Teachers’ Views of the Effectiveness of the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management (IY TCM) Programme in County Wexford Schools: A Follow-up Study

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Abstract
The Webster-Stratton Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) programme is a classroom-based intervention designed to reduce conduct problems in children and promote their pro-learning behaviour by strengthening teacher classroom management strategies. For the past number of years the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has been offering training in this evidence-based programme to Irish primary school teachers. In County Wexford, NEPS has carried out training with over 100 teachers. A postal survey was carried out to find out their views on the effectiveness of the programme. Responses indicate that the majority of respondents regard the IY TCM programme as an extremely useful and valuable course, which has reinforced their classroom management skills with self-reported increased use of positive approaches and improved classroom relationships. Teacher responses indicate that, by using strategies learned on the IY TCM course, their classrooms have become calmer and more positive environments that are more conducive to learning.

Introduction
As part of its support and development work with schools, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has trained many of its psychologists as facilitators for a programme for teachers designed to prevent, reduce and manage emotional and behavioural difficulties in children and to promote emotional and social competence in young children aged between two and ten years. The programme is called the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management (IY TCM) programme. NEPS offers IY TCM training to Irish primary school teachers throughout the country.

In County Wexford, over 100 teachers have participated in the IY TCM programme over the past six years. NEPS Wexford has also offered two refresher sessions in the past two years that have been attended by 30 teachers who completed the initial training. Feedback, both anecdotal and through responses on evaluation sheets following IY TCM sessions over the years, has been very positive. As we prepared to roll out IY TCM training for a seventh year, it was decided to survey those who had already attended the course to find out whether they continue to use and value the skills and strategies acquired through their initial training.

Developed by Carolyn Webster Stratton in Seattle, the IY TCM programme is part of a suite of programmes that also includes a parenting programme and a social skills/problem-solving curriculum designed for young children with conduct problems (Dinosaur School). The three IY programmes draw on the principles of social learning theory and behavioural psychology. The IY TCM programme is delivered over five days to between 15-20 primary school teachers. Two trained facilitators run the sessions using videotape modelling, role play and discussion. The intervals between the five training days are an integral part of the programme, allowing teachers to put what they have learned at training sessions into practice before input at a subsequent session.
Table 1: Broad outline of IY TCM programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Broad outline of IY TCM programme</th>
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| Day 1 | Building positive relationships with children  
       | Proactive teaching strategies                                                                   |
| Day 2 | Attention, Encouragement & Praise                                                                |
| Day 3 | Using incentives & rewards                                                                       |
| Day 4 | Managing student misbehaviour by ignoring and redirecting  
       | Managing student misbehaviour by using consequences                                               |
| Day 5 | Managing student misbehaviour by using Time Out                                                   |

The core of the IY TCM approach is that young children change as a result of the interactions they have on a daily basis. Consequently, day one of the IY TCM training focuses on the importance for teachers to build positive relationships with pupils and their families. The principle of building and maintaining good relationships with pupils is central to the IY philosophy. Day one also focuses on the necessity for teachers to be proactive so as to prevent behaviour problems from arising through: establishing clear rules for behaviour with children, setting routines for transitions during the school day, using commands effectively, and getting and holding attention through verbal and non-verbal methods. Day two focuses on teacher use of positive attention, encouragement, and the use of specific and targeted praise with children. The use of incentives and rewards is the topic for day three. Day four focuses on decreasing negative behaviours through the use of negative consequences. Day five deals with Time Out. On each of the training days, teachers work on an individual behaviour plan for a pupil in their respective classes whose behaviours are particularly challenging.

**Literature Review**

Having a high level of disruptive behaviour in the classroom impacts negatively on job satisfaction for teachers (Nelson et al, 2001). The Department of Education and Skills in Ireland identifies classroom management as a key element in teaching (DES, 2006). Proactive strategies adopted at a whole-class level are an essential element in preventing and minimising disruptive behaviours (NEPS, 2010). Research highlights the importance of addressing the following areas: positive relationships, the social environment of the classroom, the learning environment, classroom organisation, teacher attitudes and behaviour, a systematic approach to responding to behaviour problems, and strategies for developing children’s social and emotional competence (NEPS, 2010). Children’s social and emotional wellbeing is important in its own right but can also determine how well they do at school (NICE, 2008).

Why Incredible Years (IY)? The IY series of programmes have been extensively field-tested and researched internationally and the IY TCM is now a well-established teacher classroom
management intervention (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 1999). The Blueprints for Violence Prevention project in the USA identified the Incredible Years series of programmes as one of 11 model programmes out of 600 behaviour programmes effective in reducing adolescent violent crime, aggression, delinquency, and substance abuse. Findings indicate that, from trained teachers’ point of view, IY TCM resulted in: increased proactive and positive classroom management skills, decreased harsh and critical classroom management style, increased positive classroom atmosphere, and increased bonding with parents. From the children’s point of view, IY TCM resulted in: increased positive conflict management skills and social skills, decreased peer aggression and disruptive behaviours in class, increased social competence in school, increased academic engagement, improved school readiness and cooperation with teachers (Webster-Stratton, 2001).

Closer to home, research findings in Wales indicate that IY TCM trained teachers used more positive approaches when dealing with behaviour management and gave clearer commands. Their pupils were significantly more on-task, more compliant and less negative in general and less negative to their teachers. Identified high-challenge children were also significantly more on-task and less negative towards their teachers. The IY TCM course changed teacher behaviour and resulted in benefits for both pupils in general and high-risk children in particular (Hutchings et al., 2007).

Here in Ireland, following implementation of the IY Pilot Project in County Clare, responses from IY TCM trained teachers to a follow-up study indicated a significant increase in their reported levels of confidence in managing their classroom and the use of more positive strategies with children (Clarecare, 2006).

The Incredible Years Ireland Study involved a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of different elements of the IY suite of programmes. The overall study was carried out between 2009 and 2012. The second phase of the evaluation - as outlined in Positive Classrooms, Positive Children (McGilloway et al, 2010) - focused on evaluation of the impact of IY TCM training in eleven schools in the Limerick area. The evaluation involved an experimental design which had both an intervention group and a control group, a qualitative study of teachers’ experiences of using IY TCM strategies in class, and a cost analysis of the programme. The findings indicate that participation in IY TCM training improved teachers’ classroom management, resulting in reduced use of negative classroom management strategies and increased use of positive behaviour management strategies and higher levels of praise. There were positive changes in teachers’ attitudes towards and management of children’s behaviours in their classrooms as teachers reported feeling ‘less overwhelmed’ and more prepared to deal with disruptive behaviour. The findings indicated a reduction in general disruptive and negative behaviour in class, especially for ‘high risk’ children (McGilloway et al, 2010).

Methodology

Aim

The aim of the current study was to explore the opinions and views of teachers who had attended the IY TCM course in County Wexford and to investigate whether they continue to value and use the skills and strategies acquired through IY TCM training.
Design
A questionnaire was designed to gather relevant information. It consisted of 12 questions - a mixture of open-ended and closed questions. The first two questions sought information about school demographics, such as: school size, whether urban or rural, whether DEIS or non-DEIS schools (i.e., schools that are designated as schools for Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, which is a social inclusion strategy that focuses on addressing educational disadvantage in Irish schools), and the year in which teachers had completed the IY TCM course.

Teachers were asked to identify one element, skill, strategy, idea or piece of advice that they had learned through the IY TCM programme and that they continued to use in their classrooms.

Respondents were asked to rank from 1 to 10 the core elements of the IY TCM programme in order of usefulness and importance, based on their experience of implementing the programme on a daily basis in their classrooms.

Using four open-ended questions, teachers were asked to comment on the following: how IY TCM training had impacted on their general classroom management, how it had impacted on their management of pupils with behaviour problems, how it had impacted on pupils’ learning in general, and the challenges to implementing the IY TCM programme in their classrooms.

Teachers were asked whether they had written or used behaviour plans based on the IY philosophy since completing the IY TCM course, and were invited to give their comments on their use.

Three of the questions involved a Likert scale, where teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of IY TCM training in their teaching, their experience of the effectiveness of IY TCM approaches for children with behaviour problems, and the overall value of the IY TCM programme to them as teachers.

The questionnaires were posted to teachers in mid-May and followed up with text reminders after two weeks. The data was transcribed and analysed in order to identify the main themes in the teachers’ comments.

Participants
The sample comprised 106 of the teachers who had completed the IY TCM with NEPS in Wexford over the past six years. Forty-eight questionnaires were returned, which gave a response rate of 45%.

Thirty-six percent of the respondents worked in urban schools while 64% taught in rural schools. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents worked in DEIS schools while 72% were based in non-DEIS schools.

The majority of teachers in the sample (56%) worked in 8-20 teacher schools. 21% worked in 4-7 teacher schools and the same percentage worked in 20+ teacher schools. Just two percent worked in 2-3 teacher schools. The size of the schools (according to teacher numbers) is outlined in Figure 1.
Figure 1: Bar graph illustrating size of school (according to teacher numbers) where respondents work

Findings

Element, skill, strategy, idea or piece of advice learned through the IY TCM programme that teachers continue to use

Teachers were asked to identify one element, skill, strategy, idea or piece of advice learned as part of the IY TCM programme that they continue to use in their classrooms. The use of praise was cited most often in the responses (59%). Thirty-seven percent cited proximity praise specifically. Twenty-six percent of the teachers cited the overall importance of building a positive relationship with the pupils with some mentioning specific ways in which they do this, e.g., sending positive notes home, greeting each child by name each morning and sharing personal information with them. Fifteen percent of the respondents cited the use of incentives/rewards. The responses generally focused on the use of positive approaches – in terms of the importance of having a positive attitude, using positive language and reinforcing positive behaviour.
**Teachers ranking of principal elements of IY TCM in order of usefulness and importance**

Table 2: Table of average rankings from 1 -10 of principal elements of IY TCM programme in order of usefulness and importance based on teacher experience of implementing the programme on a daily basis in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal element of IY TCM programme</th>
<th>Average rankings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Building positive relationships with children</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Using attention, encouragement and praise</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Being proactive with regard to good classroom organisation</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Being proactive with regard to rules</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Being proactive with regard to daily school routines and transitions</td>
<td>5.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Using incentives and rewards</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Managing student misbehaviour by ignoring and redirecting</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Setting out and using a behaviour plan</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Managing student misbehaviour by using Time Out</td>
<td>8.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Managing student misbehaviour by using consequences</td>
<td>8.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers were asked to rank from 1-10 the core elements of the IY TCM in order of usefulness and importance, based on their experience of implementing the programme daily in class. As can be seen in Table 2, building a positive relationship got the highest rating, which is in line with the IY TCM philosophy that advocates relationship building with pupils as fundamental to good behaviour management. As has already been pointed out, the importance of developing and fostering good relationships with pupils is stressed on the first day of the IY TCM training and reiterated at successive training days. Teacher rankings indicate that they understand this and are proactive in establishing good relationships with their pupils.

The next highest ranking was given to teacher use of attention, encouragement and praise, followed closely by being proactive with regard to good classroom organisation. Again, positive attention, encouragement and praise are key features of the IY TCM course that are emphasised at each of the training sessions. The high ranking given by the respondents, in conjunction with more qualitative comments in the responses to subsequent questions, indicate that teachers are aware of and endeavour to use positive approaches and praise liberally in their classrooms. Teachers rated good classroom organisation as important, which
indicates that they have taken on board the IY focus on being a proactive teacher in terms of having clear structure and organisation.

The third highest ranking was broadly shared between being proactive with regard to rules, being proactive with regard to daily school routines and transitions, and using incentives and rewards. These are positive elements of the IY TCM course that teachers are encouraged to apply and use liberally.

Lower rankings were given to managing student misbehaviour by using ignoring and redirecting, and setting out and using a behaviour plan. This is in line with the responses to a later question, where roughly a third of the respondents indicated that they had not written a behaviour plan since completing the IY TCM course.

The lowest ratings were given to managing student misbehaviour by using consequences and managing student misbehaviour by using Time Out. This is in line with the IY TCM philosophy which stresses that positive approaches should be exhausted before moving to more negative behaviour management strategies such as use of consequences or Time Out.

In summary, the order in which the teachers ranked the key elements of the IY TCM programme indicates that they have a good understanding of IY philosophy and how certain elements take precedence to other elements, e.g., building a good relationship with pupils would be regarded as more important than using incentive and rewards. Their ratings indicate that they have been attempting to maintain fidelity to the IY TCM programme and have been striving to implement IY TCM as recommended during training.

**Impact of IY TCM on classroom management**

Teacher responses indicate that training in and use of IY TCM skills has generally improved their classroom management. Two main themes emerged following thematic analysis of teacher responses on the impact of IY TCM training on their classroom management, namely:

1. increased use of proactive approaches
2. improved teacher-pupil relationships since taking part in the training.

**1. Increased use of proactive approaches**
Forty-three percent of teachers reported themselves to be more positive in their approach towards pupils, in the language they use both in teaching and correcting misbehaviour, and in their focus on positive rather than negative behaviour.

**2. Improved teacher-pupil relationships**
Twenty-one percent of teachers reported that they had become more proactive in building relationships with their pupils since attending the IY TCM training. Many reported improved relationships not only between teachers and pupils, but also among the pupils in their classes.

The practical application of the IY TCM training was evident in teacher responses as most of their responses outlined concrete ways in which they have improved their classroom management by implementing skills and strategies learned on the IY TCM course. Teachers reported the use of the following strategies: building relationships with pupils by finding out about their interests, using specific and targeted praise, using tangible rewards, using individual and group incentive schemes, changing rewards periodically to maintain motivation, ignoring and redirecting certain low-level behaviours where possible, having a
Wiggle Space for more active children, having a set of positively-stated classroom rules that have been discussed with the children and that are clearly displayed in the class, and using positive rule reminders about the kinds of behaviour expected.

‘I greet children every morning, get to know them personally, develop a meaningful relationship with them, show them I listen (e.g. asking how their cousin is on Monday if they tell me on Friday they are visiting them over the weekend), make praise specific, have clear routines, use the Turtle Technique and Time Out.’

**Impact of IY TCM on children with behaviour problems**

Teachers reported that the skills and strategies learned through IY TCM training have had a positive impact for children with behaviour problems. Responses indicate general improvement for children with behaviour problems, with some teachers noting how all the children in their classes have benefitted from the application of the IY philosophy and strategies, not just the children with behaviour difficulties.

Respondents reported that through exposure to the IY philosophy and implementing it in the classroom, children with behaviour difficulties learn to take responsibility for their behaviour by becoming aware of their inappropriate behaviours and learning to use more appropriate replacement behaviours. As one teacher pointed out: ‘They are more enticed to “buy in” to the classroom system as it is positive’. Another teacher noted that it has helped children with challenging behaviour by creating an incentive for them to change ‘without hurting their self-esteem’.

‘The children have a clearer understanding of the behaviours I wish them to develop, and these are reinforced with specific praise. Misbehaviour is ignored and redirected where possible so that my classroom is a positive place to be, and my feedback is mainly positive. Behaviour plans are used in partnership with pupils and parents to allow us all to make the classroom as happy and as productive a place as possible. The children by and large understand that I devise and implement such plans because I care, and are generally invested in improving their behaviour. Improvements are praised and rewarded.’

The IY TCM training has provided teachers with coping tools to help them ‘manage’ undesired behaviour. IY TCM advocates the setting of specific behaviour targets. As one teacher pointed out, by setting such targets ‘children are shown that they can improve one behaviour at a time. The use of specific praise and rewards reinforces positive behaviour rather than highlighting negative behaviour. Another teacher pointed out how the use of the Time Out chair ‘allows children to think about their actions and the consequences of those actions’. It was also noted that ‘children engage in more metacognition and reflect on their behaviour through use of strategies such as the Turtle Technique’. Teachers praise children for managing their emotions well e.g. ‘You took a drink of water to relax. Good idea.’

‘I had some behavioural problems at the beginning of the year, I now have none 😊. All children seem to be happy and very eager to please me by doing their best. They realise doing well/their best pleases me but more importantly themselves where originally they were not as driven.’
Three themes emerged following thematic analysis of teacher responses on the impact of IY TCM on children with behaviour problems, namely: (1.) the existence of a more positive classroom environment, (2.) increased calmness and (3.) the benefit of using praise.

1. More positive classroom environment
Forty-two percent of teachers reported that the overall effect of using IY TCM strategies creates a more positive classroom atmosphere that encourages children to behave well and provides positive reinforcement through praise and rewards for good behaviour.

2. Increased calmness
Almost 19% of teachers reported that having structure and routines in place has a calming effect on children with behaviour problems.

‘Overall, in my class the behaviour has greatly improved. My class is calmer, the children are more enthusiastic and I feel less stressed. My target child’s behaviour has improved. He was fighting on the yard daily and now this rarely happens. However, we are still working on his behaviour in the class, but it has improved.’

3. Benefit of using praise
Twenty-three percent of teachers commented on the benefit of using praise with children who have behaviour problems.

‘I feel that the children are motivated more by praise and reward in my class.’

‘The children are calmer, they have a strong sense of routine. They thrive on rewards, encouragement and praise.’

‘IY TCM has had a positive effect on all the children not just children with behavioural problems. Positive, specific praise and reward systems have greatly helped.’

‘I built a positive relationship with the child by getting to know the child and showing an interest in what he was interested in. I used positive encouragement and praise and let him know the behaviour I expected for him.’

Impact of IY TCM on pupils’ learning
Teachers reported that since they completed the IY TCM course and began to apply IY TCM strategies in their classes, their pupils were more engaged in learning. Two main themes emerged following thematic analysis of teacher responses on the impact of IY TCM on pupils’ learning, namely: (1.) calmer classrooms and (2.) a more positive classroom atmosphere.

1. Calmer classrooms
Twenty-six percent of teacher responses indicated that children were more responsive to learning in calm and positive classrooms that are conducive to learning. A more relaxed classroom enabled the children to engage and concentrate more, thus making them more able to learn.
‘The children are able to access the curriculum in a calm environment where transitions happen with ease. The children feel secure in a positive class environment and as a result they seek help and always persevere with even difficult tasks knowing that effort is rewarded as much as outcome.’

‘The classroom environment is calmer. The children now accept the few children that might need time out/wiggle space and don’t pay much attention and get on with their work.’

2. Positive classroom atmosphere
Thirty percent of teacher responses cited a more positive classroom atmosphere that is more conducive to learning since completing the IY TCM course and applying its philosophy and skills in class. It was noted that the use of positive teacher feedback has helped to create positive, calm classrooms.

‘Classroom is a very positive place. Children arrive happy and ready to learn.’

‘Positive feedback regarding behaviour fosters a pleasant atmosphere which is more conductive to learning, and in particular to collaborative and co-operative activities, e.g. active learning in groups.’

By applying IY principles, teachers reported less interruptions to teaching time. Children were reported to be on-task more because they were in an organised environment with smooth transitions between activities and activity breaks to re-energise them. It was reported that the use of clear instructions resulted in better understanding on the part of pupils and less time being wasted on interruptions in the form of questions, chatter, etc.

‘Flow of lessons maintained and less disruption. Happy positive environment, better learning. I hope!’

Such conditions promote positive behaviour and a reduction in time wasted through negative feedback.

‘Less time is spent listening to me giving negative feedback. More time is spent on task. I have more time to plan and deliver engaging stimulating lessons when behavioural challenges arise less.’

‘Less time spent on dealing and sorting out issues so greater access to learning.’

‘Hopefully more teaching is being done as level of having to discipline falls.’
Challenges to implementing IY TCM

Three main themes emerged from thematic analysis of teacher responses to the challenges to implementing IY TCM strategies, namely: (1.) time constraints, (2.) difficulty maintaining consistency and (3.) difficulty remaining positive when faced with negative behaviours.

1. Time constraints
Thirty percent of the responses indicated time constraints as the main challenge to implementing the IY TCM programme. Teachers noted problems in finding time for the following: to read over the accompanying book, to plan and implement new ideas/strategies in class, to make some of the resources needed for IY, to implement IY in a class with large numbers of pupils, to follow through with rewards and to write a behaviour plan. One teacher found the process of writing out and sending positive notes (happygrams) home very time-consuming.

2. Difficulty maintaining consistency
Twenty percent of the responses cited problems with maintaining consistency in using the IY approach as a challenge. Teacher responses indicated that they needed to stay motivated so as to be consistent in using IY TCM strategies over time. It was sometimes challenging to be consistent with rules and positive reinforcement. It was often difficult to remember to praise and to follow through with rewards.

   ‘My own consistency in sticking to the programme – much easier to fall back on bad old ways.’

   ‘Incorporating it on a consistent basis. Easy for teachers to forget strategies – refresher courses very useful for this.’

   ‘Being consistent over a long period with particular reward systems. The energy it takes is enormous’

3. Difficulty remaining positive when faced with negative behaviours
Seventeen percent of teacher responses indicated that it was challenging to remain positive when children were misbehaving. They noted that it was difficult to ignore and redirect children when they were misbehaving. One teacher reported that ‘ignoring is even more difficult in situations where the function of pupil misbehaviour is attention-seeking’. Teachers commented on the need to stay motivated so as to model positive language and behaviour. One teacher reported that it was difficult “at the beginning to remember to be positive rather than give out and use consequences”.

   ‘Sometimes it’s difficult to praise a child who is making your teaching difficult. Initially I found it very difficult to step back and ignore minor misbehaviours. Keeping language positive at all times is very difficult but gets easier over time. Breaking habits is hard.’

Several other challenges to implementing IY TCM programme were listed as follows: implementing IY ideas in a school where a more negative system of behaviour management is in operation; remembering all the skills and strategies; keeping reward systems novel and fresh; having sufficient space; having too many children in the class.
Use of behaviour plan, based on IY philosophy

Sixty-nine percent of the teachers reported that they had written and used at least one IY behaviour plan (for an individual pupil) since completing their initial IY TCM training. Some have written plans for specific children in conjunction with learning support/resource teacher colleagues. Others have adapted the format to suit their own particular needs and found that the plan complimented advice from other sources on teaching and managing children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

‘Worked very well – Child’s behaviour improved greatly at school and at home I believe!’

‘Very helpful for teacher to have a programme set out to work from.’

‘Behaviour plan is something concrete to show parents and it allows us to plan together moving forward.’

Thirty-one percent of the respondents reported that they had not written an IY behaviour plan since completing their initial IY TCM training, although some pointed out that they had the plan ‘in their head’.

‘I haven’t written one but I’ve created them in my head.’

The fact that some teachers did not write plans may reflect the fact that they did not need them. It may be that establishing good relationships with pupils, the use of proactive strategies to prevent problems from arising and the use of positive attention, encouragement and praise precluded the need for a written plan.

Teacher Rating of Usefulness of IY TCM Strategies in Teaching

Figure 2: Bar graph illustrating Teacher Ratings of Usefulness of IY TCM

Usefulness of IYTCM in Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usefulness Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Useful</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Useful</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Useful</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful</td>
<td>0%</td>
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Figure 2 illustrates how teachers rated the usefulness of IY TCM strategies in their teaching. As can be seen, all teachers regarded IY TCM strategies as useful, albeit at different levels, with the majority of teachers (86%) rating it as very/extremely useful.
As can be seen in Figure 3, a closer examination of the data indicated that teachers working in non-DEIS schools rated IY TCM as being more useful than teachers working in DEIS schools. Ninety-one percent of teachers in non-DEIS schools rated IY TCM as very/extremely useful while 77 percent of teachers in DEIS schools rated it as very/extremely useful.

**Teacher Rating of Effectiveness of IY TCM Approaches for Children with Behaviour Problems**

Figure 4 illustrates how teachers rated the effectiveness of IY TCM approaches for children with behaviour problems. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents gave it very/extremely effective rating, while ten percent of the respondents rated it as simply effective.
As can be seen in Figure 5, as before, a closer examination of the data indicates that teachers working in non-DEIS schools rated IY TCM as more effective for children with behaviour difficulties than teachers who worked in DEIS schools. There may be a number of reasons for this.

It is likely that there are a higher number of children with more extreme behaviour problems in DEIS schools because they have a higher number of pupils who come from less advantaged economic and/or social backgrounds. It may be that many of these children have entrenched and persistent behaviour difficulties that require additional support from other agencies. In other words, IY TCM on its own, while effective, may not be enough in some cases. This is borne out in the comments from one or two of the teachers who reported that:

‘The year I did the course I had a child with quite challenging behaviour. He has since gone on to leave the school due to family reasons, and in the interim behaviour had deteriorated dramatically (three years later). I believe there are difficulties there which needed additional home based/external support. More generally, and in less extreme situations, I have found it [IY TCM] very beneficial. An element I particularly like is the benefit that accrues to the well behaved/quiet and/or timid children as the atmosphere in class is more positive and not punitive towards those who work very hard to do well and want to please teacher i.e. the ones that sometimes get missed.’

It is also possible that teachers in DEIS schools have access to more input and training on dealing with pupils with behaviour problems than their colleagues in non-DEIS schools. They may already be familiar with much of the knowledge and skills taught at the IY TCM training. While they regard IY TCM as an effective programme for dealing with pupils with behaviour
problems, their prior knowledge and the additional training they have received, may have affected their enthusiasm.

**Teacher Rating of Overall Value of IY TCM Programme**

**Figure 6: Teacher Ratings of Overall Value of IY TCM Programme**

![Figure 6](image)

Figure 6 illustrates how teachers rated the overall value of the IY TCM programme. As before, the majority of respondents regarded IY TCM as an extremely valuable programme.

**Figure 7: Teacher Ratings of Overall Value of IY TCM Programme in DEIS/non-DEIS schools**

![Figure 7](image)

As before, those working in non-DEIS schools rated the programme as more valuable than those in DEIS schools.
When asked for further comments as to the overall value of the IY TCM course and its application in schools, teachers were very positive, using superlatives such as enjoyable, wonderful, fantastic, brilliant, great and excellent. They noted that they enjoyed the course, which they regarded as both practical and helpful and commented on the value of sharing ideas and experiences with other teachers. They reported that they have recommended the IY TCM course to other teachers.

‘I would find teaching very stressful were it not for the strategies learned on the Incredible Years Programme. It was the most helpful course I have ever done and I use the strategies without thinking now. It is completely integral to my life in the classroom.’

‘I can honestly say that the programme kept me sane at times and I really enjoyed the course especially having people to talk to on the course when dealing with a very difficult class.’

‘The chance to meet with other teachers during the school year on a periodic basis was invaluable. The feeling that you are not alone in your challenges.’

Discussion and conclusions

The responses given by the teachers who completed IY TCM training in Wexford indicate that the majority of the respondents regard the IY TCM programme as an extremely useful and valuable course. Their responses indicate that the IY TCM programme has generally improved their classroom management skills with self-reported increased use of positive approaches and improved classroom relationships. Teacher responses indicate that their classrooms have become calmer and more positive environments that are more conducive to learning.

Teacher responses and comments indicate that they continue to emphasise positive approaches to dealing with behaviour in their classes. When asked to rate the principal elements of the IY TCM programme in terms of usefulness and importance, teachers rated positive and proactive behaviour management strategies higher than more negative strategies. Also, when asked to name a skill or strategy taught during the IY TCM course that they continue to use in class, they listed praise, proximity praise, building positive relationships with pupils, and using incentive and rewards.

The respondents rated IY TCM as an extremely effective programme in terms of working with pupils with behaviour problems. The programme provides teachers with classroom strategies and skills to prevent and deal with behaviour difficulties. Teacher responses highlighted how pupils with behaviour problems have benefitted from, the IY promotion of positive approaches to behaviour management, the increased calmness in their classrooms and the more frequent use of praise. It is also worth noting that teachers commented on the value of having an opportunity to share ideas and practice with teacher colleagues during the IY TCM training sessions.

Overall, the responses given by the participants in the current study are broadly in line with other studies carried out internationally and in Ireland. Responses from IY TCM trained teachers who took part in the Incredible Years Pilot Project in County Clare, indicated a significant increase in their use of more positive behaviour management strategies with children (Clarecare, 2006). Similarly, in Positive Classrooms, Positive Children, (McGilloway et al, 2010) findings indicated that participation in IY TCM training improves teachers’ classroom
management, resulting in reduced use of negative classroom management strategies and increased use of positive behaviour management strategies and higher levels of praise.

While teachers were universally positive about the IY TCM programme, they cited time constraints, difficulty in maintaining consistency and difficulty remaining positive when faced with negative behaviour as challenges to implementing the programme.

An unexpected finding of this study is that teachers from DEIS schools, while they regarded the IY TCM course as an effective and positive programme, did not rate it as highly as teachers who work in non-DEIS schools. As has already been pointed out, it may be that teachers in DEIS schools have access to more input and training in dealing with pupils with behaviour problems than their colleagues in non-DEIS schools. They may already be familiar with much of the knowledge and skills taught at the IY TCM training. While they regarded IY TCM as an effective programme for dealing with pupils with behaviour problems, their prior knowledge and the additional training they had received, may have affected their enthusiasm. This may need to be explored further as it may have implications for future IY TCM training. For example, it may be that NEPS need to survey teachers before they start IY TCM training to investigate what they already know in terms of classroom management skills and what they need to learn. It may be that some teachers are ready to move faster through the IY TCM programme or that NEPS needs to include other aspects of IY material in the five-day course.

Another possible reason that teachers from DEIS schools did not rate it as highly as teachers who work in non-DEIS schools may be that there are a higher number of children with more extreme behaviour problems in DEIS schools. IY TCM on its own, while effective, may not be enough. Children with entrenched and persistent behaviour difficulties may need more in terms of support and/or therapy. Currently, there is no IY parenting programme running in County Wexford that could support the parents of children who are accessing the IY philosophy in their schools. Likewise, few schools in County Wexford offer the Dinosaur School option. Other IY research involving IY TCM was undertaken in the context of all three strands of IY training being delivered. For example, the aforementioned IY Pilot Project in County Clare was an interagency project that involving all three strands of IY: the local HSE Clinical Psychology Service ran the Dinosaur School, Clarecare ran the parenting courses and NEPS ran the IY TCM programme in a number of schools in County Clare. The use of all three strands would, more than likely, have resulted in the IY TCM approach having had a greater impact on the pupils in the DEIS schools that took part in the pilot study. Again, this is an area for further exploration.

There were some limitations to the research. Firstly, the questionnaires were sent out in the final months of the summer term, which is a busy time in schools. While the response rate was good for a postal survey, it may have been higher had it been sent out at a different time of the year. Secondly, this study relied on self-reports from teachers. There was no objective verification of their comments whereas other research (for example, Positive Classrooms, Positive Children) involved naturalistic observation of teachers and children in their classrooms so as to get a sense of the use and impact of IY TCM strategies.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the IY TCM programme is not a panacea for dealing with all of the behavioural problems in any given classroom. Notwithstanding this, the evidence from
the current study indicates that IY TCM is very worthwhile programme and that the training is viewed very positively by teachers in County Wexford.

References


National Educational Psychological Service (2010). Behavioural, Emotional & Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support; Guidelines for Teachers


