

Including ‘positive handling strategies’ within training in behaviour management - the ‘Team-Teach’ approach

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Resubmitted to *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, March 14th, 2005

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on aspects of an evaluation of ‘Team-Teach’ - a ‘whole setting holistic’ approach to behaviour management in a range of child-care environments. A distinctive feature of Team-Teach is that it includes both training in de-escalation skills and physical interventions, known as ‘positive handling strategies’. The approach is clearly structured and calibrated against level of risk. It includes accreditation and re-accreditation of trainers. Findings from four case study educational institutions show enhanced knowledge and confidence in important aspects: staff and pupil safety, the legal framework, dealing with situations such as fights and preparedness to respond to a physical challenge. ‘Positive handling strategies’ caused most anxiety for staff in mainstream schools, partly due to their infrequent use. This finding raises questions about the training needs of staff in mainstream schools and the extent to which they can be expected to respond appropriately in the relatively rare critical incidents that necessitate physical intervention.

KEY WORDS

behaviour; physical interventions; Team-Teach

¹ The research was funded by Team-Teach, an independent educational consultancy

Background and the ‘Team-Teach’ approach

Generally the education service in Britain has been good at laying down guidance and procedures, but less good at addressing how adults feel about managing what is sometimes termed ‘challenging behaviour’² from children in school. Lines (2003) summarises the problem in the following way:

‘...challenging behaviour is an emotive issue. Feelings will inevitably run deep on the management of challenging behaviour in school. This is not merely a cerebral task. When a youngster challenges our authority, we are often struck below the belt. We are hit where it hurts; it is the core of our personhood that is threatened when a youngster challenges us; unless we have a very strong sense of self our vulnerabilities are exposed’ (p.26).

The research reported upon in this article is based on an evaluation of the Team-Teach approach in educational settings. Team-Teach is a whole setting, holistic approach that addresses significant factors that can contribute to a critical incident involving children in social care, education and health care environments. The emphasis of the approach is *‘about the way people relate to each other’* (Team-Teach, 2003, p.11). The approach was developed by George Matthews, a practitioner with over twenty years experience in school and child care settings. He developed the approach following a Churchill fellowship awarded to research training programmes on managing aggression and violence in children and adults. Team-Teach offers a psychological framework to promote positive attitudes and relationships between

² It is recognised that ‘challenging behaviour’ has a very specific meaning in relation to severe learning disabilities within social and health services facilities. This term is used here in the more everyday sense of experiencing behaviour as ‘challenging’, a term sometimes used within the education service.

adults and children in different service settings. (See Allen, 2003; Allen and Matthews, 2003, for more detail on underpinning ideas and approach to managing behaviour and Team-Teach).

Selected approaches to behaviour management and relationship improvement in schools

The association between the development of a particular approach to behaviour management and ways of improving relationships in schools, is often connected with the work of an individual. For example, Assertive Discipline (Canter and Canter, 1992, 1999); Circle Time (Mosley, 1993); the concept of ‘teaching positive behaviour’ (Rogers, 1994; 2002); Restorative Justice in schools (Hopkins, 2004) and so on. There are numerous other approaches, including those of ex-head teachers, such as Lorna Farrington, who with an eclectic mix of ideas (including the use of Assertive Discipline, Circle Time and mediation) has worked with people in a range of educational settings in Britain and Europe (Redwood, 2000). At the time of writing there is continued activity in the field of behaviour management within schools, as part of the national behaviour and attendance strategy. Additional resources have been made available along with a behavioural strand as part of the national teaching and learning strategy, at Key Stage 3. There is no shortage of guidance, training packages and examples of ‘good practice’ within the DfES website and elsewhere (see for example DfES, 2004a).

The wider potential of schools in terms of promoting pro-social behaviour and preventing all sorts of adverse futures for children is increasingly appreciated. However, good quality evidence about the effectiveness of school-based programmes

is generally lacking in the UK. Much of the available evidence is from the United States (see for example, a recent meta-analysis of 165 studies by Wilson *et al*, 2001). Another research review in the United States finds that school-based programmes can produce sustained positive changes in behaviour when they are carefully implemented, developmentally appropriate, sustained over time and build social competence (Mendel, 2000). Specific evidence on particular approaches is very sparse. Assertive Discipline training (again of United States origin) does appear to train teachers to give more positive feedback and praise to pupils and teachers tend to perceive positive changes in pupil behaviour (Wood *et al*, 1996; Swinson & Cording, 2002).

The Team-Teach approach

The Team-Teach approach is distinct from most of the behaviour management strategies currently available in educational settings in three main ways. Firstly, it provides a framework for children in all kinds of group setting (not just schools) and thus has the potential to develop a consistent and coherent framework across a local authority – particularly important for some of the most vulnerable young people, such as those in residential care. Secondly, it includes training in physical interventions, known as ‘positive handling strategies’. Thirdly, there is a support structure and emphasis on updating skills as well as re- accreditation of trainers (who may be school based). The latter structure provides a supported and sustainable system that can be based at institutional level and is not reliant on the expert consultant coming in to do INSET (in service training).

Team-Teach views 'positive handling' as a concept confirming a commitment by organisations, and individuals within an organisation, to a framework of risk reduction strategies (non-verbal, verbal and where absolutely necessary physical). These strategies are documented in the 'Individual Positive Handling Plans' and embedded within a whole setting, holistic approach to behaviour supports and interventions. 'Positive Handling Plans' are the agreed strategies (non-verbal, verbal and physical) that aim to support the individual, providing them with a sense of security, safety and acceptance, allowing for recovery and repair, facilitating learning and growth. Course documentation is at pains to stress, that physical interventions are not the main focus of the approach, with preventative, defusion and de-escalation techniques said to make up more than 95% of responses to challenging behaviour (Allen and Matthews, 2003, p.11). The approach clearly addresses the issue of feelings as well as procedures.

Types of Courses

Team-Teach courses all aim to promote effective and safe verbal, non-verbal, positive and protective techniques within a whole setting holistic response to behaviour management. Some are designed for people who want to learn effective behaviour management skills, others are for those who also hope to teach the skills. Each course builds on the knowledge gained from previous courses whilst stressing the same basic principles and values. Safety is of paramount importance and each positive handling teaching activity begins with a health and safety reminder and a warm up to prepare trainees for the activities involved.

The 'foundation course' is designed for low risk service settings, such as, mainstream schools, nurseries and children's hospitals. It covers personal safety, risk reduction strategies and positive handling, together with documentation and legal guidance. Team-Teach recommend that this six hour (one day) course should be repeated every two years although re-accreditation with Team-Teach is only required after three years. The 'basic practitioners' course' is designed for medium to elevated risk service settings, such as special schools, PRUs (Pupil Referral Units) and children's residential homes. Team-Teach recommend that this twelve hour (two day) course should be repeated every year, although re-accreditation with Team-Teach is only required after two years. Table 1 shows the way core and optional modules are a feature on both the foundation and basic practitioners' courses. It is these two types of course that form the basis of the evaluation reported in this article.

The 'intermediate instructors' course' provides trainees with the necessary skills to teach the foundation and basic practitioners' courses to fellow employees of their own employer. That is, instructors are able to cascade training within their own plus other service settings that are part of the same employment organisation or service. During this five-day course, trainees learn a wide range of positive handling and intervention strategies, as well as legal knowledge. Although re-accreditation is recommended every twelve months, only one annual re-accreditation is required after which instructors are asked to re-accredit every two years. There is a four-month grace period during which trainers can only assist in training. There are also 'advanced tutor' and 'advanced practitioner' courses that train staff in more advanced and specialist strategies and techniques.

Insert Table 1 about here

Keeping children with very difficult behaviour in mainstream classrooms can be a challenge, helping children to feel included and ‘connected’ may require further skills. American research has singled out the concept of ‘school connectedness’ as the single most important school-related variable that is protective for adverse outcomes, such as substance use, violence and early sexual activity (Resnick *et al*, 1997). For example, one study of over 83,000 pupils found that four attributes explained a large part of between school variance in school-connectedness (McNeely *et al*, 2002). These attributes included: classroom management climate; school size; severity of discipline policies and rates of participation in after school activities. School connectedness was found to be lower in schools with difficult classroom management climates and where temporary exclusion was used for minor issues. Zero Tolerance policies (often using harsh punishments like exclusion from school) were associated with reports of pupils feeling less safe, than schools with more moderate policies (McNeely *et al*, 2002).

Physical interventions

Within much of the literature and training programmes about managing pupil behaviour in mainstream school settings, the issue of physical interventions is almost entirely absent. Although physically intervening in a situation, such as stopping a fight, is likely to be a fairly common occurrence in most schools, there can be some understandable disquiet amongst teachers about this. Allen’s (1998) review of the guidance available to schools views misinterpretations of the Children Act 1989 and ‘recycled guidelines produced for children’s homes’ (p.15) being applied to schools,

as part of the problem. Piper and Smith (2003) say that many childcare environments in the UK are becoming 'no touch' zones because of *'fear, confusion, contradictions and moral panic'* (p.879). Piper and Smith highlight the fact that available guidance tends to focus on child protection or force and control, both with worrying and negative connotations.

At the time of writing, the DfES website advises teachers that:

'Physical contact may be misconstrued by a pupil, parent or observer. Touching pupils, including well intentioned gestures such as putting a hand on a shoulder, can, if repeated regularly, lead to serious questions being raised.....Teachers and other staff do however have the right to use reasonable force to restrain pupils in certain circumstances' (DfES, 2004b).

Thus a warning about how physical contact with pupils can be construed precedes the mention of force and restraint, thereby connecting these activities.

The Education Act 1997 (Section 4) clarified the position about the use of physical force by teachers (and others authorised by the head teacher) to control or restrain pupils. This clarification was made by adding a section (Section 550A) to the Education Act 1996 about the use of 'reasonable force' to restrain pupils. Reasonable force and the circumstances in which it may be used are outlined as follows:

A member of staff of a school may use in relation to any pupil at the school, such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the purposes of preventing pupils from doing (or continuing to do) any of the following, namely:

Committing a criminal offence (including behaving in a way that would be an offence if the pupil were not under the age of criminal responsibility);

Injuring themselves or others;

Causing damage to property (including the pupil's own property);

Engaging in any behaviour prejudicial to maintaining good order and discipline at the school or among any of its pupils, whether that behaviour occurs in a classroom during a teaching session or otherwise

(DfEE, 1998, Circular 10/98, p.1).

Examples of situations in which physical interventions might be appropriate are listed as:

Pupil attacks a member of staff, or another pupil;

Pupils are fighting;

Pupil is engaged in, or is on the verge of committing, deliberate damage or vandalism to property;

Pupil is causing, or at risk of causing, injury or damage by accident, by rough play, or by misuse of dangerous materials or objects;

Pupil is running in a corridor or on a stairway in a way in which he or she might have or cause an accident likely to injure him or herself or others;

Pupil absconds from a class or tries to leave school (NB only if at risk if not kept in the classroom or school);

Pupil persistently refuses to obey an order to leave the classroom;

Pupil is behaving in a way that is seriously disrupting a lesson

(DfEE, 1998, Circular 10/98, p.2).

The Education Act 1997 introduced the legal right to use 'reasonable force' in relation to circumstances in which physical intervention is used, although there is no legal definition of reasonable force (DfEE, 1998, p.3). Whilst there may appear to be a relatively wide range of possible circumstance in which physical intervention is possible, teachers must also consider the best interests of the child (the paramouncy principle from the Children Act, 1989) and must take a balanced view of the individual child's needs and that of others (Allen, 1998, p.24).

The NUT (2003) reminds teachers that they may have a duty to act in some circumstances and that *'it is not a safer option for a teacher to do nothing'* (p.2) The NUT advises members that: *'so far as a teacher's duty of care is concerned, an omission can be significant if there were to be a subsequent claim for negligence'* (p.2). Although the NUT also makes it clear that teachers are not expected to risk their own personal safety in exercising this duty of care.

Consultation on 'Positive Handling Strategies for pupils with severe behavioural difficulties' was underway by April 2000. NASEN (2000) in its response to this consultation said that *'there should be greater recognition that restraint situations can occur in mainstream settings'* (p.1). Further guidance was issued in 2002; by this time the focus was upon 'Restrictive Physical Interventions for staff working with children and adults who display extreme behaviour in association with learning disability and/or autistic spectrum disorders' (DfES/DoH, 2002). Thus the

recognition that physical contact will happen in mainstream settings on some occasions was put aside in this guidance and the concept of 'positive handling' was dropped.

Research commissioned by the DfES to evaluate the impact and implementation of Circular 10/98 shows that data on the extent to which schools actually need to use physical interventions is patchy. Special schools are reported to be more likely to recognise the relevance of the circular for their pupils than mainstream secondary schools. A third of secondary schools reported no incidents requiring the use of physical intervention in recent years. It may follow then that the majority of mainstream schools (two-thirds) did have to respond to incidents with some form of physical intervention. Case studies in this research showed that the use of positive handling was a '*very small part of an overall behaviour management programme in schools, notably special schools*' and '*was always a last resort*' (Fletcher-Campbell *et al*, 2003, viii).

There are a number of difficulties for mainstream schools and teachers in developing a framework for working on improving behaviour when including the need for physical interventions. There is understandable worry that a judgement, to act or not, may not be supported, or that allegations may be made about the nature and purpose of any physical contact with a pupil. To counter these possibilities, the NUT advises that (where possible) an adult witness should be present when such an intervention is carried out and it is recommended that all incidents are logged in a record book (NUT, 2003).

Physical interventions are an uncomfortable issue within the debate about behaviour in schools. Allen (1998) comments that *'one of the difficulties I have encountered in researching this topic, is a widespread reluctance to honestly describe what we are talking about'* (p.5). Allen goes on to say *'I think it is time we admitted as a society, that we are not good at managing disturbed, delinquent and disruptive children'* (p.15). The DfES itself can seem unsure as to how it wants to present any need for physical intervention with pupils. The latest guidance (DfES/DoH, 2002) appears to fall short of fully recognising that this is a skill that all teachers might need to exercise, although with differing levels of frequency. Yet recognising this possibility might seem to be a logical consequence of more inclusive schools.

Research Methodology

The research reported upon here is part of a study including wide-ranging data. Data includes course participants' evaluation of over 500 courses conducted between 2000 and 2003; observations of courses; before and after data from education staff attending two of the observed courses; before and after data for four case studies (three schools and a behaviour support service operating through three pupil referral units). In addition the Team-Teach approach was evaluated by representatives of 17 LEAs in different areas of the UK. Children and parents in the case study institutions were also invited to give their perspectives. This article focuses primarily on key evidence about the impact of the training on teachers from the different settings in the case studies. These institutions included a primary and secondary mainstream school; a special secondary school and a primary behaviour support service, organised as three PRUs.

In the case studies, teachers completed a questionnaire directly before and directly after the Team-Teach training. About three months later a researcher visited the institutions to investigate in more depth the longer-term impact and issues arising out of training in this approach.

Key Findings

Many of the questions teachers were asked both before and after the Team-Teach course related to levels confidence, knowledge and preparedness in relation to particular aspects of behaviour management. Improvements were seen in all aspects, as Table 2 illustrates.

Insert Table 2 about here

The most positive aspects following training relate to staff confidence and increased knowledge of techniques perceived as effective in relation to safety, for themselves, aggressive children and other children. The biggest changes following training were found in relation to staff preparedness to respond to a physical challenge; confidence in being able to cope with children fighting; and, knowledge about the legal framework in relation to positive handling. Knowledge of the legal framework had the lowest proportion of staff reporting that they felt 'fairly knowledgeable' or better *before* the Team-Teach training. Least change was evident in whether staff felt 'confident' in providing physical or psychological support to children and preparedness to respond to deliberate manipulation.

Insert Table 3 about here

There are interesting differences from this overall picture when individual institutions are compared. Overall the mainstream primary school showed very positive improvements in all aspects monitored, except in relation to their perceived knowledge of techniques to keep an aggressive child physically safe. In contrast the mainstream secondary school showed the most positive 'after' rating for this latter issue, having started from a very low knowledge base. Both the mainstream and special secondary schools felt less confident with respect to giving psychological or physical support to children, or responding to deliberate manipulation, in comparison with colleagues in the primary institutions.

Before the training a sizeable proportion of staff, particularly at the special school and PRUs, admitted that they physically intervened on a daily or weekly basis, despite not being trained to do so. However, following training one in five staff still voiced concerns about using positive handling strategies, reminding us that even with training this is likely to remain a worrying issue for staff. Worries centred on knowing how to do the positive handling correctly and recalling techniques when needed.

Effects of the Team-Teach course at school level – three months after training

Follow-up interviews were held with 39 staff and the four head teachers across the case study schools, about three months after they had attended a Team-Teach training course. All schools reported positive benefits from the Team-Teach training, particularly in relation to consistency of approach, reporting and recording, as well as increased confidence, as noted immediately after the training. However, none of the

19 staff interviewed at the two mainstream schools had used the positive handling strategies in this three-month period, although there was a record of one incident at the secondary school. As one member of staff in a mainstream school said:

“I think one of the problems is, in this school because you don’t use them [positive handling strategies] so often, you forget. I mean it was interesting to me to try and build that in but I’ve forgotten a lot of it.....”

However, knowing what was an acceptable and unacceptable physical intervention provided reassurance for some mainstream staff, for example:

“To a certain extent I found it a bit reassuring that we were made aware of what was acceptable and what was not acceptable...”

Nearly half the staff (9 of 20 interviewed) at the special school and primary PRU on the other hand had used positive handling strategies. Staff in these types of setting were upbeat about the use of the low key interventions introduced by the Team-Teach approach. For example:

“The best one is the deflection – just catching them on the arm and turning them if the two are squaring up to each other...”

Staff in these settings also reported greater empathy with children and an increased tendency to assess risk:

“I think I’ve got more empathy with them possibly than before. Possibly I would be riled by some of the things they said in the past and now I think ‘they are the children and I am the adult and this is my job’.”

And:

“I’d make an assessment. Whereas before I’d go in there and not think about the fact that I’d get hurt, I’d consider that now.”

Two of the four head teachers described their staff as more confident and aware of their rights, responsibilities and roles as a result of the Team-Teach training. The training also had the effect of encouraging staff to reflect on - how their own behaviour may influence situations, their right to protect themselves in situations where they may not have the physical pre-requisites to cope effectively, and the advantages of using a team approach when managing difficult behaviour. All four head teachers planned to train new members of staff and to organise refresher sessions to maintain their staff’s competence in the Team-Teach techniques. The timing of the planned refresher sessions ranged from once a month in the pupil referral unit to half yearly in the mainstream primary and yearly in the mainstream secondary school. Head teachers referred to the importance of consistency in the approach. Linking arms and ‘scripting’ – using certain pre-determined phrases – were all thought to be good ideas that would help to ensure consistency. One head teacher discussed the quality of the tutors at length:

“They had everything you needed really – they had the expertise, they had the positive approach, they had the good sense of humour to help deliver it which I think we all need in this day and age and I think they had the enthusiasm for what they are doing... ..I honestly can’t think of a way of improving it. Perhaps if there had been different facilitators I might have a different view.”

Discussion and Conclusions

Managing and promoting positive behaviour and relationships is an important part of what schools do. It is a role that is recognised as central to future citizenship. This is not an easy task and the indicators of unhappy situations and very difficult behaviour in schools are all too apparent. On a more positive note though, schools do offer tremendous opportunities for improving the way people relate to each other and take their place in society. If this is within an inclusive agenda, the behaviour presented in schools may on occasion necessitate physical intervention, if teachers are going to be able to exercise their ‘duty of care’ towards pupils. Equally schools have a ‘duty of care’ towards their staff, which includes appropriate training. Allen (2002) reminds us that *‘emergencies occur in all walks of life’* (p.8) and that *‘as with other types of crisis management, plans need to cover situations of varying severity’* (p.9). Allen (2002) is writing about people with learning disabilities, however the warning is clearly relevant to mainstream schools that include children with behaviours that may warrant physical intervention, if staff are going to be able to exercise their ‘duty of care’ towards pupils.

These case studies are of very different types of educational setting with different levels of need for support with behaviour and inevitably they present a complex

picture at the level of individual institution. However, the overall trend is one of increased confidence and comfort for staff in relation to managing very difficult behaviour; staff feeling better informed about the legal framework to physical interventions and more prepared to respond to such situations. Nevertheless, directly after the course, one in five of the trainees still did express various concerns about the positive handling strategies - particularly in relation to knowing how to do this correctly, as well as general recall. This latter situation is an important reminder that even strategies that are seen as relatively successful will not be experienced as such by all staff. Three months later these concerns about positive handling strategies were still pertinent, especially in the mainstream primary and secondary schools; there were no incidents of physical intervention directly experienced by these interviewees. More broadly though a range of positive associations with the Team-Teach approach were reported, particularly to do with de-escalation skills, consistency, communication and confidence. The need for refresher training is built into the Team-Teach approach and follow-up interviews clearly demonstrated that this was needed. A number of suggestions for improving the courses were made: these can be best summarised as relating to more tailoring to the individual needs of a school and additional/ enhanced and specific techniques. These suggestions are already available via the 'option' units negotiated at the time the course is booked by a school or other setting (see Table 1).

Overall the evaluation provides a positive endorsement of the Team-Teach approach especially in relation to staff confidence, as well as knowledge of the legal framework for physical interventions. The impact of the training was more pronounced in the special school and pupil referral units, as they also experienced more empathy with

the children and were more likely to use risk assessment. Importantly Team-Teach provides a clear framework for staff to refresh their skills and keep up to date with the latest advice on behaviour management – through refresher training and re-accreditation and also through the extensive resources, including video clips (introduced after we conducted our case studies), on the Team-Teach website. ‘Positive handling strategies’ caused most anxiety for staff in mainstream schools, partly due to their infrequent use. This finding raises questions about the training needs of staff in mainstream schools and the extent to which they can be expected to respond appropriately in the relatively rare critical incidents that necessitate physical intervention.

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Table 1: Foundation and Basic Practitioners' courses – time and activities

Length of course	Type of course/setting	Syllabus	Time devoted to activities
6 hour	Foundation 'Low risk'	Core activities Optional activities	4 hours 2 hours
12 hour	Basic Practitioners 'Medium to elevated risk'	Core activities Optional activities	8 hours 4 hours

Table 2: Immediate impact of the Team-Teach training (case studies combined)

Type of impact	Before	After
Fairly 'confident', or better, that they can keep themselves safe from an aggressive child	44.1%	79.3%
Fairly 'confident', or better, that they can keep an aggressive child physically safe	27.0%	77.8%
Fairly 'confident', or better, that they can keep other children safe from an aggressive child	35.7%	75.0%
Fairly 'confident', or better, about coping with children fighting	20.0%	71.7%
Fairly 'knowledgeable', or better, about the legal framework and positive handling	15.9%	71.1%
Fairly 'confident', or better, in relation to psychological support to children	45.5%	59.3%
Fairly 'confident', or better, in relation to providing physical support to children	33.7%	57.7%
Fairly well 'prepared', or better, to respond to deliberate manipulation	29.9%	55.2%
Numbers in all 4 case studies combined	187 (6 teachers did not complete the first questionnaire)	193

Table 3: Immediate impact of the Team-Teach training (by type of case study)

Type of impact	Mainstream Primary		Mainstream Secondary		Behaviour Support Primary		Special Secondary School	
	B*	A*	B	A	B	A	B	A
Fairly 'confident', or better, that they can keep themselves safe from an aggressive child	44%	86%	20%	49%	36%	63%	31%	50%
Techniques known for keeping an aggressive child physically safe , fairly 'effective' or better	31%	42%	11%	73%	19%	86%	27%	70%
Fairly 'confident', or better, that they can keep other children safe from an aggressive child	25%	93%	26%	70%	47%	86%	35%	75%
Fairly well 'prepared', or better, to respond to a physical challenge	44%	93%	32%	72%	55%	85%	51%	83%
Fairly 'confident', or better, about coping with children fighting	31%	100%	13%	69%	48%	71%	47%	81%
Fairly 'knowledgeable', or better, about the legal framework and positive handling	25%	93%	5%	64%	21%	82%	19%	66%
Fairly 'confident', or better, in relation to psychological support to children	75%	87%	30%	49%	54%	71%	51%	57%
Fairly 'confident', or better, in relation to providing physical support to children	56%	86%	21%	55%	37%	61%	44%	50%
Fairly well 'prepared', or better, to respond to deliberate manipulation	44%	86%	20%	49%	36%	63%	31%	50%
Numbers in each case study	B=16	A=15	B=77	A=85	B=50	A=49	B=44	A=44

B* = Before Team-Teach training

A*= After Team-Teach training