Newly Qualified Irish Primary School Teachers' Experiences and Understandings of Reinforcement and Punishment.

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Research Question:

"What are the experiences and understandings of Irish newly qualified primary school teachers in the area of punishment and reinforcement within the context of behaviour management?"
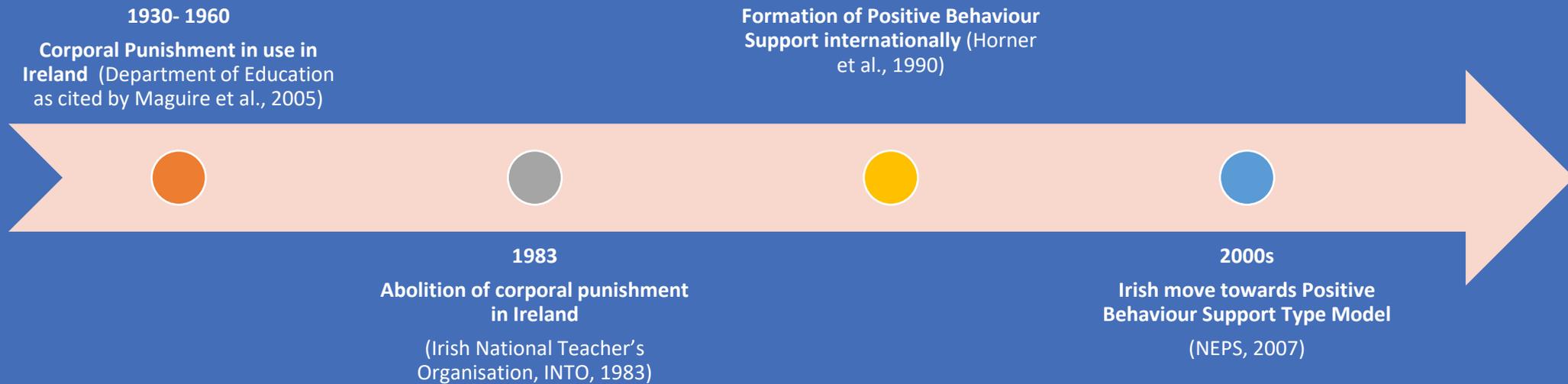
Behaviour in Irish Primary Schools

- 10-15 % of students will exhibit behaviours of concern during their school years (Collinshaw et al., 2004)

- Social, emotional and conduct issues within an Irish nine-year-old cohort have shown significant behavioural risk factors to be present (Nixon, 2012)

- Over one-fifth of Irish primary school students have reported being hurt through acts of physical aggression in school (Minton, 2010)
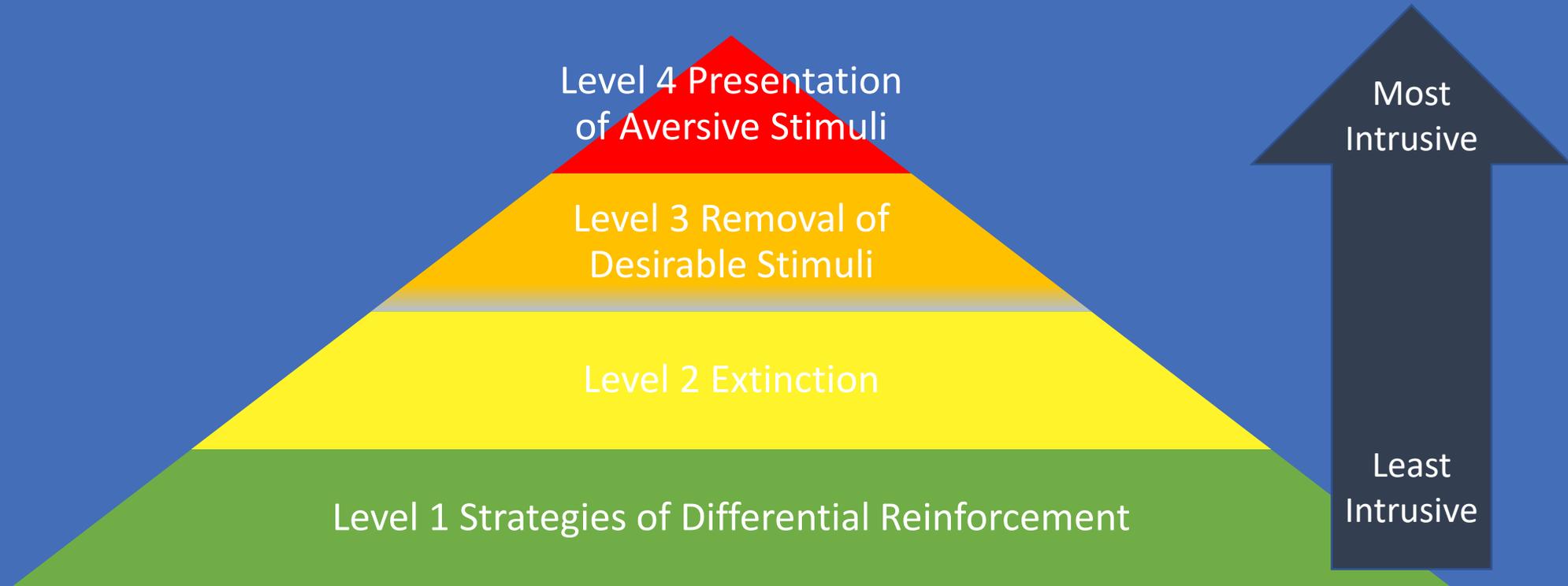
Definitions of Reinforcement and Punishment

Reinforcement:

- "the presentation of a certain kind of stimulus in a temporal relation with either a stimulus or a response. A reinforcing stimulus is defined such by its power to produce the resulting change [in behaviour]" (Skinner, 1938, p. 62).

- Punishment:

- Punishment is considered to be the removal of a positive reinforcer or the introduction of an aversive stimulus (Skinner, 1953)

Changing Behaviour Management Styles in Education

1930- 1960

Corporal Punishment in use in Ireland (Department of Education as cited by Maguire et al., 2005)

Formation of Positive Behaviour Support internationally (Horner et al., 1990)

1983

Abolition of corporal punishment in Ireland

(Irish National Teacher's Organisation, INTO, 1983)

2000s

Irish move towards Positive Behaviour Support Type Model

(NEPS, 2007)

Current Preferred Practices:
Hierarchy of Procedural Alternatives for Behaviour Reduction (Alberto & Troutman, 2016)

Level 4 Presentation of Aversive Stimuli

Level 3 Removal of Desirable Stimuli

Level 2 Extinction

Level 1 Strategies of Differential Reinforcement

Most Intrusive

Least Intrusive

Effects of Practices on Teacher and Student

- Student:

-academic underachievement

- disengagement from school

- difficulties in relationships with peers and teachers

(Evans et al., 2003; Graziano et al., 2007; Ladd, 1999).

- Teacher:

-stress

-burn out

-lower job satisfaction

-thoughts of leaving the profession (Darmody & Smith, 2011; Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Friedman 2006; Greene et al. 2002)

Behaviour Change and Teacher Preparedness

- Negative correlation between teacher confidence and their use of effective behaviour techniques (Safran, 1989; Woolfolk et al., 1990).

- Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to use positive proactive strategies such as reinforcement of good behaviour; whereas those with low self-efficacy are more likely to rely on punitive measures (Emmer & Hickman, 1991).

- In-service support and evidence based programmes provided in this area e.g., Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton, 2011) & Friends for Life (Barrett, 2004)

Initial Teacher Education and Behaviour Management

- Internationally a need and desire for effective and explicit behaviour management training during ITE (Cains & Brown, 1998a; Cains & Brown, 1998b; Clarke et al., 2012; Gallio & Little, 2003; Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Villa et al, 1996)

- Pre-service teachers are positive about including students with behavioural difficulties (O'Toole & Burke, 2013; Shevlin et al., 2009), but feel under-prepared to do so (Clarke et al., 2012)

- Behaviour is a key priority in the areas of support required by NQTs (Hick et al., 2019; Killeavy & Moloney, 2009).

Methodology

- Participants

  - Participants recruited through Purposive and Snowball Sampling

  - Four Female Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs; Age range 21-30 years)

  - Maximum 1 year experience within primary schools

  - Teacher contract status varied

Methodology

- Teacher 1
  - DEIS Band 1 school in inner city, Dublin.
  - Temporary contract
- Teacher 2
  - Casual substitute teacher in Cork city
  - Worked across a number of schools
- Teacher 3
  - DEIS Band 1 school in Cork City.
  - Long term substitute contract
- Teacher 4
  - Dublin city, permanent contract.

- All qualified in Ireland. Two from an undergraduate B.Ed. and two from A Masters in Primary Education.

Methodology

- **Design**
  - Qualitative
    - Capture lived experiences of teachers with regard to behaviour management strategies.
  - Semi structured interviews
  - Inductive approach

- **Materials/Apparatus**
  - Interviews conducted via Zoom
  - Transcribing through Nvivo 12
  - Interview questions were developed and guided by previous studies such as Miller et al. (1998).

- Questions included...

What behavioural management strategies do you use within your classroom? (Q7)

What is your understanding of the term 'punishment'? (Q9)

What is your understanding of the term 'reinforcement'? (Q12)

Methodology

- Ethics
  - Proposal approved by DBS Ethics committee
  - Before each interview, a letter of participation, including information sheet with consent form was emailed to interviewees
  - These outlined ethical issues and systems in place for issues such as data collection, protection and storage.
  - Continuity of consent maintained throughout the interview
  - Participants were debriefed after the interview and a debrief sheet was emailed to the participant after the interview.

Methodology

- **Procedure**
  - Participants were interviewed individually via Zoom
  - Prior to the commencement of the interview participants were briefed of the topic
  - The interview commenced, and a number of supplementary and probing questions were developed as part of the schedule, as well as the main questions.
  - Upon completion of the interview, participants were thanked
  - Debrief sheets were provided.
  - Upon transcribing, data was deidentified, and names were replaced with pseudonyms

- **Data Analysis**
  - The research consulted the six decisions of thematic analysis as per Braun and Clarke (2006)
  - Key themes were selected contingent on their direct association with the research question
  - Inductive and latent approach to analysis was employed
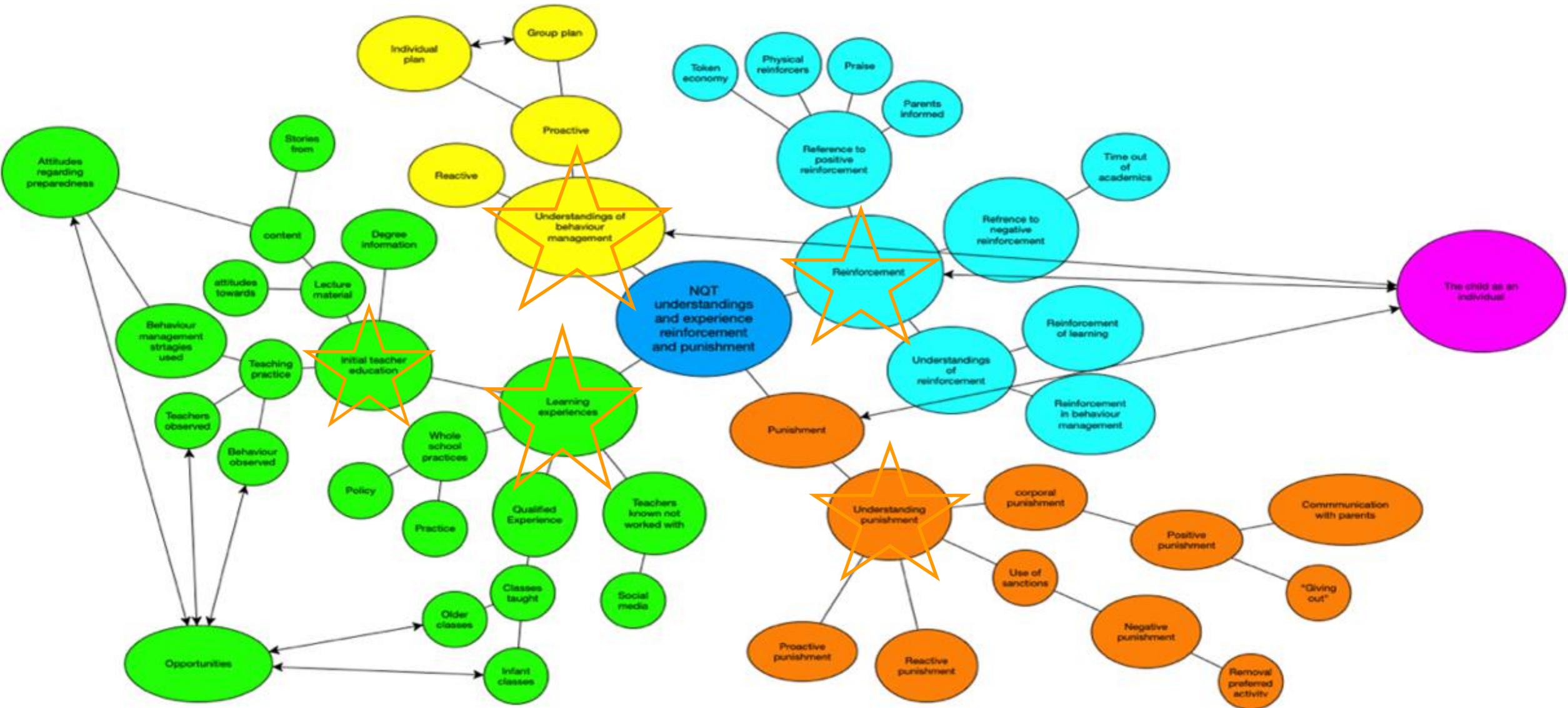
Figure 1 Original Concept Map
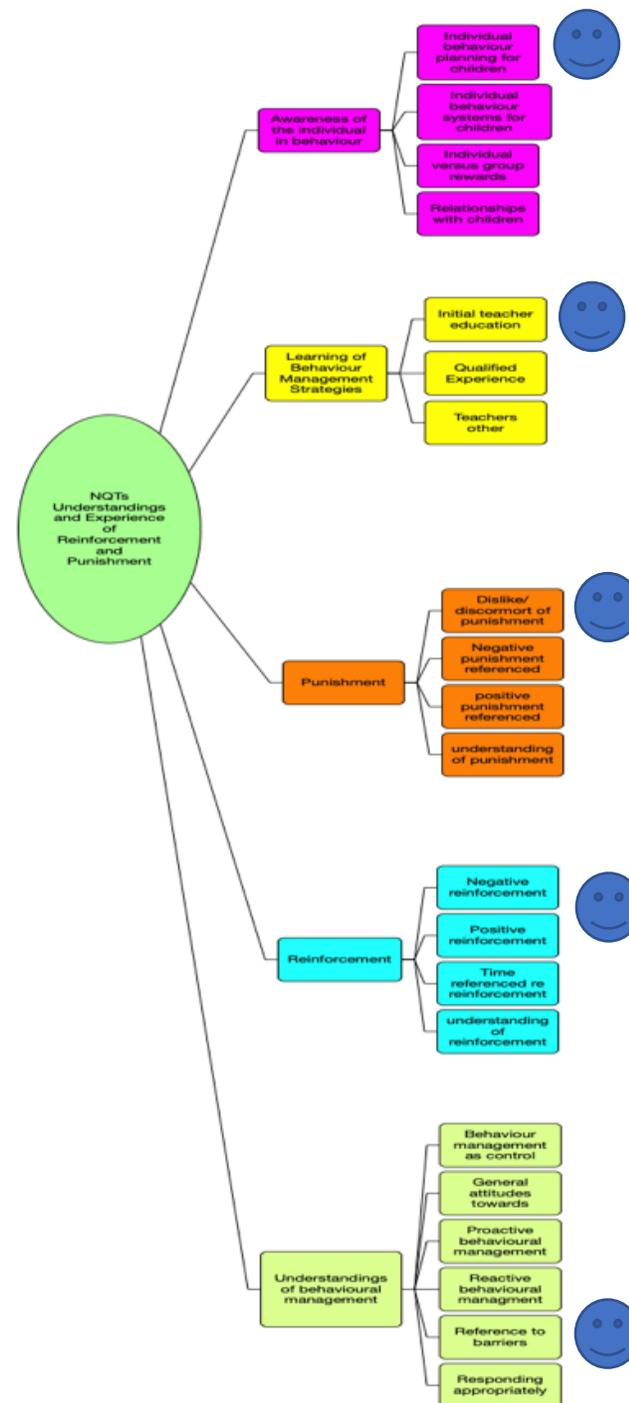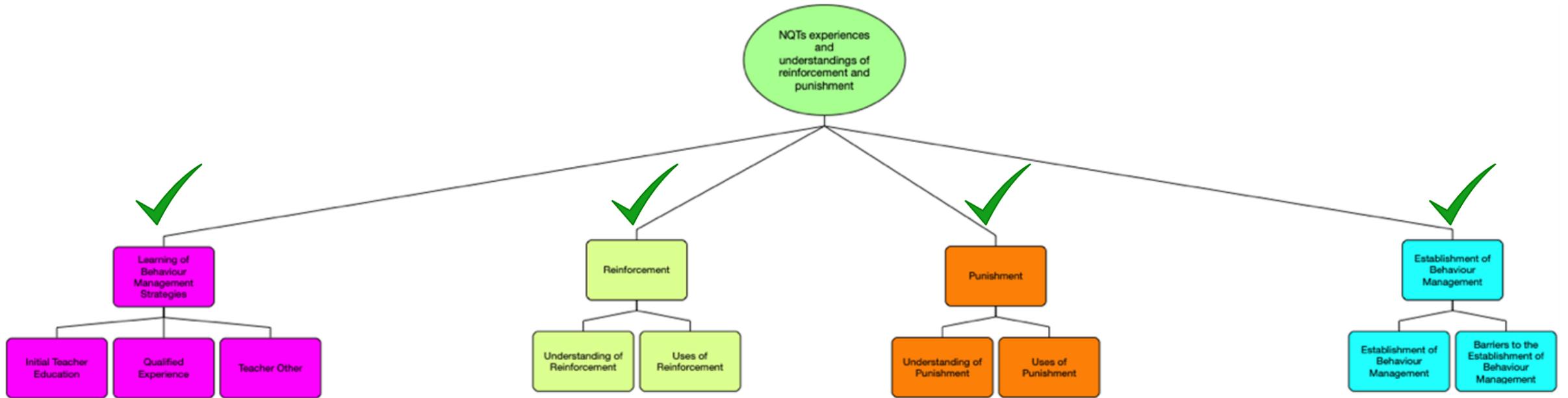
Figure 2 Refined Concept Map

Figure 3 Final Concept Map

Theme 1: Learning of Behaviour Management

- Subtheme 1a: Initial Teacher Education
  - One participant referenced the option of completing a behaviour module as part of an elective module.
  - Teachers found it difficult to match the theories taught to real life classroom experience.
  - Told to use verbal praise and token economies without being explicitly taught the concept of reinforcement.
  - Teaching practice gave them an opportunity to experience behaviours of concern in the real world setting.
  - General consensus that further practice within settings with more challenging behaviours would be of benefit.

- Subtheme 1b: Qualified Experience
  - Qualified experience had lent to their behaviour management repertoire.
  - A number of participants identified encountering behaviour. management practices which made them feel uncomfortable and shaped their approach going forward.

- Subtheme 1c: Teachers Other
  - Utilising the knowledge of teachers whom they knew.
  - The use of social media platforms such as Instagram was cited as a learning tool.

…when you actually go out into the classroom that background knowledge of intrinsic motivation doesn't really roll over into real life situations (Teacher 3)

We were always told to praise positive behaviour, college always wanted us to do that (Teacher 4)

It is kind of moving more towards, OK, let's see where this child is at and what do they actually enjoy .. what's the best way that they stay engaged (Teacher 3).

I follow a couple of Instagram accounts… and like that's quite helpful to just have a community of other teachers that you can talk to and share ideas with (Teacher 2).

Theme 2: Reinforcement

- Subtheme 2a: Understanding of Reinforcement in the Context of Behaviour Management
  - Understandings appeared to be unclear
  - Positive reinforcement more commonly mentioned
  - The definition of reinforcement was not consistent amongst participants and appeared to cause some confusion.

- Subtheme 2b: Uses of Reinforcement in the Context of Behaviour Management
  - Responses indicated uses of negative and positive reinforcement within the classroom.
  - Positive reinforcement was most commonly referenced; verbal praise being most cited, followed by token economy and physical reinforcers.
  - The age range of the students appeared to impact the choice of reinforcement type
  - Participants showed considerable confusion regarding the definition of negative reinforcement

> Yes, look at you, look what you're doing…constantly pointing out when they're doing what you want them to do (Teacher 3)

> Praising them, I think being specific as well about praise has definitely worked (Teacher 1)

> The negative reinforcement then on the other side is like if you do X then and there'll be Y consequence, I supposed to be the negative side of it, negative reinforcement (Teacher 2)

Theme 3: Punishment

- Subtheme 3a: Understandings of Punishment in the Context of Behaviour Management
  - Muddied understanding of the term punishment
  - Understood punishment as being negative, with some referencing historical corporal punishment
  - Should be proactively planned, rather than being a reactive procedure

- Subtheme 3b: Uses of Punishment in the Context of Behaviour Management
  - A number of punishment procedures identified with the data, including both negative and positive punishment practices.
  - Response-cost (e.g. token removal) and time-out (e.g., thinking chair) procedures.
  - Positive punishment practices identified (e.g., verbal correction, notes to parents)
  - There was a level of discomfort or disapproval of the use of punishment
  - Punishment used when they had exhausted all known strategies or sensed a lack of control

I think of my father, when he was in school and getting whipped crossed knuckles" (Teacher 4)

I don't know if it always necessarily works unless it's completely transparent from the beginning what will happen (Teacher 2)

It's not something I like to use to be honest. It's a last resort if I have a child… I've have had children curse at me, restorative practice doesn't work for them (Teacher 3)

Theme 4: The Establishment of Behaviour Management

- Subtheme 4a: The Establishment of the Precursors for Behaviour Management
  - Importance of positive relationships
  - Fine balance between being in control of the class and establishing a meaningful relationship with the pupils
  - Awareness of what behavioural procedures would work for individual students
  - They were aware that it was their responsibility to read the pupils needs and interests correctly in order to use behavioural procedures with accuracy.

- Subtheme 4b: The Barriers to Effective Behaviour Management
  - Teachers identified that identified having experienced behaviours of concern, that the serious nature of the behaviours often got in the way of the behaviour management.
  - Identified a need to be reactive.
  - Identified a lack of resources and time which hampered the establishment of relationships or indeed the understanding of behaviour.
  - NQTs were aware that there was an amount of factors which played into behaviour management over which they had little control.

It's all about kind of sussing out how they're going to react…not like fully headstrong going in but I would try not to be a pushover either like I wanted them to, kind of like me (Teacher 3)

What works for one child wouldn't necessarily work for another (Teacher 2)

I was meant to take him out to do kind of work in a behaviour plan, but it ended up that I was just take him out to go for walks and to do movement and yoga because like it just got to a stage or it just was too bad for him (Teacher 3).

We, as educators or teachers we don't have time, like I said earlier to find out why the behaviour is there is happening in the first place" (Teacher 4)

Discussion: Findings Regarding NQT Practices

- Strong use of reinforcement within NQT classrooms; further strengthening the findings of others using samples with unspecified teaching lengths (Hyland et al., 2014; Leckey et al., 2016)

- The use of praise and incentives was common in order to encourage positive behaviour throughout, is also in line with others (Hyland et al., 2014)

- Student voice in reinforcement not identified- potential for mismatch? (Raschke, 1981)

- Unclear understandings of punishment but clear use of punishment proceedures e.g., time-out & response cost.

- Are punishment procedures a result of less intrusive procedures not working, lack of knowledge, or lack of self-efficacy? (See Emmer & Hickman, 1991; Safran, 1989; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008; Woolfolk et al., 1990)

ITE & Induction Processes

- Supports findings regarding NQTs inability to connect course-based content relating to behaviour with real life-practices (Hick et al., 2019)

- Need for further research regarding:

-Specialised placements (Lambe & Bones, 2007; Carrol et al., 2003)

-Placement Tutors (Hick et al., 2019)

- Place of NQT induction system (Hick et al., 2019; Totterdell et al., 2008)

Communities of Practice

- Significant reference within the findings to the support offered to NQTs from other qualified teachers in the area of behaviour

- Further research recommended:

- Effect of professional communities of practice in an online space (Carpenter et al., 2020; Benko et al., 2016)

Other Issues

- Pupil-teacher relationships are paramount to the foundation of effective behaviour management (Marsh, 2012).

- Time appeared to be a significant issue for NQTs (Blatchford et al., 2011)

- NQTs may benefit from additional support regarding time management

Limitations & Strengths

- Sample size and gender

- Use of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews:

-allowed for depth

- May be fallible

- Future research should aim to strike a gender balance using a larger sample with the use of mixed metholodgy encouraged.

Final Conclusions

- NQTs lack understanding regarding the basic behaviour principals of reinforcement and punishment

- Clear uses of reinforcement and punishment with NQT classrooms

- Further research is required in the following areas:

- Rationale for utilizing punishment procedures

- Potential for placement to link course content to classroom-based practices

- Communities of practice for NQTs

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Thanks for listening

Any Questions?