

Time to Time-Teach

Picture the scene - the Surrey Special Schools Sports Association, senior table tennis Doubles Final, 1986. The organiser, a Mr George Matthews, asks me, a PE teacher with six or seven years' experience of working with special needs children, to umpire the final between two pairs of EBD students. I fully realised what a poisoned chalice this man was handing me. The match was fiercely contested and ended with a 30-28 scoreline. It was probably one of the most exciting competitions I have ever witnessed and was especially rewarding due to the sportsmanlike reaction of both pairs, rendering my fears groundless. An analysis of George's management style would have indicated even then why a positive outcome was possible. Little could I have anticipated that 15 years later our paths of George and myself were to cross again.

I was now Vice Principal of St Dominic's School, with behaviour management as my prime area of responsibility. Over ten years at the school, we had developed a positive behaviour management package based on the work of Bill Rogers, an internationally renowned consultant in the field. I had become increasingly aware, however, that the range of challenging and sometimes aggressive behaviours exhibited by our pupils demanded a more holistic approach. Paramount among my concerns was the health and safety of staff and pupils. I heard about a course entitled 'Team-Teach', and realised that the name of its founder, George Matthews, was familiar to me from 15 years before. Further enquiries revealed that the approach sounded exactly what I had been seeking.

I found that Team-Teach could offer a comprehensive package which would furnish staff with a hierarchy of skills to prevent and de-escalate potentially explosive situations, and provide dignified solutions to students. It emphasises that 95% or more of all situations can be resolved without recourse to physical intervention. It supports both employer and employee, with regard to health and safety by reducing the risk to all concerned, while understanding the legal implications of positive handling and restraint. And it does all this by utilising a training system - accredited by BILD (British Institute of Learning Disabilities) and affiliated to the NCRGSA (National Control and Restraint (General Services) Association - which responds to challenging and aggressive behaviours in a manner that maintains positive relationships for all. There is an emphasis on planning for foreseeable incidents, and therefore reducing the occasions when staff react instinctively. The importance of proper reporting procedures and documentation allied to full risk assessment is stressed throughout the training packages.

My overriding concern in 2001 was whether I could convince the Governing body that they should invest money in training me and other members of staff, as in-house tutors. Staff were given the opportunity to gain tutor qualifications.

Initial training conducted by George Matthews lasted a week and led to Intermediate Tutor status. This provided us with the skills and materials to develop Team-Teach within school. The approach developed tutor confidence and built on the team ethic required to support children and

colleagues. With two members of staff trained, we could embark on a full training programme within the school.

I was able to draw on the full range of support material to deliver the training. This includes theory booklets, Powerpoint presentations, a 24-hour help line, and access to the website www.team-teach.co.uk. All staff had the opportunity to attend a 12-hour Basic (medium risk) Course, initially utilising INSET days. Feedback from this was very positive, with comments such as 'very relevant to my day to day work', 'increased my confidence to work with our children', and 'very positive and child-centred'.

Subsequent training has involved mandatory Tutor Re-accreditation, and refresher courses for staff. Voluntary extra sessions organised in-house have also proved popular and worthwhile, and can be tailored to the specific difficulties of our children. Team-Teach training is now part of all new staff induction and is also the standard INSET provided as part of Continuing Professional Development.

Becoming a Senior Tutor has enabled me to deliver training outside St Dominic's, which has provided an opportunity to network and share practice with colleagues. The whole Team-Teach experience has been rewarding for all concerned and made a significant contribution to meeting the needs of the children in our care. Since its introduction, the occasions of physical restraint have reduced, with staff fully utilising the alternative strategies now available to them.

The behavioural approach which led to the sporting highlight previously mentioned, was one with which I could identify. Having experienced Team-Teach training myself and personally delivered many courses, my opinion remains unchanged.

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Acknowledgement to George Matthews, www.team-teach.co.uk