

The Effects of Training Staff in SEBD Schools in Positive Handling.

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Dean has been the Director of Positive Behaviour Strategies Ltd and has been a Principal Tutor for Team Teach since the SEBD School that Dean was working in closed as a result of a restructuring of SEBD provision in Sheffield in 2005. In this article, he describes his research for part of his recent SEBDA/ University of Leicester master's degree. Dean looked at the impact of training in 'positive handling', using the well known Team-Teach approach, in four SEBD schools, interviewing a small sample of staff and young people. His findings follow an instructive overview of the literature on positive handling (or to use current government terminology 'use of force'). [NB This study took place before the Coalition Government's 2010 revisions to official guidance in this area.]

Literature Review

The Alliance to Prevent Restraint, Aversive Interventions, and Seclusion (APRAIS, 2004) suggests that it is a myth that restraint keeps students who are out of control safe; their view is that restraint can escalate pupils' behaviour and create more aggression. The organisation seeks to eliminate the use of restraint and believes that using such techniques shows failure to provide appropriate service and support. Other views (APRAIS, 2004) taken from the organisations website, suggest that restraint:

- Causes serious physical and psychological harm;
- Results in the dehumanization of all involved;
- Prevents the development of respectful and supportive relationships between children and adults;
- Leads to the segregation and exclusion of children from their communities.

Amos (1999) suggests that restraint only teaches children the following:

- "The world is a very dangerous place. I could be killed at any moment.
- My parents, and those others who claim responsibility for me, cannot be trusted to protect me.
- My body is not my own. I have no right to personal space.
- Might makes right.

- I am a bad person.” (Amos, 1999, p.2)

Allen (2009) suggests that due to an increasingly litigious culture and an overemphasis on risk management and health and safety legislation, an industry of physical interventions training packages has been created that are often expensive and based on a very thin evidence base.

Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 enabled school staff to use reasonable force to prevent a pupil from doing any of the following:

- a. Committing any offence (or, for a pupil under the age of criminal responsibility, what would be an offence for an older pupil);
- b. Causing personal injury to, or damage to the property of, any person (including the pupil himself); or
- c. Prejudicing the maintenance of good order and discipline at the school or among any pupils receiving education at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise.

Morgan (2004) produced a report for the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The report suggested that staff needing to use restraint should know how to do it properly.

In 2004 Team-Teach commissioned Portsmouth University (Hayden and Pike, 2004) to evaluate the effectiveness of the training Team Teach delivers. Sources of information included: course participants' evaluation of over 500 courses delivered between 2000 and 2003, course observations, pre and post course data from education staff attending courses and case studies. The key findings provided a positive endorsement of the approach with staff feeling more confident, a sense of safety and a basic knowledge of the legal framework for physical interventions. The report confirmed that the most frequently suggested improvements within the Team-Teach approach were 'further work in de-escalation skills' (Hayden and Pike, 2004).

In 2004, SEBDA News (Cotton and Sellman, 2004) reported that the implementation of the Team-Teach approach at Broad Elms SEBD School saw a reduction in incidents of over 90%

and exclusions were reduced to zero. The school's OfSTED inspection (2004) recognised behaviour management as a strength. The report stated that the systems and principles in place were ensuring pupils could learn in an environment free from harassment, which promoted good pupil behaviour.

Bambara et al (2004) described positive behaviour support (PBS) as being:

'..Characterised by educative, proactive and respectful interventions that involve teaching alternative skills to problem behaviours and changing problematic environments that contribute to problem behaviours. PBS blends best practice in behavioural technology, educational methods, and ecological systems change with person-centred values in order to achieve outcomes that are meaningful and relevant to the individual and to his or her family.' (Bambara et al, 2004, p.3)

DCSF Guidance (2007) puts a strong emphasis on training staff in de-escalation alongside physical interventions and states that schools should have a policy on the use of physical interventions.

Allen, (2003a) suggested that physical intervention can be likened to fire fighting and suggests that we need to concentrate more on fire prevention adopting a preventative ethos.

A case study of Team-Teach by Stevens (2008) at Kingstanding Special School noted that prior to the training in 2004, 259 incidents of challenging behaviour had been recorded. One year later, post training, 48 such incidents were recorded. Following this an average of 10 incidents a year were recorded. The case study puts the reduction down to consistency of approach from staff and a common framework for staff to work to.

Dawson (2003) examines the effects of Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) training with staff in two similar schools, one to be regarded as 'the experimental school' the other as the 'control school'. Experimental school staff received LSCI training, while control school staff received

regular support in developing their own solutions for crisis. The frequency of crises and exclusions decreased significantly in the experimental LSCI School, while increasing significantly in the control school. More pupils in the LSCI school were transferred to less restrictive settings and had higher attendance rates. All staff in the LSCI school felt able to manage crises, while only 2 of 16 staff in the control school reported this competence.

The 2008, Joint Committee on Human Rights report 'The Use of Restraint in Secure Training Centres' (STCs) states that restraint was used on more than 3,000 occasions in STCs in 2006. The use of restraint arose during the inquests into the deaths of two young people whilst detained in STCs. These cases created headlines such as 'Restraints on children 'must end''. BBC News. (2008).

The Study

Four SEBD schools that catered for Key Stage 2, 3, and 4 pupils were selected for this study and incident / exclusion data was collected. The four schools were then trained in the Team Teach approach. Following the training incident / exclusion data was collected and the data was analysed along with the pre course figures. For the purpose of this study the four schools are referred to as Schools A, B, C, and D. A senior member of staff and a pupil in each school was also interviewed. The pupils selected for this study had regularly been held and were considered amongst the most challenging pupils in the schools.

School A

Prior to the training, staff reported a lack of confidence in managing behaviour; this led to inconsistencies of approach that had a knock on effect on when staff would intervene. Along with increasing confidence and improving consistency of responses, the training created a more supportive ethos. Following most incidents pupils were debriefed using 'Life Space Interviews' (Redl. 1960). A pupil survey highlighted that they recognised the number of serious incidents at

the school had significantly decreased; resulting in more frequently attained learning outcomes and improved behaviour. 29 out of 30 surveyed pupils said they enjoyed coming to school and their behaviour had improved. All the pupils said that following incidents, members of staff resolved the matters fairly. The pupils understood that staff would only hold them to keep them safe (Cotton and Sellman, 2004). OfSTED highlighted the school's system for managing and promoting positive behaviour as a strength of the school (OfSTED 2004).

School B

Since the school's opening, all staff receive on-going Team-Teach training; only similarly trained supply staff are employed. De-escalation takes place and staff are more confident as a result of the training. They also recognize the signs of anxiety enabling them to intervene before higher-level behaviours occur.

Each day staff attend a review to discuss any issues regarding each pupil's day. For any pupils who have been involved in any incidents a 'behaviour review' takes place, this is where the pupils behaviour is discussed in detail. All incident reports are reviewed and are graded for seriousness on a scale of 1 – 5

Incidents involving physical intervention are usually graded as 1, 2 or 3 on the scale. The school is in the process of introducing SIMS (Schools Information Management System) to record incidents.

Staff members are available to talk to pupils following incidents although this not structured or recorded. This is also the case for staff involved in incidents.

The interviewee initially received training focussing on physical techniques. The Team-Teach training focused more on de-escalation strategies alongside physical interventions and helping

staff see the causation of the behaviour. The training helped to create a more caring, supportive ethos where staff felt confident to manage behaviour. The interviewee believed that training which focused on the physical techniques only, created a chaotic environment where staff “put out fires” and felt disempowered

School C

School C opened in 2005 and staff were recruited from a number of similar schools closed as a result of restructuring. Staff were trained in Team-Teach before the school opened.

The school uses SIMS (Schools Information Management System), which is a management information system that covers all parts of the schools' administration. The system is used to record incidents thoroughly and gives senior management and other staff accurate information on all incidents.

Staff in the school came from several settings with a wide range of experiences, skill levels and philosophies. Team-Teach training gave the school consistency and helped embed a supportive ethos especially the de-escalation side of the training.

Before Team-Teach training the staff member in School C had no training in positive handling and found this very uncomfortable, knowing that at any moment she could be involved in a physical intervention. Often alone with seven pupils she remembers very few incidents involving restraint; this was due to a different population of pupils who showed lower level behaviours as opposed to the more complex behaviours that are often exhibited in School C.

School C acknowledged the importance of providing opportunities for debriefing of both pupils and staff. For staff, this was done on an individual basis, if they needed to talk. For pupils,

debriefing remained an area of development for the school and although staff are available, when debriefing took place it was inconsistent and lacked structure and purpose.

School D

The school's original training focused on physical techniques. Without de-escalation tools staff felt under pressure to intervene physically. This could lead to such techniques being used too early. The recent Team-Teach training focused on recognising the signs of aggression, de-escalation techniques, the importance of working as a team and understanding the legal implications of physical intervention. The course increased awareness of the need for documentation, recording and reporting and emphasised the importance of repair and reflection following incidents. The training resulted in a notable increase in staff confidence and complemented a new positive ethos the new head teacher is trying to implement. Following incidents a report is completed which includes the pupil's account; this section of the report is completed when the pupil is calm and ready to talk to someone who was not involved in the incident. In many cases this is an informal process and often does not take place. The school is looking to employ pastoral support in the future whose role will include more formal debriefing of pupils.

Pupils' Interview

The four pupils interviewed all understood that staff may need to hold them to keep them safe and gave examples of pupils hitting other pupils or teachers, getting angry or violent, or absconding. The pupils also recognized the importance of staff training in de-escalation and physical interventions. The pupils said that once they had gained self control, staff would release them and send them back to class to either catch up on work and/or apologise.

Discussion and Conclusion

Below is a summary of the percentage of incidents involving physical interventions and fixed term exclusions per annum, prior to and following the positive handling training.

Incidents	Pupils on Role	Prior to Training	Following Training	Overall Reduction	Exclusions Prior to training	Exclusions following training
School A	36	60%	4%	93%	12	0
School B	90*	22%	10%	54%	10	0
School C	90*	63%	25%	60%	12	11
School D	70*	254%	89%	64%	*337	*69

*Average number of pupils per term

All the schools saw a reduction in physical interventions post training. The most significant reduction occurred in School A. It seems likely that the reduction was due to the following factors:

- Pupils were given the opportunity for listening and learning following most incidents;
- The School had a member of staff with an overall responsibility for behaviour management whose role was to ensure that pupils and staff were supported;
- The whole staff team was trained in Team-Teach and embraced the whole ethos of the approach.

School A was the only school in this research to implement structured listening and learning following most incidents (Cotton and Sellman, 2004). This less threatening form of de-briefing focuses on teaching pupils how to control their own behaviour; this was achieved by staff listening to the pupil's point of view, staff explaining why they had to intervene, linking the pupil's feelings with the behaviour and planning alternative ways of managing feelings. Incidents would have been reduced further if structured listening and learning followed every incident. Dawson

(2003) suggested that staff working with SEBD pupils should be trained in Life Space Interviews and have access to ongoing support and supervision, these interviews follow a similar structure to the Team-Teach listening and learning module.

School B saw a reduction in incidents of 54% compared with a reduction of 60% in school C. School B and D are very similar in size but School B had a higher ratio of staff absences than school C.

School D's incidents dropped by 64% after receiving the training but the school's level of incidents had been higher than the other three schools pre-training. Incident figures were high because initial training focused on physical interventions. This led to staff/pupil relationships often being damaged and would lead to physical techniques being used too early. A lack of structured debriefing could also create an unsupportive ethos and incidents would reoccur (Dawson 2003).

School A had its highest frequency of incidents in the autumn term which reduce in spring and summer terms; this pattern was repeated the following year. This pattern is also evident in the second year of School B.

- The schools have their highest intake of new pupils during the autumn term so new pupils, who may have been out of education for some time, might not be used to the education system and expectations of the school.
- New pupils may not have developed relationships with other pupils or staff.
- Existing pupils may feel the need to re-establish the social hierarchy.

- Pupils returning to school following the summer break may have had several weeks of less structure and fewer boundaries, this may account for the higher frequency of incidents.

Schools B and C saw a reduction in incidents, however a more significant reduction occurred in School A. One factor may be the size of the schools (Witcher et al, 1996).

School C also shows dramatic reductions in incidents in spring of the first year due to the cohort of pupils attending the school and, as it was a new school, several students were “still finding their feet”. Another contributory factor in reducing incidents is consistency of approach (Stevens, 2008), which can be more difficult to achieve in larger schools due to a higher number of staff and pupils.

School B’s incidents increased every term in the first year; this may be due to high staff absences throughout this period and although supply staff are fully trained, staff/pupil relationships were not always well established. School D saw an initial increase in incidents following the Team-Teach training, this is common and due to the training looking at consistent recording and reporting; prior to training incidents may have been under recorded.

Whole school training alongside good clear policies on how to manage behaviour which staff understand and implement, go a long way towards creating a consistent approach (DCSF, 2007). Harris et al (2008) stated 32 key policy principles that should be included in policies and which contribute to creating consistent approaches. Examples are:

Principle 4: Service users should be treated fairly and with courtesy and respect.

Principle 5: Service users should be helped to make choices and be involved in making decisions which affect their lives.

Both these principals could be implemented by providing opportunities for listening and learning following incidents.

Principle 9: Secondary prevention procedures should be developed to ensure that problematic episodes are properly managed with non-physical interventions before service users become violent.

Without de-escalation skills this principle would not be met, initially this was the case in School D.

Schools A, B and D reported a reduction in exclusions whereas School C's exclusions remained consistent. This suggests that excluding key pupils does not reduce incidents but that the training may be more effective. However, even following the training School D excluded an average of 69 pupils per term. School D has traditionally high levels of incidents and exclusions so some staff may be reluctant to adopt the change the training often brings. A new Head Teacher and an overall reduction in incidents of 64% in the first year should encourage staff to continue a consistent approach and reduce incidents and exclusions further.

Staff in Schools B and D described experiences of working in schools where previous training focused on physical techniques. Incidents in School D were numerous and without de-escalation strategies staff would resort to physical intervention too early. School B described "a chaotic environment where staff put out fires and felt disempowered". This would suggest that training staff in physical interventions alone is counter-productive, ineffective and would support the perception that the training leads to increased use of force. Following Team-Teach training the schools in this research appear calmer and more supportive. The staff interviewed by the author were all keen to improve further the quality of the provision they provide.

School D is considering employing pastoral support with a responsibility for debriefing pupils. Following serious incidents, Allen and Matthews (2003) suggest that the staff/pupil relationship may be damaged, stay the same or be improved. If the pupil receives no support following an incident the staff/pupil relationship is likely to be damaged or stay the same. If the pupil does receive support following an incident the staff/pupil relationship could stay the same or be improved. As this theory is based on building positive relationships, it would be more effective for the school to have the member of staff who was involved in the incident involved in the listening and learning process - debriefing (SIRCC 2005). This may be problematic if the pupil does not want the member of staff who was involved in the incident to be there, so a third member of staff could be used as a mediator.

Section 7 of 'Holding Safely' (SIRCC, 2005) looks at learning from events and examines ways in which staff can best use the experience of physically restraining young people to shape future practice and policy. Team-Teach includes a module on listening and learning but only one out of the four schools that received the training, debriefed pupils regularly following incidents.

Matthews (2009) believes that the "Listening and Learning" module is vital to the Team-Teach approach; without this being proactively supported in services it is unlikely that the number of restraints will reduce or relationships be improved. Putting more emphasis on the listening and learning module would create a more supportive ethos within the schools and go a long way towards implementing positive behaviour supports (Bambara et al, 2004).

Restraint can cause serious physical and psychological harm and can result in the dehumanization of all involved (APRAIS, 2004), however Section 93 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 states circumstances where restraint may be necessary. The physical techniques within the Team-Teach framework seek to avoid injury and should only be used as a last resort (other than in an emergency). Listening and learning with pupils following incidents reduces the risk of any psychological harm and helps pupils and staff map a way forward. Many

of the people trained believe they have not the time to debrief pupils due to a high frequency of incidents. The implementation of debriefing teaches pupils to control their own behaviour and reduces incidents so as the number of incidents decrease, more time for would be available for debriefing.

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (2010), which surveyed 1,001 of its members, calls for training in this area to be made compulsory to increase confidence. New teachers feel they have not had enough training to deal with challenging behaviour and felt they were not getting enough guidance on the issue.

Training staff in physical interventions alone or providing training that focuses on physical techniques is counterproductive, increases incidents and would support the perception that training staff in this area leads to increased use of force.

This research suggests that training staff in positive handling, which focuses on 95% diversion, diffusion and de-escalation alongside physical interventions has a positive effect on pupils by teaching them to manage their feelings. Staff confidence levels improve following training so they are less likely to resort to the use of force. Incidents in schools are reduced resulting in more frequently attained learning outcomes.

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