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Sustained CPD as an effective approach in the delivery of the incredible years teacher classroom management programme

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ABSTRACT

The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management (IYTCM) programme aims to equip teachers with the strategies and skills necessary to promote socio-emotional child development. In Ireland, educational psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) are involved in the delivery of the IYTCM programme training to primary school teachers. This study sought to ascertain experiences of the continuing professional development (CPD) offered to teachers by NEPS during IYTCM programme dissemination. A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews was adopted. Data were collected from primary school teachers and educational psychologists. Findings indicate that the sustained CPD, facilitated by NEPS, during programme delivery, presents as an effective approach to teacher CPD and to educational psychology service delivery. The study highlights the importance and efficacy of customising programme delivery, co-constructing behaviour plans and facilitating sustained support. The evaluation considers implications of the findings and possible further developments for this model of working.

KEYWORDS

Incredible years teacher classroom management; continuing professional development; primary school teacher; service delivery; behavioural; emotional and social difficulties

Introduction

For more than ten years, psychologists from the Irish National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) have been collaborating with Irish primary schools to build teacher capacity through the delivery of training in the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management (IYTCM, Webster-Stratton, 2000, 2001) programme. NEPS is an executive agency of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and aims to respond to need and effect change at individual, group and systems levels within schools. One of NEPS' service priorities is to enhance wellbeing in school communities through the delivery of training in the evidence-based IYTCM programme, a commitment outlined in the DES Action Plan for Education (2016–2019) which sets out a vision for the Irish education and training system to support every learner to fulfil their potential.

The IYTCM programme is a classroom-based intervention designed to reduce children's social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and promote their pro-learning

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behaviour by providing teachers with key skills and strategies to support students' positive behaviour in class. This paper reports on a research project which studied experiences of the continuing professional development (CPD), facilitated by NEPS, during IYTCM programme delivery to primary school teachers. The particular focus was on the perceptions of teachers and educational psychologists from NEPS of the CPD offered during IYTCM programme dissemination. The research questions were:

1. How does NEPS facilitate the delivery of the IYTCM programme to primary school teachers?
2. What is effective about this approach to CPD for teachers in meeting the social, emotional and behavioural needs of students?

Literature review

Empowering teachers to effectively support all students in their classroom in order to maximise positive outcomes underpins the work of the National Educational Psychological Service in Ireland. This work needs to be understood in the context of current policy and practice in the Irish education system and previous research in the field.

Inclusive education policy and practice

An inclusive model for education is endorsed in Irish educational policy (Department of Education and Skills [DES], 2005, 2017; Government of Ireland, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2004) and sets the context of current teacher and educational psychology practice in Ireland. Inclusive education, as espoused by the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, avows the right of every child to education, upholding the key tenets of increased participation, equitable acceptance, access, provision and support for the needs of all learners (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). However, much national and international research indicates that teachers repeatedly cite students' emotional and behavioural difficulties as one of the greatest challenges to successful inclusive education practice in the mainstream classroom (Banks & McCoy, 2011; 2012; DES, 2010; Florian, 2019; Keon, 2020; Travers et al., 2010). In Irish primary schools, the National Council for Special Education's Administration System in 2010 reported that, from a total of 16,629 students with special educational needs accessing additional teaching support hours, 3730 (22.43 per cent) of these had emotional/behavioural disturbance and 726 (4.37 per cent) had severe emotional/behavioural disturbance, highlighting this student cohort as substantial in the Irish context (Banks & McCoy, 2011).

A high level of behavioural difficulties in the classroom impacts negatively on student learning as well as student and teacher wellbeing (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Cummins & McMaster, 2006; Nelson et al., 2001). Consequently, teachers often require access to further continuing professional development and support to enhance their capacity in teaching students presenting with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Educational psychologists' knowledge of psychological theory and practice relating to well-being and behaviour for learning means that they can offer a range of supports to students and teachers in relation to emotional and behavioural difficulties (DES, 2016,

2018; Frederickson, 2002), including consultation and teacher training in evidence-based approaches and interventions.

The incredible years teacher classroom management programme

The IYTCM programme seeks to address the social, emotional and behavioural difficulties of primary school students (Webster-Stratton, 2001). The programme has been extensively field-tested and researched, with findings consistently documenting increases in teacher use of effective, proactive strategies and decreases in student problem behaviours (for example, Baker-Henningham et al., 2009; Webster-Stratton et al., 2004, 2001, 2008). The programme training incorporates six full-day workshops with four week intervals to allow for implementation of strategies.

In Ireland, NEPS facilitates the delivery of training in the IYTCM programme to schools teachers. The DES Action Plan for Education (2016–2019) committed to NEPS training all teachers in DEIS schools in IYTCM. DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) is a national programme, launched by the DES in 2005, aimed at addressing the needs of children and young people from communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion. Of note, Banks and McCoy (2012) found that children attending designated disadvantaged schools in Ireland are significantly more likely than their peers to be identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. Thus far, 1462 teachers in DEIS schools have received the training. Research conducted within NEPS, much of which remains unpublished, has found that the IYTCM programme has resulted in enhanced classroom management skills, student-teacher relationships, teachers' psychological outcomes, and reductions in student problem behaviours in DEIS schools (for example, Egan et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Newman, 2015).

Educational psychology practice

The NEPS' Model of Service aims to work in partnership with school communities in identifying need, and offering a range of services to meet these needs. However, historically, policy documents, such as Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005) firmly placed NEPS in an assessment-led role with the provision of resources to students with Special Educational Needs based on psychological assessment and diagnosis of disability. The introduction of the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model in 2017, as outlined in the DES Circular 0013/2017, marked a significant development in the Irish Educational Psychology context, as it stipulates resource allocation based on identified need, dispensing with previously required psychological assessments and diagnoses. This model expects that schools respond to identified need by implementing evidence-based, preventative practices to promote positive student outcomes.

As detailed in the DES Circular 0013/2017, NEPS can support schools to action the Circular. It stipulates that teachers' responses to students' needs "will be informed and assisted by collaboration with ... the school's NEPS' psychologist" (p. 17). It further instructs that schools can seek support and training from NEPS in evidence-based programmes to address student need. Given this context, NEPS can offer a significant contribution within the school system by informing and supporting appropriate intervention, and developing teacher capacity.

Continuing professional development and support

Continuing professional development (CPD) is perceived as essential to enhance teachers' capacity to meet the challenges of expanding fields of knowledge and diverse student populations (William, 2011). An extensive research literature shows that CPD is most effective in improving teachers' practice when it is continuous, practical, closely connected to teachers' classroom lives, suitably supported and fosters teacher collaboration (Cordingley, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Lowrie, 2014; Owen, 2014; The Teaching Council, 2016; Wei et al., 2009).

In the Irish context, the Teaching Council, as the statutory professional standards body for teaching, is developing Cosán, a national framework for teacher CPD, which seeks to promote professional learning as a priority for teachers both for their benefit and that of their students. Cosán aims to create ongoing learning opportunities based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning. Currently, under Rule 58 of the Rules for National Schools, teachers are entitled to Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) following attendance at an approved one-off CPD summer course. During the academic year, NEPS engage in the provision of support and development initiatives, including facilitating group consultation sessions with teachers to explore solutions to school-based problems, and delivering teacher trainings within and across schools.

Programme fidelity and adaptation

In IYTCM programme training, the partnership between the facilitator and teachers seeks to empower teachers to respond effectively to challenges and student need in their classroom contexts (Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). The IYTCM programme is best understood as using a principle-driven framework and flexible delivery strategies to allow for tailored adaptation with high fidelity (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008, 2010; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). According to key researchers, the most effective facilitators are those who retain the core elements of the intervention while bringing their clinical creativity to bear in order to tailor the programme to unique teacher goals (Webster-Stratton & McCoy, 2015; Webster-Stratton et al., 2011). According to Han and Weiss (2005), teachers will only be successful in implementing new practices if they believe doing so will produce desired changes.

Adapting the programme to meet the needs of teachers and students is considered the most important factor in determining intervention use (Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007). A number of research studies have elicited teachers' perceptions of the training strategies [see Table 1] and the approaches employed by the facilitator during IYTCM sessions (Marlow et al., 2015; Reinke et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2011).

Table 1. IYTCM training strategies.

Training Strategy	How is it used?
Vignettes	Over 250 DVD vignettes depicting videotaped modelling of classroom management strategies and teacher-student interactions in a variety of 'real life' classroom situations are available.
Role play	The use of role play during training provides teachers with an opportunity to practice strategies. Teachers adopt the roles of both students and teachers in various scenarios provided by the facilitator.
Use of dialogue and reflection	Meaningful interaction between experience and reflection is facilitated
Emotional regulation	Teachers are provided with methods to "down-regulate" the magnitude of their internal reactions to misbehaviour. They learn to reframe beliefs regarding child behaviour.

The research by Marlow et al. (2015) revealed that many teachers felt the American-based vignettes did not fit the English primary school culture and were dated. The format of the workshops, which require active participation using strategies such as role play, was reported by teachers as challenging and intrusive, particularly in the initial sessions (Marlow et al., 2015; Reinke et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2011). Yet, a number of teachers in Marlow et al.'s (2015) study believed these practice strategies instilled confidence in their ability to incorporate IYTCM into their classroom practice.

In the current study, acquiring teachers' experiences of the training strategies represents a means of gaining insights into their perceptions of the CPD provided by NEPS as IYTCM programme facilitators. In addition, seeking the facilitators' experiences of the CPD may further enlighten our understanding of the approach NEPS employs, and address the dearth of research which incorporates the voice of the facilitator.

IYTCM programme facilitators

Research to date highlights facilitators with psychological qualifications as imperative to appropriate programme adaptation and effectiveness (Baker-Henningham et al., 2009; Reinke et al., 2013; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007; Snyder et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008; Williford & Shelton, 2008). The IYTCM programme is grounded in psychological theory, with the main underlying theoretical background based on cognitive social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), which contends that social learning processes are required to learn new skills and influence practices (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Facilitators in the study by Williford and Shelton (2008) drew on their psychological knowledge to tailor the programme successfully, emphasising specific IYTCM strategies based on the targeted student's behavioural presentation. Similarly, in the study conducted by Baker-Henningham et al. (2009), the facilitators, with a background in psychology, tailored the intervention for students in a Jamaican context, without discarding the key theoretical underpinnings. The alterations included modifying the language used in handouts and adding items relevant to the Jamaican classroom to the functional behaviour checklist to inform behaviour planning.

The authors reported that the quality of training and implementation was critical to intervention success and that more general support would have been insufficient in the Jamaican context. In much of the teachers' feedback data in the IYTCM literature, the educational psychologist (EP) facilitating a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) or group learning situation, which allowed teachers to work together to examine and attempt to resolve common classroom challenges, emerged as important (Hutchings et al., 2013; Marlow et al., 2015; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007). In a study conducted by Marlow et al. (2015), the facilitators were qualified teachers, and some teachers reported feeling that there was a "script" rigidly followed, which could have been more flexible. Such findings indicate that facilitators' qualifications do matter and warrant further investigation in an Irish context to provide an understanding of the potential value NEPS' psychologists can offer to teacher CPD through IYTCM programme facilitation.

Sustained support and development

A number of studies have discovered that additional support provided by the IYTCM facilitator during the implementation intervals between each training workshop, such as additional individual on-site coaching and consultation sessions, is linked to effective programme implementation by teachers working with students with varying needs (for example, Baker-Henningham et al., 2009; Feinberg et al., 2004; Fixsen et al., 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Raver et al., 2008; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007; Williford & Shelton, 2008). In the research, teachers valued these opportunities to discuss strategies, clarify practices and tailor the programme appropriately. Teachers have noted that a concerted effort to maintain the use of the IYTCM strategies, alongside curriculum and other administration duties, is required after the workshops have terminated (Carlson et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). Yet, research to date has not documented any long-term supports provided to teachers utilising the programme beyond the initial training and implementation period. This is significant given that sustained opportunities to reflect on teaching and learning processes are considered central to ensuring responsiveness to emerging classroom needs (Wiliam, 2011).

The current study specifically set out to explore how NEPS' psychologists facilitate teacher CPD through IYTCM intervention training programme delivery in the Irish context, addressing this lacuna in research literature. Gaining such insight sought to determine whether NEPS, through programme facilitation, offers a way of providing successful and appropriate teacher CPD, all of which is timely within the context of the DES Circular 0013/2017 and the current development of Cosán in Ireland.

Methodology

The researcher adopted a constructivist paradigm which assumes that knowledge is socially constructed by those active in the research process (Mertens, 2014). A qualitative research design emerged from the constructivist paradigm. The use of semi-structured interviews, as the primary data collection instrument, allowed for some structure and consistency whilst facilitating spontaneous, rich and contextual accounts from the participants' subjective perspectives (Silverman, 2005). Ethical approval was obtained from the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee. An interview schedule was devised by the researcher and piloted. Data collection lasted from January to April 2016. Informed consent and participants' demographic details were secured. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in the participants' professional environment.

Research participants consisted of Irish primary school teachers and EPs from NEPS. NEPS is organised into eight regions based on geographical location. Each region has an assigned Regional Director, and each EP is assigned a cluster of schools in their region. Teacher participants were recruited with the assistance of a Regional Director who provided a list of schools in one NEPS region who had received IYTCM training. A random sample of six schools was chosen to participate. School principals were requested to disseminate information sheets to trained teachers, inviting their participation in the study. A follow-up visit established the voluntary participation of twelve teachers with at least two years' experience implementing the IYTCM programme [see Table 2].

Table 2. Teacher participant information.

Pseudonym	Gender	School Type	Staff Size	Years using IYTCM	Years of teaching experience	Training Setting*
Sinead	Female	Non-DEIS	8	2	9	Ed. centre
Mary	Female	Non-DEIS	8	2	13	Ed. centre
Laura	Female	Non-DEIS	8	5	30	Ed. centre
Sarah	Female	Non-DEIS	8	5	29	Ed. centre
Helen	Female	DEIS Band 2	13	2	14	Ed. centre
Sean	Male	DEIS Band 2	13	2	11	Ed. centre
Niamh	Female	Non-DEIS	20	8	28	In school
Jessica	Female	DEIS Band 2	17	6	19	In school
Lisa	Female	DEIS Band 2	17	6	15	In school
Fiona	Female	DEIS Band 2	17	6	17	In school
Catherine	Female	DEIS Band 1	22	8	33	In school
Siobhan	Female	DEIS Band 1	22	4	9	In school

* Teachers received training in their schools at whole-school level or in the local Education Centre (Ed. centre) with other schools

Two NEPS' psychologists, a male with 16 years' experience and a female with 21 years' experience, who had delivered the training to the teachers in the same region willingly participated following dissemination of an information sheet and a follow-up phone call [see Table 3].

Table 3. EP participant information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Qualification Level	Years delivering IYTCM	Years' experience as an EP
Kate	Female	51	Master's Degree	10	21
John	Male	44	Doctoral Degree	11	16

The data were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were thematically analysed following the six-stage approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher used qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to assist efficient data management and analysis (Darmody & Byrne, 2006). All relevant segments of data in relation to the research questions were given a code reflecting the original statement as closely as possible. Upon preliminary analysis, 57 initial codes were generated and similar codes were then linked to form categories. Analysing the frequency of references to each category enabled the collation of the categories into subthemes. Further refinement allowed for the emergence of three themes. "Member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) enabled the participants' views of the accuracy of the preliminary analyses. Inter-rater reliability enhanced the credibility of the thematic analyses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The aim of the current study was to explore the views of teachers and EPs of teacher CPD, facilitated by NEPS through IYTCM training delivery.

Findings

Findings indicate that the sustained CPD, facilitated by NEPS during IYTCM training delivery, presents as an effective approach to teacher CPD, and evidences that such service delivery by NEPS is constructive for primary school teachers. Three overarching themes emerged from thematic analysis (see Figure 1), which addressed the research aims. These were: the importance of customising programme delivery; the efficacy of co-constructing individual behaviour plans; and the overall effectiveness of sustained support.



Figure 1. Thematic map of research findings.

The importance of customising programme delivery

The theme of customising programme delivery refers to the responses provided describing how the EP facilitated teacher CPD during IYTCM training delivery, including what was effective about this approach. The theme was divided into two subheadings: the tailoring of training strategies and the tailoring of programme content.

The tailoring of training strategies

All teacher participants considered the EP's capacity to work with them to make the IYTCM training strategies relevant to the Irish context an important factor in facilitating learning and subsequent programme implementation. Laura (teacher) referred to the EP delivering the training in a way that was comprehensible and appropriate:

What he was saying and what we were doing in training made sense to us. I looked forward to our sessions because out of every training day, there was always something that you came away with and said 'that makes sense to me'.

Specifically, during programme training most teachers found engaging in role play challenging. Yet, eight teachers acknowledged that the EP interacted with them in tailoring its use to ensure it was an effective teaching and learning strategy. Sarah (teacher) provided further detail:

After, he would give you specific feedback based on what you said as part of your role. He would develop a chat around it, 'I liked the way you ...', creating this positivity all the time, so even if you felt you made an idiot of yourself, you gained something from it. He encouraged teachers to discuss it and they would ... 'I never would have thought of going at that problem from that perspective'.

Fiona (teacher) highlighted the EP's awareness of group dynamics in using this training strategy, recalling how *"they changed it to smaller group work and it was easier than having to do role playing in a bigger situation. Some people, like me, just aren't comfortable in that situation."* All but one of the participants reported that the scenarios, presented in the vignettes, were old fashioned and not appropriate to the Irish setting. However, half of the teachers reported that the EP, through ongoing interaction and dialogue, helped them to relate the scenarios to their classrooms. This opinion is reflected in Laura's statement (teacher): *"the EP would talk through them with us and we'd all try to make them as interesting and as relevant as possible to our classrooms."*

Both EP participants considered that using role play and presenting vignettes were the most challenging strategies to facilitate during training. According to the EPs, their knowledge of the theory and principles underpinning the IYTCM programme was paramount in allowing them to facilitate programme delivery flexibly without losing the evidence base. This was illustrated by Kate (EP):

if you don't have the background of the theories that support the principles, and are uncomfortable with process and letting stuff emerge, you could stick slavishly to the manual. Basically you do an awful lot of scaffolding (before role plays). With the vignettes, you know the principle that you want to surface ... you build questions around them.

The tailoring of programme content

All of the teachers agreed that EPs' understanding of the classroom environment was instrumental to suitable programme adaptation. Interestingly, all six of the teachers who had received training within their school, at a whole-school level, reflected on how the EP's familiarity with their individual school context enhanced the tailoring of programme delivery. For example, Niamh (teacher) acknowledged that *"he's very familiar with our school ... so he was realistic."* Lisa (teacher) added that the EP's knowledge of the school enhanced his credibility on the ground:

he was an ideal person because he knew the school and we knew him. It's better than random people coming in and trying to put this programme on you, dictating your policy, and you're thinking, 'you don't even know what sort of school we have or anything about us'.

Likewise, one EP, John, felt that his knowledge of the school context enhanced his ability to work with teachers to deliver the programme effectively at a whole-school level:

The schools trust you because you're their psychologist. It's much easier, using lots of practical examples. I have a context to build on. It's useful when you're doing it as a whole school. That's the beauty of psychologists, we know the schools.

Both EPs agreed that training at a whole-school level is preferential to instil the IYTCM programme in a school. Appropriate tailoring was of particular importance during the formulation of individual behaviour plans based on the IYTCM strategies.

The efficacy of co-constructing individual behaviour plans

The co-construction of individual behaviour plans emerged as another strong theme from participants' responses which addressed the research questions seeking to explore how

the EP provided an effective approach to teacher CPD as IYTCM programme facilitator. The theme had two subheadings: working in partnership and the sharing of expertise.

Working in partnership

Devising and formulating individual behaviour plans was reported as challenging by half of the teachers. Specifically, Siobhan (teacher) explained: *“a child could have ten problems, but you have to choose one and deal with that first.”* One EP, John, agreed that *“the biggest problem for teachers is how they go about the behaviour planning.”* Yet, all teacher participants agreed that one of the most beneficial aspects of the IYTCM training was the collaborative nature of the support facilitated by the EP in co-constructing individual behaviour plans. Sinead (teacher) recalled that *“working together on the behaviour plans was definitely the most beneficial part. You were focused on your child and on your issue in your classroom which really helped.”* Laura (teacher) described how the professionals worked in partnership to construct unique plans to meet individual student need:

... you're working as a team, where you sit down with the psychologist and you discuss it. You know you're both working on the same level, you understand each other, and you're working towards the same end result, the better of the child.

All of the teachers reported improvements in inappropriate student behaviours following the professionals working in partnership during behaviour planning, evidencing the co-construction of behaviour plans as an effective aspect of the sustained CPD facilitated by NEPS.

The sharing of expertise

The teachers' descriptions of the CPD during behaviour planning evidenced the EP *“giving away psychology”*. As Kathleen (teacher) explained *“we learned to identify the inappropriate behaviours and then use backward chaining to find the functions or triggers ... and chose three or four targets to work on.”* This practice resulted in the emergence and establishment of a shared understanding between the professionals. Sarah (teacher) recalled that the training *“... gives you an understanding of where they're coming from.”* Furthermore, the sharing of psychological knowledge appeared to have a positive impact on teacher practice in relation to problem-solving around students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Mary (teacher) explained:

it made us more aware of how he works ... some days you'll be like, 'I just want him to do x, y and z,' but you have to see what's triggering this behaviour - are there underlying reasons for this, as opposed to just jumping in.

Overall, the working partnership between the professionals and the sharing of psychological insights during programme delivery enhanced the sustained CPD.

The effectiveness of sustained support

Sustained support emerged as a fundamental theme from participants' responses regarding the EP's delivery of teacher CPD as IYTCM facilitators. The sustained nature of the

support provided by the EP during the training and subsequent implementation periods was highly valued and considered critical to enabling teachers use the intervention to successfully meet student need. Helen (teacher) explained: *“he was available between sessions. If you had any problems you could email him. You’d send your behavioural plans and he’d provide feedback. That contact was great. You need that support.”*

Interestingly, following the termination of the training workshops and implementation intervals, most of the teachers commented favourably on the EP providing “informal” support around IYTCM implementation. During subsequent school visits, the EP was able to review continuing programme use and behaviour plans. This support was described by Sinead (teacher):

when he would call for other children in the school, he nearly knew who all of us had focused our individual behaviour plans on. He would check up on how that child is getting on. ‘Have you found improvement? Have you had difficulties? How’s it going?’

Jessica (teacher) added that *“if we have any questions about it when she’s here, she talks to us or if we need to tweak it for our class or a student.”* However, all participants articulated a desire for more long-term, formal collaborative opportunities to revise the IYTCM strategies and behaviour planning. Both EPs suggested the establishment of *“a community of practice”* whereby they would facilitate teachers assembling *“once a term”* to support long-term programme use. This reflected observations made by all participants on the value of providing opportunities for teacher interactions during training.

Based on analysis of the data gathered, the sustained teacher CPD approach during IYTCM dissemination highlighted the importance and effectiveness of customising programme delivery, co-constructing individual behaviour plans, and providing sustained support.

Discussion

This study sought to explore experiences of teacher CPD, facilitated by NEPS, during IYTCM training delivery. The research questions aimed to investigate how NEPS facilitates the CPD and whether this form of CPD is effective. Findings indicate that the sustained CPD provided by NEPS during the IYTCM intervention training is an effective approach to teacher CPD and educational psychology service delivery.

The first key research finding highlighted the importance of customising training delivery, both in terms of adapting the training strategies and the programme content. Such tailoring by the EP ensured that the training and the programme were appropriate to the Irish context, and to teachers’ school and classroom contexts. In accordance with previous research, the findings indicate that the tailoring of training strategies and programme content enhanced teacher learning (Webster-Stratton et al., 2011) and subsequent programme implementation (Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007).

Specifically, in terms of training strategies, similar to past findings, many participants found engaging in role play challenging (Marlow et al., 2015; Reinke et al., 2013; Snyder et al., 2011) and the vignettes dated and culturally different (Marlow et al., 2015). Yet, teachers acknowledged that, through the sustained CPD delivery, the EPs ensured that the strategies were used in a way that made them practical and relevant to the teachers’

lived experiences in the Irish classroom. EPs appeared to employ their creativity in using the strategies, for example, scaffolding the role plays and relating the vignettes to the teachers' classrooms by facilitating a "community of practice" which involved ongoing dialogue and group problem-solving that was context-sensitive. Such findings are consistent with past research which indicates that CPD is most successful when it fosters teacher collaboration (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; The Teaching Council, 2016; Wei et al., 2009), and that facilitating a group learning situation is an important aspect of IYTCM training (Hutchings et al., 2013; Marlow et al., 2015; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007).

In previous research, the most effective facilitators were those who could deliver the training flexibly while maintaining programme fidelity (Webster-Stratton et al., 2004, 2011; Webster-Stratton & McCoy, 2015). Based on the present study's findings, NEPS' psychologists' in-depth knowledge and understanding of the psychological theoretical underpinnings of the IYTCM programme (for example, Bandura, 1986) was pivotal to adapting training delivery for Irish teachers while satisfying fidelity. This highlights one of the benefits that can accrue from enabling EPs' work as IYTCM facilitators, and echoes previous research findings that facilitators with a background in psychology are uniquely placed to tailor the programme to teacher needs in various cultural contexts, resulting in greater programme use and effectiveness (Baker-Henningham et al., 2009; Reinke et al., 2013; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007; Snyder et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008; Williford & Shelton, 2008). Furthermore, customising the teacher CPD was enhanced by the NEPS' psychologists' understanding and knowledge of school and classroom life (for example, Baker-Henningham et al., 2009).

The NEPS' psychologist familiarity with each school context was considered particularly advantageous in customising the CPD offered during intervention training at a whole-school level. Furthermore, CPD delivered at the whole school level enriched the instilling of the new IYTCM practices. These findings are substantial and align with previous research indicating that CPD is most effective when it relates to broader school reform (Wei et al., 2009).

A significant finding in seeking to explore the effective delivery of teacher CPD was that of the importance of the EP and teachers co-constructing individual behaviour plans. With the sustained, working partnership created by the EP, teachers learned to formulate, implement and revise behaviour plans, thus enabling them to promote positive student behaviour and reduce displays of inappropriate behaviours. This is consistent with the aim of the IYTCM training as outlined by Webster-Stratton et al. (2011), who proposed that the partnership between the facilitator and teachers should seek to empower teachers to respond effectively to classroom challenges and student need. During this co-construction process, the NEPS' psychologists shared their psychological knowledge with the teacher cohort, resulting in greater teacher understanding, capacity and competence to intervene effectively with their students' emotional and behavioural needs.

Given the challenges involved in the effective planning and implementation of behaviour supports, as reported in this study, sustained teacher CPD was considered essential, and this is consistent with past research which found that additional support between IYTCM training workshops was linked with effective intervention implementation (Baker-Henningham et al., 2009; Feinberg et al., 2004; Fixsen et al., 2005; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Raver et al., 2008; Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007; Williford & Shelton, 2008). The current

findings indicate that NEPS' psychologists had the capacity to provide the necessary sustained teacher CPD to support intervention implementation between and following the IYTCM workshops, for example, by email and "informally" during subsequent school visits, and this support was highly appreciated by teachers as it clarified and improved planning and classroom practice.

However, in line with previous research (Carlson et al., 2011; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008), the desire for more structured, long-term teacher CPD beyond the initial workshops and implementation period was highlighted to ensure successful programme maintenance in response to students' evolving needs. As suggested by participants, the establishment of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) facilitated by NEPS' psychologists, would enable teachers to congregate regularly and ensure structured, sustained support. Such communities of practice would provide for teacher dialogue and active engagement, echoing the aim of Cosán's framework for teacher CPD.

Overall, the study's findings are significant in the Irish context as they indicate that the CPD delivered by NEPS, as IYTCM facilitators, is in line with recommended best practice as outlined in research on teacher CPD. In line with this literature, NEPS was considered to provide sustained, meaningful and suitably supported CPD, which are key elements in improving teachers' practice (Cordingley, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Lowrie, 2014; Owen, 2014; The Teaching Council, 2016; Wei et al., 2009).

Study limitations

A number of limitations are noted in this study. While the findings can be used to inform future practice, the design would suggest generalisability of findings is limited to population and geographical location. Results may be confounded by school demographics and EP work practices distinctive to the region in the study. Future research with a larger, more varied group of participants may provide greater variation and depth of findings. In addition, the voluntary, self-selecting nature of participation may have increased the threat of participant bias, and the constructivist paradigm has the potential for researcher bias and social desirability. For a richer data set, the research could include the views and perspectives of additional stakeholders, including school management and Special Needs Assistants. Furthermore, exploring the CPD provided by NEPS during other support and development initiatives may further expand our understandings of the most effective approaches to teacher CPD.

Implications for educational psychology practice

This research presents significant implications and offers innovation for the discipline of educational psychology in Ireland, particularly in the context of the DES Circular 0013/2017 and the development of Cosán. Overall, the study indicates that NEPS' psychologists can provide sustained, meaningful teacher support and development opportunities. In doing so, the psychologists operationalise the NEPS' Model of Service, responding to need and affecting change at the individual and group, as well as systems levels, particularly when CPD is delivered at a whole-school level. The introduction of Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017) has provided greater opportunities for NEPS to engage in support and

development initiatives by instructing that resource allocation is based on identified need, rather than psychological assessment and diagnosis.

In line with this, past research has found that providing teachers with more opportunities to reflect on and enhance their skills is central to effective responsiveness to student need (William, 2011). Interestingly, previous research indicates that teachers are only successful in implementing new practices if they believe in their ability to produce desired changes (Han & Weiss, 2005), and the present study found that teachers' familiarity with their NEPS' psychologist increased the EP's credibility during programme facilitation, and this ultimately enhanced teachers' engagement and impacted positively on intervention implementation. Exploring opportunities to expand NEPS facilitation of teacher CPD thus presents as a valuable and timely endeavour as it is likely to positively impact teacher implementation of evidence-based interventions with resulting positive student outcomes.

The findings of this study may provide helpful insights for educational psychology practice going forward in seeking to offer and facilitate a similar model of teacher CPD, and thus ensure its effectiveness. Firstly, customising intervention training delivery, while maintaining fidelity to the key theoretical underpinnings, is fundamental in equipping teachers to utilise the intervention to best effect in meeting student need. Therefore, in planning teacher CPD, utilising insights of school and classroom life to tailor both the training strategies and content presents as a way of enhancing training events. The current study identified particular advantages in providing teacher CPD at a whole-school level. This finding indicates that the training context matters, and should be an important consideration when planning teacher CPD events.

In delivering CPD which seeks to build teacher capacity in relation to behaviour planning, the EP and teachers need to be enabled to work together to co-construct effective plans that respond to students' needs. The EP sharing psychological knowledge during the CPD further enhances teacher capacity and understanding. Finally, sustained support presents as an essential element in offering CPD to teachers. Such sustained support can be offered both formally and informally subsequent to CPD workshops, for example, using email correspondence, consultations and check-ins during school visits.

Current findings indicate that, for future practice in facilitating IYTCM programme delivery, NEPS may seek to explore and establish ways of facilitating more long-term, structured support to sustain and enhance ongoing intervention use. NEPS may draw on established practices in offering such a support service, for example, utilising the NEPS' group consultation sessions as a structure to facilitate communities of practice, and using the NEPS' consultative problem-solving framework which involves problem identification, problem analysis, implementation planning and review to support teacher practice and intervention use. The potential for NEPS to offer CPD opportunities as summer courses which entitle teachers to EPV may also be explored as an efficient form of intervention dissemination and service delivery. Given its unique position in the Irish education system, NEPS has the capacity to facilitate sustained learning opportunities for teachers beyond the initial summer CPD course. These suggestions may be of significance in guiding and informing practice decisions relating to support and development initiatives within the educational psychology service, as well as within Cosán.

Overall, the study highlights that meaningful and sustained support in school contexts presents as the most effective and, ultimately, efficient form of teacher CPD which can be

effectively facilitated by NEPS. The NEPS' psychologist who appreciates teachers in their professional contexts can join, not as expert, but as co-creator of knowledge-based practice in these IYTCM workshops and communities of practice to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in Irish primary schools.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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