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Achieving Gold: 'Team-Teach' Behaviour Management Approach in Sheffield

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Dean Cotton and Edward Sellman describe the benefits of achieving the award of the Gold Standard for the 'Team-Teach' Approach to Behaviour Management

Introduction

This article outlines the 'Team-Teach' approach to the management of challenging behaviours and how the approach has been introduced at Broad Elms School, Sheffield. The special school has recently become the first establishment in the UK to attain the gold standard award and the following commentary shares some of the many impacts its implementation has had on school life.

Team-Teach

Team-Teach provides training in behaviour management and interventions to professionals working in education, social and health service settings via an extensive network of tutors. It is one of the UK's first accredited training framework specifically for those who work with young people who display challenging behaviour, and the largest provider of such training. The approach is accredited by The British Institute of Learning Difficulties and is affiliated to the National Control and Restraint (General Services) Association. Team-Teach provides 6 and 12 hour courses, as well as advanced modules, for members of staff who work with young people who represent a low, medium or high-risk of exhibiting challenging behaviour respectively.

One of the central aims of the approach, once implemented, is to balance issues of child protection with those of providing a holistic and consistent environment, where professionals work together to manage challenging behaviours. In doing so, professionals are empowered to fulfil their educational and/or care duties whilst young people are empowered to learn more socially acceptable ways of managing their own behaviour. Whereas the popular image of such approaches may be characterised by the use of restraint or 'positive handling', Team Teach emphasises the importance of preventing and de-escalating potentially explosive conflicts. This is accompanied by an understanding of the legal implications of positive handling. A gradual and graded response is used to manage challenging behaviours, where the use of appropriate positive handling is only used as a last resort, when there is a threat to personal safety or property and once all other strategies have been exhausted. All such incidents are recorded and documented, then followed up by a debriefing process involving all key parties, focused on the restoration and enhancement of positive relationships.

Avoid physical restraint if possible

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Achievement of the Gold Award

Broad Elms School is a special school in Sheffield for up to 36 primary school aged children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Team-Teach initiative was introduced to the school by Dean Cotton, a member of staff, who had previously been on an initial training course and is now an advanced tutor. Dean recalls how the 5-day instructor's course highlighted the amount of work the school needed to accomplish in order to reduce serious incidents, fixed term exclusions and provide a more consistent approach for preventing or managing challenging behaviour.

Under Dean's guidance and with considerable support from the whole school staff, the school has implemented the Team-Teach approach consistently throughout the school to such a high quality that it has become the first organisation in the UK to achieve the Gold Standard Award. Concurrently, the school has also been designated a national centre of excellence for the management of challenging behaviours. This process, which has taken 3 years and involved 16 members of staff being trained has resulted in serious incidents at the school being reduced by over 90% and no fixed term exclusions for over a year. The school's successful OfSTED inspection in Spring 2004 recognised behaviour management as a major strength of the school and reported that the systems and principles in place were ensuring pupils could learn in an environment free from harassment, which promoted good pupil behaviour.

To be awarded Gold standard status, the school had to meet over 90 criteria stipulated by Team-Teach, these included:

- **Policy & Procedure-** the implementation of a new behaviour policy to current guidelines.
- **Documentation-** Behaviour Support Plans were drawn up for each child, all linked to the monitoring and periodic evaluation of individualised behaviour management strategies.
- **Risk assessments** on all children attending the school.
- **Detailed serious incident reports**, which include an evaluation of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques and positive handling interventions used.
- **Staff Training-** all staff receive the most up-to-date information on issues of behaviour management and positive handling.
- **Repair and Reflection processes-** all children involved in a serious incident receive counselling, a process aimed to encourage pupils to learn to control their behaviour in more acceptable ways. Staff also have access to a debriefing process following serious incidents.

The Team-Teach initiative now means serious incidents are dealt with more consistently and systematically. **Each classroom contains three soft chairs** and two adult members of staff should a positive handling intervention be required. The school has both a time-out and withdrawal room to aid the de-escalation of potential conflicts, although the use of the time-out room has been significantly reduced. The **time-out room** offers an open space for contemplation with restricted access to any

strategies other than those that ensure safety. The **withdrawal room** offers a space away from any situation that may be causing anxiety, where they can be observed and supported until they are ready to return to their classroom. Positive handling interventions are followed up by a **'life-space' interview** by a Team-teach co-ordinator, who is also responsible for documenting, monitoring and analysing serious incidents.

Much of the school's transformation can be credited to holistic changes to classroom organisation, school culture and staff training associated with the introduction of the initiative. Every classroom now contains visual aids such as timetables, prompts and individualised academic and behavioural targets. Children's Behaviour Support Plans and Individualised Educational Plans are kept simple, relevant and reviewed regularly with each pupil. At a cultural level, there is consistency of approach in teaching, behaviour management and communicational practices. Much effort is dedicated to making the school an attractive, well-resourced and comfortable place to study. The school is broken into smaller units of peer groups and houses, who frequently engage in extra-curricular and reward activities. All full-time members of staff are comprehensively inducted and receive Team-teach training. There is an emphasis on developing and sharing expertise across the staff, alongside a 'team-spirit' that ensures members of staff are supported and do not feel isolated.

Points of view

Feedback from a survey of pupil's points of view highlighted that the children also recognised that the number of serious-incidents at the school had significantly decreased, resulting in more frequently attained learning outcomes and improved behaviour. When questioned, 29 out of 30 of pupils said they enjoyed coming to school and their behaviour had improved whilst attending the school. All 30 pupils said that when they are involved in an incident, members of staff resolve the matters fairly.

Comments from teachers are equally positive:

Confidence in the knowledge that the staff group have the skills and expertise to successfully manage some of the most challenging children in the city.

Kath Taylor, headteacher

It gives you a tool bag of positive and individualised behaviour management strategies to be used when facing challenging pupils.

Crispin Barton, teacher

As a slightly built female, Team-teach has built up my confidence in using de-escalation techniques, particularly with Year 6 boys, who are physically stronger than me.

Anne Dean, classroom learning assistant

Closing thoughts

Overall, members of staff have found the implementation of Team-teach at Broad Elms school empowering on a number of levels. It has helped create a mutually-supportive staff group more proficient in the management of challenging behaviours as well as protecting them legally. In turn, this allows members of staff to perform their duties as educators more effectively. Meanwhile, children and young people's safety is ensured whilst being given the opportunity to learn both academically and socially.

It should be noted that the award of the Gold Standard for Team-Teach could not have been achieved without the support and dedication of the whole school.

Note on Team-Teach

Team-Teach is a holistic approach to the management of challenging and sometimes violent behaviour. The emphasis of the approach is on preventing conflict situations from escalating but also includes positive handling strategies for situations where pupils present a danger to themselves, others or property. Team-Teach is the largest provider of training in this area for mainstream and special schools, as well as a range of child and adult services in the UK. The approach 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, who between them have worked with over 400,000 people across a wide range of care, educational and health-service settings.

For further details visit www.team-teach.co.uk or ring 01403 268928.

George Matthews was a Deputy Head of an EBD school and his workshops are always well-received at conferences.

While supporting his organisation's work, we are not saying that the Team -Teach approach is necessarily the most appropriate for your circumstances.

There are other approaches (e.g. CALM, TCI etc - contact BILD).