Siew, 2015), walking around, and physical contact with other children that sometimes includes hitting or kicking them (Martinez, n.d.).

Though all dimensions of classroom management play roles in mitigating misbehaviour, the present study focuses on the dimension of behaviour management in particular. Because behaviour management comprises teachers' strategies for responding to classroom misbehaviour and planning interventions to prevent it, the term has been used interchangeably with classroom management for many years (Hardin, 2004; Martin & Sass, 2010). There is now a considerable body of research

related to various aspects of behaviour management: for instance, Kim and Stormont (2012) explored 34 Korean teachers' behaviour-management strategies and found that they used punishment and reprimand much more than praise, and that their developmentally appropriate beliefs were not consistent with their actual practices. Dobbs-Oates, Kaderavek, Guo and Justice (2011) investigated the relationship among preschool teachers' behaviour management, children's task orientation, and children's emergent language and literacy development, and found that task orientation and behaviour management were predictors of children's emergent literacy development. Tillery, Varjas, Meyers and Collins (2010) interviewed seven kindergarten and 13 first-grade teachers in the U.S. about their perspectives and approaches related to behaviour-management strategies, and found that such strategies were generally focused on individual students' behaviour rather than group behaviour. The same teachers thought that they influenced children's behavioural development strongly through positive intervention strategies. Hännikäinen (2005) studied the use, application and adoption of rules in a preschool context that included 29 five- to six-year-old children, three teachers and a day-care nurse. It was found that, though the teachers and children mutually agreed a set of rules and signed a contract concerning them at the beginning of the year, the teachers' prior knowledge about rules and the appropriate conditions in which to formulate them cannot be ignored.

In the Turkish context, Akgün, Yazar and Dinçer (2011) observed the classroom- management strategies of six preschool teachers, and reported that they generally preferred negative strategies such as ordering or threatening. Akar, Tantekin-Erden, Tor and Şahin (2010) investigated Turkish public preschool teachers' management practices and experiences, and found that their participants thought of themselves as the authority in the classroom, despite some having emphasised that they established classroom rules jointly with the children. Uysal, Akbaba-Altun and Akgün's (2010) investigation of which strategies preschool teachers used in response to classroom misbehaviours found that these were usually teacher-centred.

Classroom management in general and behaviour management in particular have recently been re-focused on promoting children's learning and development. It is now held that children should control their behaviour as well as being active in all processes of school learning (Winsler & Carlton, 2003), while preschool teachers should use effective methods against misbehaviour and focus on children's acceptable behaviour (Pianta et al., 2005). In another words, teachers are now expected to follow developmentally appropriate behaviour-management strategies. The five key practices delineated by Şahin (2013, p. 21) included (1) explaining which behaviours are unacceptable, (2) giving children choices and responsibilities, (3) coaching children on how to resolve their conflicts, (4) focusing on positive rather than negative behaviours, and (5) exhibiting consistent reactions to children's behaviours.

However, few studies have examined how DAP and behaviour-management strategies work together. One, by Şahin-Sak, Tantekin-Erden and Sharolyn-Durodola (2016), assessed the developmental appropriateness of four Turkish preschool teachers' beliefs and practices related to organising the physical environment of the classroom and the planning/programming of activities. They found that the teachers' beliefs were closer to DAP than their self-reported and actual practices were, and that their practices were primarily affected by the physical characteristics of their schools and the children's characteristics. However, no detailed study has yet been conducted of preschool teachers' developmentally appropriate behaviour-management strategies. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap in the literature.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this qualitative study, data collection took place through observations.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 20 female preschool teachers. All but one had graduated from early childhood education departments, and the other from a child development department. Their

teaching experience ranged from one to 12 years, and their ages from 23 to 35. Twelve of the participants had taken a classroom-management course during their undergraduate education; one had attended a seminar related to classroom management; and one had done both. The other six teachers had no formal classroom-management training.

### Data Collection Instrument

The Developmentally Appropriate Classroom Management Observation Form was used to collect data in this study. It was developed by Şahin (2013) to observe preschool teachers' classroom-management practices and to determine these practices' developmentally appropriateness and inappropriateness. It focuses on four dimensions of classroom management; (1) the physical environment, (2) planning and programming activities, (3) relationships and communication, and (4) behaviour management. The behaviour-management dimension that is the focus of the present study has three sub-dimensions in the form: (a) rules, (b) discipline and (c) other strategies.

### Data Collection Procedure

Data collection took place during September, October, November and December 2015 in Van, Turkey. Initially, the researchers visited several schools and informed teachers and administrators of the aim of the study. Volunteers for participation signed consent forms, but none allowed video-recording. Two researchers acted as nonparticipant observers, i.e., did not manipulate or intervene to control the natural flows of the classroom or the practices of the teachers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Each teacher was observed for 10 hours in total at different times of day and different days of the week, according to a schedule agreed by the researchers and teachers. After an initial meeting, two researchers would appear in the classroom at the same time, but observe the teacher separately take separate field notes, and create their own labels, for data-confirmation purposes (Adami & Kiger, 2005). Both observers were experienced in qualitative data-collection methods, and had used The Developmentally Appropriate Classroom Management Observation Form before.

### Data Analysis

Each observer transferred their labels and observation notes to the computer at the end of each day. After all observations had been completed, they discussed their labels in light of the notes accompanying the observation form, other prior literature, and their field notes until they reached approximately 96% agreement about them. Then, they selected some quotes that clarified their observations.

## FINDINGS

The researchers' observations are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Observations Related To Behaviour Management

<b>Behaviour management</b>		<b>Not observed (n)</b>	<b>Observed sometimes (n)</b>	<b>Observed consistently (n)</b>
Rules	Clear, simple, consistent	1	11	8
	Including rationales	3	11	6
	Visibly present in the room	12	-	8
	Opportunities to discuss the rules	9	11	-
Discipline	Setting limits	3	9	8
	Empowering children	1	7	12

Behaviour management	Not observed (n)	Observed sometimes (n)	Observed consistently (n)
Coaching children to solve their conflicts	9	8	3
Focusing on positive behaviour	4	6	10
Exemplifying pro-social behaviors	9	8	3
Consistent reactions to children's behaviour	1	6	13
Other strategies	3	5	12

### Rules

Just over half of the teachers (n=11) were labelled as "observed sometimes" with regard to clear, simple and consistent rules, either because there were too many rules for four to 6-six year olds (a total of 13 in T<sub>11</sub>'s classroom, for instance), or because the rules were generally negative, e.g., "We do not damage our toys" (T<sub>2</sub>), "We do not talk without raising hand" (T<sub>3</sub>), and "We do not harm our friends" (T<sub>13</sub>). Clear, simple and consistent rules were observed in eight teachers' classrooms, while one teacher did not promulgate any rules.

More than half (n=12) of the observed classrooms had no written rules, but six classrooms, the teachers explained the rationale of the rules orally. For instance, in T<sub>10</sub>'s classroom, while one of the children was talking, another interrupted her and started to talk without raising his hand. The teacher said:

*"We have a rule; we will raise our hand before starting to talk and will not interrupt each other. Because, when all of us interrupt each other or talk at the same time, we can't understand each other."*

Lastly, none of the teachers were observed conducting group meetings with the children to set rules. More than half of the teachers (n=11) sometimes talked about the rules or added new rules when they encountered misbehaviours. For instance, when a child ran in her classroom, T<sub>12</sub> sat with the children on some cushions and asked if they remembered the rules. Then, she said that they shouldn't run in the classroom because they could hurt themselves. However, nine teachers never created opportunities to talk about the rules.

### Discipline

It was observed that while nine teachers set limits only sometimes, eight consistently explained their expectations clearly. The latter group's remarks in this sphere included:

*"I will never accept you hitting each other, and I will never listen to children talking if they don't raise their hands."*T<sub>2</sub>

*"You can never touch your friends without permission. It is unacceptable."*T<sub>3</sub>

In relation to empowering children, 60% of the participant teachers (n=12) consistently assigned responsibilities such as leading the queue to breakfast, handing out paper, crayons or worksheets to friends, or tidying the classroom, and also let them choose which learning centre they would use during free play time. Only one teacher did not empower children at all.

Eight of the teachers sometimes coached children. Usually, this consisted of helping children talk about their problems but not necessarily finding solutions to them. For instance, in T<sub>20</sub>'s classroom, two children were fighting during an art activity. She called them over to her and had them to explain their problem. Then, rather than asking how they would solve their problem or what they would do from then on, she merely said that they were friends and should continue their activities silently. At

this point, they apologised to each other. In nine preschool teachers' classrooms, however, the teachers were not observed asking children what their problems were. Instead, teachers resolved such conflicts. For instance, T<sub>19</sub> said that she would never accept children complaining about each other, and always urged children to apologise to each other, accompanied by hugs and kisses.

It was observed that half of the participants (n=10) consistently noted children's good behaviours and provided positive feedback about them. For instance, when most of the children in T<sub>13</sub>'s classroom were not listening to her while she read a story. T<sub>13</sub> said the names of children who *were* focusing on her and thanked them. Then, other children started to listen to her. Four of the teachers, however, never were observed doing anything of this kind.

The exemplification of pro-social behaviour was observed consistently in only three teachers' classrooms. For instance, T<sub>13</sub> read a story related to friendship, mutual respect and sharing. At the end of the story, she led a discussion about the friendship, and linked it to relations in the classroom. On another day, a cartoon about making mistake and apologising was shown in the same classroom, and discussed in a similar vein, but including comments about siblings and parents. However, nine teachers were never observed doing this.

Lastly, in two-thirds of the classrooms (n=13), the basic rules were enforced consistently; with teachers reacting in the same way regardless of which child had broken them.

### Other Strategies

It was observed that three-fifth of the teachers (n=12) used other strategies such as issuing warnings and (more usually) punishments and rewards. Another strategy consisted of solving the problems for the children. For instance, when children did not wait their turns, T<sub>2</sub> had them do the activity last. Also, there was a time-out chair in the corner of T<sub>4</sub>'s classroom, and when children repeated misbehaviour two or three times, she sent them to the chair. She also sometimes sent children who interrupted an activity to a neighbouring classroom. T<sub>6</sub>, meanwhile, said that she would give stickers to children who finished their activities silently, but at the end of the activity, she gave stickers to all children regardless of whether they had made noise.

## DISCUSSION

In a developmentally appropriate classroom, rules should be clearly understandable by the children and appropriate to their age and maturity; the phrasing of these rules also should be positive, and their numbers should be kept low: ideally, to a maximum of seven (NAEYC, 2014; Şahin, 2013). However, our participants mostly exhibited developmentally inappropriate practices, in that those who made rules at all usually 10 or more. A profusion of rules may be indicative of teachers' anxieties related to classroom management, i.e., reflect a perceived need to control children more. Most of the rules that our participants established were similar from one classroom to another, a finding parallel to Şahin's (2013).

Preschool teachers should explain the rationales behind rules to children, and also display the rules prominently in the classroom (Şahin, 2013). In our sample, only about half of the teachers discussed rationales for rules, and less than half displayed them in written form. Though it would be tempting to ascribe such lapses to simple lack of awareness that such actions are considered developmentally appropriate, such an explanation seems improbable, given that more than two-thirds of the sampled teachers had received formal classroom-management training.

In developmentally appropriate preschool classrooms, teachers should also use classroom meetings when setting rules, and convene periodic group discussions about the rules thereafter (Gestwicki, 2011; Şahin, 2013). However, in this study, no teachers were observed consistently providing children with such discussion opportunities. In other words, the teachers tended to be teacher-centred with regard to the establishment of rules, to a degree that can be deemed developmentally inappropriate.

As related to the sub-dimension of discipline, the teachers' practices appeared to be more developmentally appropriate, particularly when it came to the empowerment of children, focusing on positive behaviour, and showing consistent reactions to children's behaviour. However, the teachers' practices were usually developmentally inappropriate with respect to coaching children to resolve their conflicts and exemplifying pro-social behaviours. It can be surmised that preschool teachers may not be aware of the importance of giving children responsibility to resolve conflicts among themselves.

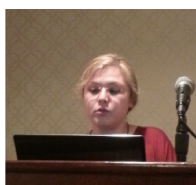
Lastly, more than half of the participant teachers used reward and/or punishment strategies (e.g., stickers and time-outs) to deal with misbehaviours in the classroom. The specific strategies we observed paralleled those reported by Şahin (2013), but differed from those noted by Akgün, Yazar and Dinçer (2011). Also, strategies used by teachers are usually appropriate for behaviourist approach (Ozmon & Craver, 2008).

In conclusion, the Turkish preschool teachers we observed exhibited a mixture of developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practices, i.e., mostly appropriate with regard to empowering children, focusing on their positive behaviour, and showing consistent reactions to their behaviour; but largely inappropriate with regard to the number, presentation and discussion of rules, the coaching of children to resolve their conflicts, and the exemplification of pro-social behaviours.

In the light of these findings, it seems clear that preschool teachers are either unaware of particular aspects of DAP, or consciously or unconsciously reject such aspects as being inappropriate to the realities of their work in the classroom. Therefore, it would seem prudent to provide teachers with additional seminars or in-service training on developmentally appropriate behaviour management. Future studies could arrange for the provision of developmentally appropriate behaviour-management training and compare teachers' practices before and after they receive it. It would also be worth comparing teachers' developmentally appropriate behaviour-management practices across different variables such as age, gender and educational level.

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