

How safe is your school?

Promoting and providing a supportive learning environment in which all students can expect to feel safe is an essential function of all schools. Students have a fundamental right to learn in a safe, supported environment and to be treated with respect.

Nick Burnett reports on his time as a Principal in the UK and the impact that the introduction of Team-Teach had within his school, the development of Team-Teach.

Addington School

During my time as the Principal of one of the largest Special Schools in the UK, catering for 210 pupils aged 2-19 with a wide range of disabilities, it was our decision to implement the Team-Teach approach to managing behaviour across the school that had a significant impact in leading to the 'OfSTED' accolade of being 'a very good school with some features of excellence.'

The decision to move to Team-Teach was taken soon after my arrival at Addington School when I found the current approach was limited to a small number of people and was unable to meet the needs of an increasingly complex and challenging group of pupils, leaving pupils and staff feeling anxious and worried about the behaviour they were observing. A Deputy Principal and another very experienced teacher attended the 12 hour course after discussions with a newly appointed teacher who was already trained as an Intermediate Tutor in Team-Teach. The approach fitted extremely well with the new Leadership and Management Teams desire for any behaviour management approach to focus on positive outcomes.

Over a period of 4 years, the training of 3 staff as Advanced Instructors and 1 member of staff as an Intermediate Tutor meant that the 100 staff were all trained in Team-Teach including all support and administration staff. Not only were staff much more confident in their ability to handle increasingly complex pupil behaviour but it also ensured that staff and pupils all felt much more confident in providing a safe and supported environment where all were treated with respect. What is also important to note is that Addington trainers were in increasing demand to train staff from neighbouring mainstream schools, the District, and Family and Community Services and had also assisted a Team-Teach Principal Lead Tutor in delivering training to parents.

What is Team-Teach?

Team-Teach is training in positive handling strategies through a whole setting holistic approach to managing difficult, disturbing and sometimes dangerous behaviour. Team-Teach is the largest provider of training for mainstream, special, child and increasingly adult services in the UK and is accredited by the British Institute of Learning Difficulties and affiliated to the National Control and

Restraint (General Services) Association. There are over 1,500 tutors having taught between them over 400,000 people principally across a wide range of care, education and health service settings, promoting a multi-disciplinary approach between education, social services and health.

The training has evolved from a residential care, education and health background working with service users with a variety of emotional, social, behavioural, learning, communication and medical needs.

Team-Teach has been established in the UK since 1997. Its origins go back to a trip undertaken in 1996 by George Matthews, an experienced teacher and deputy head, to the USA to study techniques for managing aggression and violence in adults and children. The trip was part funded by a Churchill Fellowship and highlighted the fact that none of the programmes at that time had been specifically developed for use with children. As is stated in the *Team-Teach Workbook*: "As a teacher George was keen to help staff to develop the diversion, defusion and de-escalation skills which can allow 95% of situation to be resolved without the need for physical intervention." Team-Teach was the result of his work with his colleagues.

Team-Teach procedures revolve around three key areas: risk assessments, incident reports and behaviour support plans. Risk assessment allows staff at the school to form a collective view about the current state of each child and to help identify possible causes and solutions. As the *Handbook* states: "Where the risks concerning a particular individual are foreseeable there is a requirement for a fully documented risk assessment which outlines the risk and gives details of planned and agreed preventative strategies."

With its emphasis on de-escalation much of Team-Teach's training focuses on the verbal and non-verbal skills practitioners need to avoid situations spiralling out of control. These include posture, awareness of space, paraverbal skills – such as the use of tone, pace and volume, and the fostering of a culture in which staff work as a team, readily accepting help from other members of staff. An important part of the Team-Teach programme is help scripts aimed at defusing situation through the use of carefully scripted exchanges. These can play a part in calming a child down but also in signalling support or relief for a fellow member of staff when a change of face might help resolve a situation before it escalates further.

Of course there remains the five per cent of incidents where physical intervention may become necessary. The 'duty of care' element applicable in all states identifies that to 'do nothing' is not an option. If someone is going to get hurt, or there is a likelihood of severe damage to property or the pupil is severely disrupting the class there is an expectation that a teacher has a duty of care and if they do not take 'reasonable' steps to fulfil this duty they may be judged to be negligent. Even in these circumstances Team-Teach has prescribed procedures with stress placed on using the least intrusive intervention likely to be successful.

Training options include a 6 hour Foundation (Low Risk), a 12 hour Basic (Medium Risk) and advanced modules as required by an audited risk assessment. Following successful completion of the Basic course, individuals can apply for tutor “Train the Trainers” courses which will qualify them to provide 6 & 12 hour courses “in house” for employees for whom their employer has a Health & Safety responsibility. Trainers are provided with a range of supporting materials including presentations and supporting video clips of all the relevant elements of the course.

Research Evidence (*Portsmouth University, April 2004*)

Any approach worth pursuing needs to be fully researched and a summary of the research undertaken by Portsmouth University is available from the web-site. Below are a couple of quotes from the research:

‘Seventeen Local Authority officers indicated their belief that Team Teach could make a positive contribution to:

- *the feelings of safety experienced by young people and staff in services;*
- *staff confidence in their ability to manage challenging behaviour*
- *After the training the staff reported feeling better prepared to cope with difficult behaviour and more knowledgeable about the guidelines under which they were operating’*

‘The seventeen officers indicated their belief that Team-Teach could make a positive contribution to the number of staff suspensions, assaults on staff and exclusions from services’

The modular course design allows for flexibility and relevance across a wide range of specialist and mainstream education, social care and health settings. It is appropriate for children, young people and adults with a wide range of support needs.

Team-Teach training provides a tool box of approaches for staff to use appropriately within their setting. Team-Teach also stresses the importance of documentation and provides examples of good practice within a range of settings regarding the collection, analysis and use of data to inform future practice and training. Team-Teach also provides advice and training in the setting up of appropriate systems to help with the reduction and management of difficult and challenging behaviours.

“There are risks and costs to a programme of action. But they are far less than the long range risks and costs of comfortable inaction” – JF Kennedy

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