

# Behaviors of Concern to Croatian Primary School Teachers

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the occurrence of problem behaviors in primary classrooms in the Republic of Croatia and to investigate teachers' level of concern and the support needed to address these behaviors. Approximately 8% of primary school teachers across Croatia completed a 20-item survey to indicate the occurrence of types of problem behaviors (i.e., distractibility, disobedience, aggression, delinquency) in their classrooms, separately for boys and girls. Level of concern for the problem behavior (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *extremely*) and need for support to address the misbehavior (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *a lot of support*) were also rated separately by student gender. Results indicated that teachers rated the occurrence of problem behaviors more frequently for boys than girls across all dimensions of problem behavior, with distractibility reported as the most frequently occurring problem both for boys and for girls. Teachers also reported significantly higher levels of concern and greater need of support for the behavior of boys in comparison to girls across the dimensions of distractibility, disobedience and aggression. Teachers reported significantly higher levels of concern than their need for support to address behaviors of distractibility and disobedience. Larger class size was associated with heightened levels of concern and support for a number of the problem behavior dimensions. Implications for future practice are recommended.

*Key Words.* Problem Behavior, Teacher Concerns, Primary Schools

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## BEHAVIORS OF CONCERN TO CROATIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Preventative practices and early intervention are standards of best practice in the field of special and general education. This is especially true when working with young children with behavioral challenges as problem behaviors left unchecked can intensify with age and result in the future diagnosis of an emotional/behavioral disability (Hester et al., 2004). However, although research indicates that

interventions targeting young students with problem behavior lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Beard & Sugai, 2004; Riney & Bullock, 2012), teachers need the necessary skills to effectively identify and target those early behaviors for classroom intervention. To prepare teachers for this task requires a clear understanding of the types of problem behaviors causing concern for those who work with children in the early grades.

It is apparent that teachers of young children have ample opportunity to observe problem behavior in their classrooms. For example, in the United States it is estimated that 10% to 25% of young children display significant levels of problem behavior (Campbell, 1995; Graves, Blake, & Kim, 2012; Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012; Lavigne et al., 1996; Qu & Kaiser, 2003; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). In Australia, estimates of emotional and behavioral problems among primary students range from 6% to 10% (Beaman, Wheldall, & Kemp, 2007; McLeod & McKinnon, 2007), and in southwest Ireland researchers report upwards of 26% of students in the earliest grades demonstrate significant social-emotional and behavioral problems (Hyland, Ní Mháille, Lodge, & McGilloway, 2014). In the Republic of Croatia the levels of problem behavior in classrooms are less clear. The scant research that does exist suggests that Croatian primary school teachers may view student behavior positively and regard problem behaviors as not disruptive for their daily teaching (Kerestes, 2006; Vidic, 2010). Nonetheless, the Croatian education system does identify and serve students with behavioral disabilities and therefore there are opportunities for early intervention efforts related to student behavior. Yet preparing teachers to intervene early requires an understanding of the types of problem behaviors they will encounter in their classrooms. In the present investigation we conducted a nationwide study to examine the types of problem behaviors that occur in primary school classrooms in the Republic of Croatia and the level of concern and support primary school teachers need to address these behaviors. Contextual information is provided in the following sections to assist readers in better understanding the Croatian elementary school system, teacher preparation as it relates to classroom management and services for students with behavioral disabilities. This information is helpful in understanding the implications of the results of this investigation.

### **The Elementary School System in the Republic of Croatia**

Elementary education in the Republic of Croatia is compulsory and free for all children in grades one through eight between the ages of six and fifteen (The Primary and Secondary School Education Act, 2008). It is organized in three educational phases based on the developmental ages of students (National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education, 2010). These phases correspond with grades 1 - 4, 5 - 6, and 7 - 8. The first phase referred to in this paper as the primary level is organized to capitalize on early building of teacher-student relationships as students remain with one teacher throughout the primary grades. These primary school teachers spend from 4 to 6 hours of instruction per day with their class and follow these students through the first four years of formal schooling,

providing ample opportunity to develop strong teacher-student bonds.

Preschool for children younger than five years of age is not compulsory, yet 86% of Croatian children attend some form of preschool programming. In the year before they start formal elementary school, a limited preschool or kindergarten experience becomes mandatory with 99.6% of children attending (Preschool Education in the Republic of Croatia, 2011). As the focus of preschool and kindergarten is child centered on social and emotional development, entrance to grade one is typically the child's first contact with the more formal learning environment. During the first year of primary school, the teacher's role includes both instruction in academic subjects and responding to student behavior. In this first year of schooling the teacher is responsible for recognizing the need for and implementing prevention practices and early intervention.

### **Teacher Preparation in the Republic of Croatia**

The teacher education system in the Republic of Croatia has been in transition due to vast political and economic changes over the last 25 years as the country has moved from the ex-Yugoslavian state to its recent admittance to the European Union in 2014. During this time, the changing, yet ever increasing standards for elementary teacher certification in Croatia have transitioned from two, then four years of required university coursework in an approved education preparation program to the current standard for the requirement of a masters degree in education for teacher certification (Zrilić, 2012). However, according to current master level program competencies in teacher preparation, future teachers still have no required coursework related to classroom management and receive only one mandatory course in inclusive education to address the needs of students with disabilities (including those with behavioral disabilities). University students in teaching programs and preschool teachers generally report insufficient competencies for teaching in inclusive settings (Skočić Mihić, 2011; Skočić Mihić et al., 2014; Skočić Mihić, Lončarić, & Pinoza Kukurin, 2009), which by definition include students with behavioral disabilities.

Challenges for teacher education in the Republic of Croatia include a lack of applied research in schools as well as insufficient preparation of pre-service teachers regarding the practical knowledge and skills needed to cope with everyday school situations. Indeed, Croatian teachers report feeling unprepared for the challenges of teaching when they enter the classroom for the first time (Pavin & Vizek-Vidović, 2004). These teachers are not alone as teachers from many countries report a lack of confidence in their ability to manage the classroom when they enter the profession of teaching (see Martin, Linfoot,

& Stephenson, 1999; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Although this problem is not unique to Croatia, it highlights the importance of gaining a clear picture of the challenges Croatian teachers face in the classroom so as to better support them with pre-service and in-service training targeted to their needs.

### Students with Behavioral Disabilities

The term *children and youth at risk* is used in Croatia as a universal term for children and young people exhibiting significant behavioral problems (Bašić, Ferić, & Kranželić, 2001). Although accurate statistics for the exact number of students that have significant behavioral problems do not currently exist, estimates of children and youth at *high risk* or *very high risk* for behavioral disabilities in Croatia have been noted as 15% and 10%, respectively (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007).

The Croatian scientific and vocational approach to educating students with behavioral disabilities once they are identified is strongly aimed at prevention of future problems (Bašić, 2009). The continuum of services for these students in the general elementary school environment includes (a) instruction from expert associates who have expertise in addressing problem behavior (i.e., social educators) provided directly to students with disabilities and consultation services provided to their teachers and their parents (Uzelac & Bouillet, 2008a), (b) treatment services provided directly to the student in an extended day program within the school setting to target decreasing academic failure and improving problematic behaviors (Uzelac & Bouillet, 2008b), and (c) after school programs at behaviorally focused treatment centers providing academic and behavioral support directly to the students.

Nationally, given the high estimates of students at risk for developing behavioral disabilities, the lack of required coursework in teacher preparation programs to address problem behavior and the scant research examining problem behavior in schools, we set out to investigate behaviors of concern to primary school teachers across the Republic of Croatia. Particularly with the lack of nationwide coverage in previous participant sampling, we deemed it important to adapt a measure that would allow for comparisons with results from other countries. The purpose of the present investigation was to identify teachers' perceptions of the occurrence of problem behaviors in their classrooms in order to determine the types of problem behaviors encountered by primary school teachers across Croatia. In addition, we examined the level of concern teachers had about the problem behaviors occurring in their classrooms as well as their perceptions regarding their needs for support to address the problem behaviors they encountered. Finally, teacher demographics were examined as possible correlates of teachers' concerns and need for support.

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 706 teachers serving students in grades one through four were recruited from 73 primary schools across the Republic of Croatia (94.6% female, 3.5% male and 1.8% not reported). Teachers were asked to provide background information about their age, years of experience, class size and teaching role (position). The sample consisted of classroom teachers (91%), substitute teachers (4%), teachers in afterschool programs (4%) and assistants in teaching (1%). The average class size was 17.75 ( $SD = 6.89$ ) pupils and the average school size was 220.24 ( $SD = 110.22$ ) pupils. The mean age of respondents was approximately 45 years ( $SD = 9.76$ ) and average teaching experience was 20 years ( $SD = 10.7$ ).

### Measures

**The Child Behavior Survey.** Two sections of the Child Behavior Survey (Martin et al., 1999) were used in this study to assess the occurrence of types of problem behavior, the level of teachers' concern about those behaviors and the support needed by teachers to address the behaviors. Section I included questions about demographic information related to teaching experience and current classroom setting. In Section II teachers were provided a list of 20 problem behaviors and identified whether or not the behavior occurred within their current classrooms, separately for boys and girls using a 2-point scale (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*). For each item that was reported as occurring in the classroom, teachers then used four-point scales to rate level of concern for the problem behavior (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *extremely*) and need for support to address the misbehavior (1 = *not at all* to 4 = *a lot of support*), separately for boys and girls. The survey yielded subscales composed of five items for Distractibility (e.g., "doesn't remain on-task for a reasonable time"), four items for Disobedience (e.g., "does not follow established class rules"), five items for Aggression (e.g., "expresses anger inappropriately"), and six items for Delinquency (e.g., "lies"). Prior research findings yielded adequate internal consistency for the subscales with Cronbach's alphas of .88 for Distractibility, .81 for Disobedience, .92 for Aggression and .79 for Delinquency (Martin et al., 1999). In the present study composite scores for subscales were calculated as the mean scores (sum of subscale item scores divided by number of items in subscales). Reliability coefficients together with mean scores of subscales, separately for boys and girls, are presented in Table 1.

The survey was translated from English to Croatian by a team of educational specialists, including school psychologists with expertise in behavior and language experts in English and Croatian. The demographics section of the original survey was slightly modified to reflect teaching regulations and current practices in Croatian

Table 1  
 Within-Group Comparison of Mean Scores for Occurrence by Student Gender

	Subscale occurrence	N	$\alpha_b/\alpha_g$	Boys mean (SD)	Girls mean (SD)	Wilcoxon Z
1.	Distractibility	5	.82/.77	.65 (.36)	.36 (.34)	14.37**
2.	Disobedience	4	.72/.67	.42 (.36)	.18 (.27)	14.54**
3.	Aggression	5	.74/.67	.29 (.30)	.08 (.17)	14.10**
4.	Delinquency	6	.66/.58	.14 (.18)	.06 (.13)	9.43**

Notes.  $\alpha_b/\alpha_g$  = Chronbach's alpha for subscales for boys/girls.

\*\* $p < .001$ .

schools (e.g., examples of teaching qualifications; constellation of grade levels).

### Procedure

A national database of statistics for primary schools in Croatia was used to select a stratified sample of two Croatian statistical regions (36% Coastal and 64% Continental region of Croatia) representative of approximately 10% of primary school teachers across Croatia ( $n = 955$ ). Once schools were randomly selected, principals of these schools were sent a letter of invitation, a copy of the questionnaire, and a statement of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport's approval for the study via email. Principals were then telephoned and invited to participate in the study. Most (74 of 83) principals initially approached agreed to participate in the study. Questionnaires were then sent by mail and were administered by school staff instructed to recruit participants with different levels of teaching experience. Instructions for obtaining participants' informed consent and for completing questionnaires were provided to each participant. Of the 955 primary school teachers invited to participate in the study, 706 (74%) completed and returned the surveys. This response rate represents approximately 8% of all primary teachers in the Republic of Croatia. The time to complete questionnaires was approximately 20-25 minutes.

### RESULTS

Mean teacher ratings for the occurrence of problem behavior are presented in Table 1. All subscales with the exception of the Delinquency subscale were found to demonstrate acceptable internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, with reliabilities higher for ratings of boys than girls. It can be noted that some items (3 out of 6 items) in the Delinquency-Occurrence subscale had very low mean scores and variability indicating low occurrence of such behaviors in this sample, thus resulting in lower indicators of reliability for the Occurrence subscale for Delinquency.

In the present investigation a significance level of  $p < .01$  was set across all analyses in order to decrease the

likelihood of type I errors when interpreting results. A paired samples Wilcoxon test was used to test differences between teacher ratings of boys and girls. As can be seen, boys were rated significantly higher than girls across all problem behavior subscales with regard to occurrence of misbehavior. Teachers reported the highest occurrence of problem behavior for both boys and girls as distractibility, followed by disobedience, then aggression, followed by delinquency.

Mean ratings for individual items are presented in Table 2. Teachers consistently rated boys higher than girls on all problem behaviors with regard to the occurrence, concern for the behavior, and support needed to address the behavior. Teachers indicated two items in the Distractibility subscale, "inability to remain on-task for a reasonable time" and "distractibility/not listening", as the most frequently occurring of all problem behaviors. These behaviors held high rank for teacher concern and need for support for both boys and girls, with the addition of high ratings for "excessive demands for teacher attention/not working independently" for girls. Within the Disobedience subscale the highest ratings across occurrence, level of concern and needed support were for problems with "following established class rules" for boys and "not getting along well with other children" for girls. For the Aggression subscale teachers reported greater occurrence, concern and needed support for girls and boys for "inappropriate expression of anger" with high and similar concern and need for support for boys with regard to "physically aggressive with others/bullies". For both groups, "lies" was the most problematic behavior related to the Delinquency subscale.

To investigate the nature of differences related to teachers' ratings, a factorial ANOVA using a within subjects design ( $2 \times 2$ ) was conducted to test for differences on two teacher report measures (concern for problem behavior and level of support needed to address problem behavior) and gender (reports for boys and for girls). The main effects of teachers' perceptions of concern versus needed support and of ratings for boys versus girls as well as interaction effects

Table 2  
Means for Problem Behavior Items by Gender

Subscale items	Occurrence		Concern		Support	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>DISTRACTIBILITY</b>						
Demands must be met immediately/cannot wait for attention	.55	.28	2.04	1.66	1.80	1.52
Disrupts the activities of others	.69	.32	2.37	1.72	2.09	1.57
Doesn't remain on-task for a reasonable time	<b>.75</b>	<b>.47</b>	2.40	1.92	2.12	<b>1.76</b>
Excessive demands for teacher's attention/doesn't work independently	.53	.33	2.22	1.81	2.04	1.71
Distractibility or attention span a problem/does not listen	.74	.43	<b>2.42</b>	<b>1.94</b>	<b>2.13</b>	1.73
<b>DISOBEDIENCE</b>						
Argues when reprimanded or corrected	.37	.14	2.07	1.49	1.88	1.44
Does not get along well with other children	.45	<b>.24</b>	2.14	<b>1.72</b>	1.99	<b>1.60</b>
Refuses to obey teacher-imposed rules	.31	.14	1.95	1.45	1.78	1.38
Does not follow established class rules	<b>.59</b>	.21	<b>2.26</b>	1.57	<b>2.00</b>	1.46
<b>AGGRESSION</b>						
Expresses anger inappropriately	<b>.49</b>	<b>.17</b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>1.56</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>1.47</b>
Is physically aggressive with others/bullies	.34	.07	<b>2.23</b>	1.35	<b>2.13</b>	1.33
Damages others' property	.12	.03	1.58	1.19	1.53	1.17
Uses obscene language or gestures	.42	.12	2.05	1.40	1.82	1.36
Breaks things/damages others' property	.08	.02	1.46	1.14	1.39	1.12
<b>DELINQUENCY</b>						
Runs away from school or classroom	.04	.01	1.30	1.12	1.32	1.13
Steals	.05	.04	1.32	1.22	1.29	1.17
Lies	<b>.43</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>2.12</b>	<b>1.60</b>	1.85	<b>1.48</b>
Engages in inappropriate sexual behavior	.05	.01	1.32	1.14	1.30	1.14
Is verbally aggressive with others	.39	.15	2.10	1.52	<b>1.90</b>	1.42
Ignores the feelings of others	.34	.14	2.04	1.46	1.85	1.42

Note: The highest arithmetical means are set in **bold**.

between type of measure and student gender and accompanying effect sizes are presented in Table 3.

As can be seen from Table 3, a significant main effect was found for teachers' ratings of concern and needed

support for the Distractibility and Disobedience subscales, indicating greater concern about these types of behaviors than need for support to deal with them. The magnitudes of these differences, as indicated by partial

Table 3  
Teachers' Perceptions of Concern and Support Needed for Problem Behaviors with Gender Differences

Subscale	M (SD)				df	F (partial eta squared)		
	Concern		Support			Gender	Measure	Interaction
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
Distractibility	2.12 (.75)	1.66 (.67)	1.91 (.83)	1.54 (.68)	(1,221)	74.17** (.25)	48.72** (.18)	8.37** (.04)
Disobedience	1.76 (.75)	1.40 (.61)	1.63 (.74)	1.34 (.56)	(1,217)	47.04** (.18)	27.30** (.11)	10.32* (.05)
Aggression	1.53 (.69)	1.25 (.54)	1.48 (.66)	1.23 (.55)	(1,199)	41.99** (.17)	4.80 (.02)	4.37 (.02)
Delinquency	1.29 (.50)	1.22 (.50)	1.27 (.53)	1.20 (.51)	(1,199)	6.83 (.03)	1.53 (.01)	0.33 (.00)

\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 4  
Correlation between Subscales and Teacher Demographics

Teacher demographics	Distractibility		Disobedience		Aggression		Delinquency									
	C <sub>boy/girl</sub>	S <sub>boy/girl</sub>														
Gender (O=male, 1 female)	.15*	.12	.11	.07	.19*	.09	.14	.05	.15	.07	.10	.04	.10	.09	.06	.04
Years of teaching experience	-.03	-.10	.03	-.08	.04	-.05	.08	-.07	.12	-.06	.10	-.09	-.01	-.05	.03	-.12
Class size	.21*	.16*	.13	.16*	.13	.13	.11	.16*	.19*	.19*	.13	.19*	.19*	.13	.16*	.11
Classroom placement (O=main, 1=afterschool)	.12	.14	.09	.06	.05	.07	-.01	.08	.06	.17*	.02	.16	.10	.08	.12	.10
Years with students (1 to 4 years)	-.04	.01	.06	.08	.05	.06	.10	.08	-.04	.03	.01	.06	.02	.05	.05	.05

C- Teacher Concern, S- Support Needed, \*  $p < .01$ .

eta squared, are noted as large and medium, respectively. There were no significant main effects for the Aggression and Delinquency subscales, indicating teachers reported similar levels of concern and needed support for these types of problem behaviors. The main effect for gender was significant for the Distractibility, Disobedience and Aggression subscales, with teachers reporting significantly higher levels of concern and needed support for the problem behaviors of boys in comparison to girls. Further, the magnitude of the effect sizes for these differences were in the large range, indicating a practical significance of the results in addition to the statistical significance. Although ratings of boys were higher than girls for Delinquency, the difference was not significant. Finally, interaction effects were found between type of measure and student gender for the Distractibility and Disobedience subscales, however, because effect sizes for these interactions were relatively small (i.e., .04, .05, respectively), interpretations of these interactions were deemed inappropriate.

Pearson product moment correlations were conducted in order to determine whether teacher demographic variables were associated with their ratings of concern and needed support across the four subscales of problem behavior. As shown in Table 4, teacher gender was significantly correlated with teachers' concern for the problem behaviors of distractibility and disobedience, with female teachers associated with higher ratings on these subscales. Class size (number of children in classroom) had the greatest number of significant correlations, although all were relatively small in size ranging from .16 to .21. Class size was positively associated with teacher concern for distractibility and aggression on their ratings of both boys and girls. Class size also was positively associated with teachers' concern for and support needed to address

delinquency problems for boys and support needed to address distractibility, disobedience and aggression for girls. Classroom placement in afterschool programs was significantly correlated with teacher's concern for aggression for girls, but not for any of the other subscales. Teachers' experience was not significantly correlated with any of the problem behavior variables.

## DISCUSSION

The current results suggest that Croatian primary school teachers do encounter students with problem behaviors, especially when the nature of the behavior is distractible or disobedient and the students are boys. Moreover, these teachers are concerned about a range of problem behaviors as can be seen in the findings that 14 out of 20 behaviors for boys had mean ratings above 2 (i.e., *somewhat concerned*). It also should be noted that while some behaviors received relatively low ratings for occurrence, they were still reported as behaviors of concern to their teachers (e.g., physical and verbal aggression). In addition, although teachers generally reported less need for support to address problem behavior than their level of concern about such behavior, need for support was still indicated for a number of the behaviors of boys. That is, four of the problems of distractibility, as well as problems with not following rules, physical aggression and inappropriate expression of anger received mean ratings above 2. These findings suggest that Croatian primary school teachers do want some level of support to address problems related to distractibility, disobedience and aggression in their classrooms.

The findings of the current study extend previous research in that they represent the views of approximately 8% of all primary school teachers across the Republic of Croatia and provide insight about the nature of problem

behaviors exhibited in primary classrooms for boys and for girls at a national level. These results build upon prior descriptions of problem behavior found in more localized studies with Croatian children and youth. For example, Keresteš (2006) investigated teacher reports of problem behavior among primary school teachers in Krapina-Zagorje County. As with the current findings, she found that teachers reported boys as exhibiting more problems than girls across problem behavior type and that difficulties with attention and hyperactivity (similar to distractibility in this study) were the most prevalent of the behavior problems for both boys and girls. Ricijaš, Krajcer, and Bouillet (2010) examined risk behavior among Croatian high school students in the capitol city of Zagreb and found that adolescents self-reported more problems with apathy and distractibility than other types of problems. Gender differences also were noted for aggression with adolescent boys reporting higher levels of aggressive behavior than adolescent girls.

Although within country comparisons cannot be made for all findings from the present study, comparisons can be made about the nature of teacher concern for problem behaviors and the level of support needed to deal with those problems with reports from elsewhere. Specifically, Stephenson, Linfoot, and Martin (2000) used the Child Behavior Survey (Martin et al., 1999), as was used in the present investigation, to examine the views of primary school teachers in Australia regarding their level of concern about problem behaviors and their need for support to address those problems. As with the present investigation, Stephenson et al. (2000) found that the Australian teachers reported greatest concern about behaviors related to distractibility, followed by disobedience, then aggression and finally, delinquency. Moreover, as with the current study, distractibility was noted as the area of greatest need for teacher support to address the problem. However, unlike our findings which replicated the pattern for order of ranking for behaviors of concern, teachers from Australia noted aggression as the second highest area of need for support, followed by disobedience, and then delinquency. It should be noted that teachers in the Stephenson et al. investigation responded to the survey items in terms of their entire class while teachers in the present investigation were asked to rate items separately for boys and girls.

It is interesting to note that the concern for distractibility and disobedience was greater than the needed support for those behaviors. Stephenson et al. (2000) found a similar pattern among Australian teachers. One possible reason for lower scores on needed support to deal with the problem behaviors is the possibility that teachers gave socially desirable answers thinking that indicating a higher need for support would reflect negatively and relay lower competencies for coping with problem behaviors. Keresteš (2006) suggested a similar explanation for her findings that problem behaviors presented low or no

problem for elementary teachers in Croatia in comparison to Greek and Australian teachers. Greater concern for distractibility and disobedience than need for support to address those behaviors also could be related to the teachers' perception of the availability of support. It could be that teachers already access support to address these behaviors or that the support that is available has not proven helpful in the past or is not provided in a format that teachers feel confident in using.

Teacher concern and needed support was evidently not related with years of teaching experience or number of years teaching the same group of children. Instead, class size was the demographic most predominately associated with teachers' concern and needed support for just over half of the ratings of problem behaviors. Although this finding is not surprising, it is interesting given that previous research using the same scale did not find significant associations with class size, even when the average class size was 25 students in comparison to 17 students in the present study (see Stephenson et al., 2000). It may be that the Australian teachers had more preparation in classroom management to respond to the behavior of students in larger groups than Croatian teachers.

## LIMITATIONS

Although the results of this study go some distance in presenting a national picture of teachers' perceptions related to problem behaviors in primary classrooms across the Republic of Croatia, some limitations should be considered for future investigations. First, this study provides information from one point in time rather than examining how teachers' perceptions of behavior may change over time. The practice of teachers staying with the same students for the first four years of schooling allows a unique opportunity to examine changes in teacher perception. A longitudinal investigation would yield a richer view of the nature of how teachers perceive their students' behavior with ongoing interaction over time. A second limitation of this study is that teachers were not asked about the nature of the support they would like to receive to assist them in addressing the problem behaviors of their students. Although the present study provides a picture of the types of behaviors to be targeted for support, teacher preferences for the delivery method of that support (e.g., professional development opportunities, direct in-class support) were not identified. Such information would be beneficial for training purposes at both the pre-service and in-service levels of teacher preparation.

## FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that primary school teachers in the Republic of Croatia have the opportunity to provide a useful point of entry for intervention to address problem behaviors in the early

years. The school environment and experience are important predictors of student attachment to school (Bouillet, 2011) and Croatian primary teachers have four years with their students to build these attachments. This is important because students who have strong attachments to school are more likely to have stronger academic success and less likely to develop behavior problems at school. Conversely, it is well established that significant problem behaviors in early grades lead to poor outcomes in adolescence and beyond (Montague, Enders, & Castro, 2005). Thus, it is imperative that teachers who identify students with problem behaviors in their classrooms and report concern for and a need of support to address those behaviors be provided the necessary tools to achieve early and positive change. One such approach noted to be a vital component of early intervention for problem behavior is the implementation of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) (Riney & Bullock, 2012).

School-wide PBS can be used to systematically and directly address the behaviors of most concern to classroom teachers in ways that are likely to result in positive behavior change. School-wide PBS utilizes a 3-tier systems approach for establishing environments that support *all* students in the development of positive behaviors (Sugai, O'Keeffe, & Fallon, 2012). While this model has gained wide acceptance and implementation in thousands of schools across the United States as the research base on its effectiveness in reducing problem behavior continues to grow (e.g., Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010), it is less practiced among education professionals in other countries, including the Republic of Croatia. Zrilić (2011) recommends that to prevent school behavior problems such as avoiding school and delinquency calls for the transformation of teacher preparation programs to ensure a level of competency of teachers for creating positive classroom and school climates. As school-wide PBS practices implemented in elementary schools have been shown to significantly reduce the development of chronic problem behaviors, it seems a logical selection for education professionals in Croatia to explore these proactive methods to support teachers in fostering positive behavior for all.

### CONCLUSION

For those working to support students with longstanding problem behaviors, the importance of understanding teachers' perceptions regarding concerns about and need for support to address problem behaviors cannot be understated, especially in the early grades when teachers have the potential to evoke great change for their students. The findings of the present study provide a view of the perceptions of primary school teachers across the Republic of Croatia and suggest that these teachers do encounter problem behaviors in their classrooms which concern them and for which they need support. In order to build safe and effective learning environments for all children, teachers'

concerns and needs in these areas should be addressed. Ultimately, teachers should enter the profession of teaching with sufficient training to prepare them to address the types of behavioral challenges they will likely face and receive ongoing support throughout their careers through systems of support such as those available through school-wide PBS.

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- class teacher
- a substitute for a classroom teacher
- teacher in afterschool programs
- assistants in teaching

What is your highest teaching qualification?

- 2 year professional study program
- 4 years professional study program
- 4 years university study program
- 5 years university study program

What grade(s) do you teach?

- Year One
- Year Two
- Year Three
- Year Four

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## Appendix

### CHILD BEHAVIOR SURVEY (ADAPTED FROM MARTIN, LINFOOT, & STEPHENSON, 1999)

#### Demographic Information

Gender (please tick one)  Male  Female

How old are you? \_\_\_Yrs

How many years have you been teaching? \_\_\_

How many children are in your class? \_\_\_

What is your position in school? (please tick highest)

**SECTION ONE- BOYS**

In this section we would like to know about the types of boys' behaviours in your classroom that may prove more difficult to manage. In first column we would like you to circle **YES** if the behaviour does occur in your classroom, or **NO** if does not. For each question we would like you to circle the number in Column A which describes **how concerned** you are about that particular behaviour. In Column B we would like you to circle the number which indicates **the amount of additional support** you might need in dealing with that particular behaviour.

	Does this behaviour occur among boys in your classroom?		A: My level of concern				B: Support needed			
			Not at all	Some what	Quite	Extremely	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Demands must be met immediately/cannot wait for attention	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Disrupts the activities of others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Doesn't remain on-task for a reasonable time	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Excessive demands for teacher's attention/doesn't work independently	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Distractibility or attention span a problem/does not listen independently	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Argues when reprimanded or corrected	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Runs away from school or classroom	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Ignores the feelings of others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Does not get along well with other children	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Does not follow established class rules	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Expresses anger inappropriately	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Is physically aggressive with others/bullies	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Damages others' property	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Engages in inappropriate sexual behaviour	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Uses obscene language or gestures	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Steals	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Refuses to obey teacher-imposed rules	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Is verbally aggressive with others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lies	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Breaks things/damages others' property	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

**SECTION TWO – GIRLS**

In this section we would like to know about the types of girls' behaviours in your classroom that may prove more difficult to manage. In first column we would like you to circle **YES** if the behaviour does occur in your classroom, or **NO** if does not. For each question we would like you to circle the number in Column A which describes **how concerned** you are about that particular behaviour. In Column B we would like you to circle the number which indicates **the amount of additional support** you might need in dealing with that particular behaviour.

	Does this behaviour occur among girls in you classroom?		A: My level of concern				B: Support needed			
			Not at all	Some what	Quite	Extremely	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Demands must be met immediately/cannot wait for attention	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Disrupts the activities of others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Doesn't remain on-task for a reasonable time	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Excessive demands for teacher's attention/doesn't work independently	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Distractibility or attention span a problem/does not listen independently	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Argues when reprimanded or corrected	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Runs away from school or classroom	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Ignores the feelings of others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Does not get along well with other children	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Does not follow established class rules	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Expresses anger inappropriately	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Is physically aggressive with others/bullies	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Damages others' property	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Engages in inappropriate sexual behaviour	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Uses obscene language or gestures	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Steals	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Refuses to obey teacher-imposed rules	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Is verbally aggressive with others	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Lies	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Breaks things/damages others' property	NO	YES	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4