

An evaluation of the Team-Teach behaviour support training programme in New Zealand

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This study examines the perceptions of teachers and other professionals of Team-Teach behaviour support training in New Zealand. Analysis of course evaluations, questionnaires, interviews and documents provide the findings. Comparisons are made with Team-Teach training in the UK and similarities and differences between New Zealand training providers are reported. The article concludes with some recommendations for improving Team-Teach training in New Zealand.

Key words: behaviour, school, violence, teachers, Team-Teach.

Introduction

Violence is a societal issue and the ability of schools to manage such behaviour and teach students more appropriate behaviour is arguably limited. In its role providing union representatives for primary schoolteachers, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) maintains that the problem of violence in schools is complex and will not go away. It laments 'a strong element of primary schools fixing up society but not being resourced to do so' (NZEI, 2007, p. 2). New Zealand Ministry of Education statistics reveal that the number of assaults on teachers doubled between 2000 and 2008 and the proportion of exclusions for physical assault on staff has increased from 2.7% in 2000 to 6.3% in 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2010). The NZEI (2007, p. 2) also reports an 'escalation in stand downs and suspensions in students aged 11 to 14 years'. Clearly, violence in schools is affecting both teacher safety and student access to education.

There are a multitude of behavioural 'experts' providing training of some kind, which presents a quandary for schools in deciding which programmes to use. There is an added complication when using programmes imported from overseas as a training syllabus designed for use in the UK may well not be sufficiently adapted to meet the ethical, legal and cultural needs of the New Zealand context.

In his vision of education for 2020, Slavin (2010) discusses the need for governments to support the creation, adoption and dissemination of proven programmes for teachers to

use. This requires a commitment to the use of evidence-based practice and the identification of programmes that work. In a New Zealand context, Church (2003, p. 172) identified a need to 'ascertain whether well developed overseas interventions can be adapted for use in New Zealand settings and, if so adapted, whether they remain effective interventions'.

One such overseas intervention that is widely used internationally within a special education context is the commercially available Team-Teach behaviour support training programme. Team-Teach will provide, at a cost to the school, a range of training options from the basic six-hour foundation course to a more complex five-day tutor training course. The tutor training courses provide schools with their own 'in-house' tutors selected from within their own staff. The preferred model for implementation involves training all staff members within a school, regardless of position, to promote consistency. One of the guiding principles of Team-Teach is that extreme and violent behaviour can and should be managed 95% of the time using non-physical de-escalation strategies. The training programme also provides a range of physical interventions designed specifically for use with children in schools, in direct contrast to programmes that were designed for mental health or law enforcement settings. Team-Teach is accredited by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) and has received commendable reports and approval from various organisations in the UK including the Department of Education, the Department of Health, the Office for Standards in Education and the Health and Safety Executive. Is there then a sufficient evidence base to regard Team-Teach as an evidence-based practice as advocated by Slavin (2010)?

The simple answer to this is 'not yet'. However, there have to date been two significant studies completed on the impact of Team-Teach training. Cotton (2010), in the UK, analysed 379 course evaluations, in addition to conducting a case study within four schools, in an attempt to ascertain the effects of training staff in Team-Teach. The course evaluation data demonstrate a very positive picture of the perceptions of the training, with the majority of trainees (55% to 81% across training areas) consistently rating aspects of training as excellent. The main findings of this study endorsed the Team-Teach approach and also identified a need to further develop observational skills and reflection in order to inform future practice.

Hayden and Pike (2004) completed the most comprehensive review to date of the effectiveness of Team-Teach training in schools in the UK, analysing post-course evaluation data from 10,000 trainees over a period of three years. This study presented ‘overwhelmingly positive ratings for the various aspects of Team-Teach’ (Hayden and Pike, 2004, p. 27) with ‘excellent’ ratings from trainees for specific components ranging from 52% to 85%. Also, 86% of participants found the training to be ‘of value’ and 74% considered it pertinent to their work role. Less than 1% of trainees indicated that ‘none of the training’ was of value or pertinent.

A second component of the Hayden and Pike (2004) study involved an in-depth investigation of a particular group of 32 trainees attending a 12-hour foundation course, both after initial training and at three months into implementation. At the three-month follow-up point 86% of trainee respondents within this study rated ‘all’ of the training as being pertinent to their work role and almost all indicated they would recommend the training to others. In terms of understanding the law, trainees identified a clear shift from uncertainty to confidence. However, trainees identified that the initial training had included too many physical techniques and that they had mostly forgotten them. In addition, some trainees expressed concern over the effectiveness of positive handling strategies with specific students and lamented the lack of support from the school management. They indicated that they would have liked more training in both non-physical de-escalation strategies and debriefing. A recommendation from this study was that ‘Team-Teach courses need to be more tailored for the specific needs of the schools involved’ (Hayden and Pike, 2004, p. 72). Some trainees had come to think of Team-Teach as synonymous with positive handling and failed to make the connection to de-escalation skills, which is in direct contrast to the core objectives of Team-Teach, that is, to use non-physical interventions 95% of the time.

This article reports the first evaluation of Team-Teach training in New Zealand. The initial focus of the study is a specific review of feedback on Team-Teach training for all trainees in New Zealand immediately after training and a comparison of these results with those from a similar UK-based study. This is complemented by a series of semi-structured interviews and a full staff survey conducted within two New Zealand special schools examining perceptions of the training further into implementation.

Method

This mixed-method research was conducted with the use of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Quantitative analysis of survey data was therefore combined with qualitative analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts and narratives to inform the discussion and recommendations.

The four providers currently delivering Team-Teach courses within New Zealand are: Team-Teach Asia/Pacific; two

special schools for children with intellectual disabilities, referred to as school A and B; and a private residential special school for young people with intellectual disabilities. Team-Teach Asia/Pacific is the main provider in New Zealand, delivering all levels of courses including tutor training to schools A, B and the residential school. These three special schools each have a team of trained and accredited tutors capable of delivering six- and 12-hour courses within their own organisation.

All four New Zealand providers agreed to be involved in the study and provided condensed evaluations from courses conducted between 2005 and 2010. Consent was gained from the boards of trustees and management teams of the participant schools in addition to all contributing staff members. The two special schools are state special education schools catering for students with high and very high levels of special educational needs. School A is located in the South Island of New Zealand and school B is located in the North Island. Both schools employ in excess of 60 staff members including teachers, therapists and support staff. The private residential school also employs around 60 staff including teachers, support staff and residential care workers. The residential school staff only provided initial course feedback and were not involved in the interviews and follow-up questionnaire aspects of the study.

The design of this study embraces ‘epistemological and methodological pluralism’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15) with the use of a ‘parallel mixed design’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p. 26) using participant interviews, questionnaires and qualitative document analysis to discover ‘how people construct their realities’ (Taylor and Bogden, 1998, p. 11) combined with the ‘hard generalizable data’ (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 14) of quantitative survey and statistical analysis.

The triangulation of sources of information, survey data, document analysis and interview data, along with member-checking, was included in order to provide a more accurate picture, evidenced in multiple ways. The use of a multi-method approach with a range of individuals who work in different schools presents a wider representation of teacher opinion than if the research was focused upon just one school. The research tools were structured to allow participants freedom of input and to allow participant responses to inform the direction of the study. A process of thematic coding was used for the management of all qualitative data allowing for the formation of major themes that reflect the complexity of the data.

Team-Teach course reviews provide an opportunity for research participants to rate the effectiveness of the course on a 5-point Likert scale from ‘excellent’ to ‘poor’ and to rate the value and pertinence of the training on a 4-point scale from ‘yes fully’ to ‘none’. The percentage mean responses for each course review question, for each course, were calculated and these scores were collated to present the mean percentage response to each course review question

for each of the four providers currently delivering Team-Teach courses in New Zealand. This information was then combined to present a New Zealand-wide mean score for each course review question which could be directly compared with that from the UK study (Cotton, 2010). Four hundred and seventy-eight comments on course evaluations highlighting the strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for future development, as perceived by the research participants, were then reduced by coded analysis into four major themes.

A survey was used to gauge the perceptions of Team-Teach from the staff members of the two special schools to ascertain their impressions of the initial training. These staff members had between six months' and five years' experience in implementing Team-Teach. Research participants rated aspects of the training using a 7-point scale from 1 (being the most positive possible response) to 7 (being the most negative possible response). Measures of central tendency for the entire cohort and for specific subgroups were calculated to provide information for analysis.

Semi-structured interview data were collected from ten research participants within the participant schools to 'make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the "meanings" people bring to them' (Snape and Spencer, 2003, p. 3). This qualitative approach created an opportunity for investigation into 'small areas in a great deal of depth' (Davidson and Tolich, 1999, p. 123) from the detailed narrative and rich data in order to facilitate a 'guided conversation' (Bogden and Biklen, 2007, p. 104). This enabled the development of a perspective of the perceptions of Team-Teach training that might not have been possible through exclusive use of quantitative techniques. Comments and concepts arising from the coded analysis of interview transcripts and course comments related to initial training have been used in conjunction with the analysis of statistical data to inform the findings of this study.

Results

The majority of research participants in New Zealand rated all elements of the training positively (see Figure 1) with the number of 'excellent' and 'yes fully' responses between the four providers ranging between 51% and 98%. There was a consistent trend throughout the data indicating a hierarchy in terms of which training provider achieved the highest number of 'excellent' or 'yes fully' ratings, with Team-Teach Asia/Pacific scoring the highest, school A scoring second highest, and school B and the residential school obtaining the lowest ratings.

Thematic analysis of the comments provided on course evaluations identified four major themes: attitudes to general course delivery and content; attitudes to the physical and non-physical intervention components of training; administration, logistics and resources; and the importance of relevance and context.

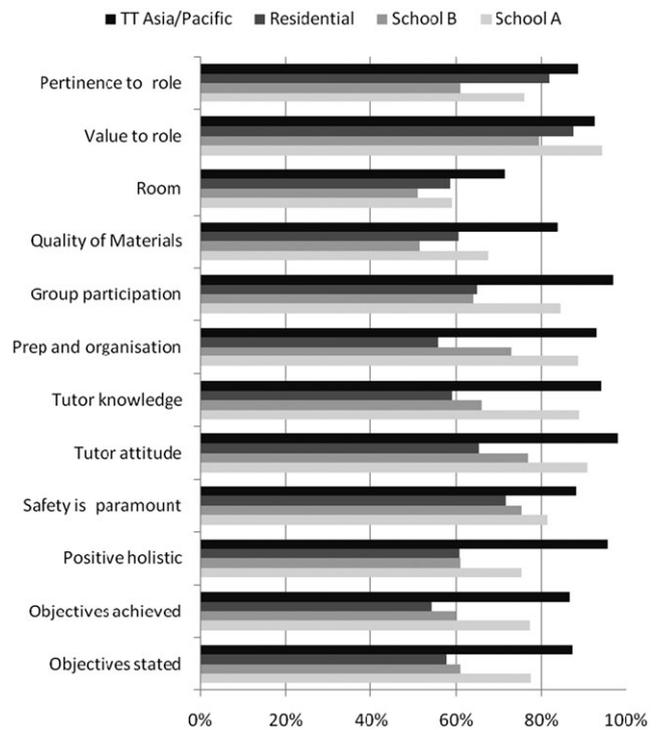


Figure 1. Percentage mean of 'excellent' and 'yes fully' responses for 11 key questions on course evaluation from participants for each of the four Team-Teach training providers

Theme 1: Attitudes to general course delivery and content

Comments related to the course were very positive overall. Research participants considered the training to be basic, clear and easy to follow, as well as comprehensive and holistic. Participants also considered the training to be child focused and to support the maintenance of dignity and humanity.

There were concerns raised over the direct relevance of legal aspects of training. Some participants appreciated the shift between practical and legal aspects to reinforce the connection while others maintained that this section needs to be addressed more deeply as it lacks understanding of the New Zealand context. Team-Teach was described as a 'real risk mitigation approach' to prevent the school 'becoming the headline'.

The competence of trainers was rated very highly. Trainers were regarded as knowledgeable, well presented and able to be understood clearly using relevant case examples from students at their respective schools. Research participants appreciated the time for co-workers to become familiar with each other and discuss real problems in the workplace.

Theme 2: Attitudes to the physical and non-physical intervention components of training

Research participants generally endorsed the non-physical de-escalation aspects of the training with support for the

gentle way that crisis situations can be handled, with special emphasis on empathy, diversion, defusing and de-escalation. There was a clear indication that participants embraced the concept of non-physical intervention as the first option. A few respondents endorsed the ‘behaviours that challenge’ module which focuses on how the actions of staff members can cause anxiety and aggression in students.

The physical interventions were received positively by staff as relevant to their work roles. A number of participants positively endorsed the range and ease of implementation of physical options with an appreciation of the graduated levels of responses. They also appreciated that holds were designed to minimise pain to which children are subjected. The ability of tutors to link practical techniques to the actual situations within their schools also featured positively.

Theme 3: Administration, logistics and resources

Some research participants were not confident that they would be able to remember the physical techniques when required and expressed a need for more time to practise technique. Others commented that training needs to be more frequent to maintain operational usefulness, as they may forget techniques in times of crisis.

Participants expressed concern over developing supporting paperwork and documentation. Many participants identified that they would require help filling out the paperwork after an incident and highlighted concerns that ‘support from the top’ would be insufficient.

There were suggestions that the course workbook (resource manual) should follow the flow of course delivery. Participants also requested supplementary readings, for the sound and picture quality of video clips to be improved, and for the video clips used to be more focused on the children and adults encountered in day-to-day work.

Theme 4: The importance of relevance and context

Research participants generally indicated that the training is relevant to their setting. However, for some participants the physical interventions selected for the practical training component lacked specificity for their operational contexts. Many participants noted the need for specific (usually physical) interventions for specific situations and students in a number of areas such as weapon removal, dealing with self-abuse or dealing with physically larger students. Although there were many favourable comments regarding the use of ‘in-house’ tutors who know the students, some participants suggested that the training should be implemented in the real world of the classroom, with tutors coming into classes to ‘observe and advise more closely’.

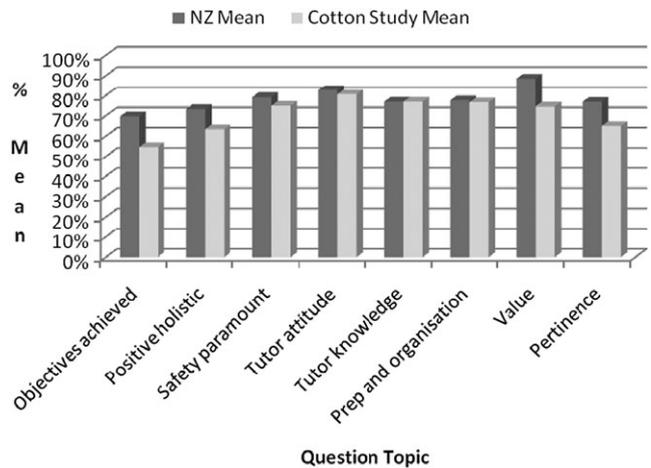


Figure 2. Comparison between the percentage mean of ‘excellent’ and ‘yes fully’ responses for New Zealand participants with the results of the Cotton (2010) study in the UK

How does feedback from New Zealand participants, immediately after course delivery, compare with that from a similar UK-based study?

The New Zealand mean for ‘excellent’ and ‘yes fully’ responses was consistently equal to or greater than the mean scores presented in the Cotton (2010) study from the UK (see Figure 2). However, there were significant differences in scores between New Zealand providers and the strength of the New Zealand mean is heavily influenced by the positive data from Team-Teach Asia/Pacific and school A.

The greatest range between scores was seen in the elements of objectives achieved, and in the value and pertinence of training whereby an additional 15% of New Zealand participants rated these aspects as ‘excellent’ or ‘yes fully’. The elements involving tutor attitude, knowledge and preparation had the least variance with a maximum of 2% variation between the New Zealand and UK figures.

When the mean responses were combined, New Zealand research participants rated aspects of the training as ‘excellent’ or ‘yes fully’ 78% of the time, as compared with the Cotton (2010) study figure of 71%.

The perceptions of staff members in two New Zealand special schools regarding the usefulness of the training further into implementation

Research participants remained positive about the usefulness of the course further into implementation with neither institution scoring within the negative end of the 7-point scale (from 1 being the most positive possible response to 7 being the most negative possible response). School A received a more positive endorsement of the training (mean = 2.33) than school B (mean = 2.94), for a combined mean of 2.59 (see Figure 3).

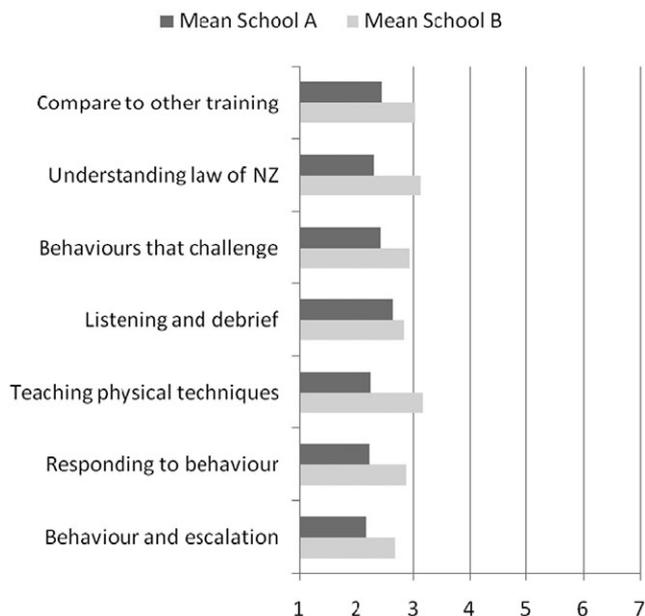


Figure 3. Mean ratings for participant perceptions of the initial training further into implementation (1 being the most positive response and 7 the most negative)

The more experience staff members had, the more useful they noted the training to be. Managers and then teachers found the training to be most useful with support staff and those identifying as ‘other’ finding the training somewhat less useful. As an example of this, in the understanding of the law, staff members with experience of ten years-plus rated the training very positively (mean = 2.23) whereas new staff members with less than 1 year’s experience in the job rated this far more negatively (mean = 5).

Feelings of disempowerment and anxiety among staff, brought about by being unaware of what they can and cannot do, were considered to be reduced by formalising the physical and non-physical de-escalation strategies. Team-Teach training has, for some participants, ‘*formalised an approach or intervention they were doing already*’.

Research participants tended to recollect the physical aspects of the training as the primary element. Indeed tutors from school B reported that, in spite of what they thought was a major emphasis on the use of non-physical responses 95% of the time, many participants focused on the physical elements of the training. Participants in school B reportedly found the physical interventions ‘*very daunting*’. Tutors addressed this in subsequent courses with a reduction in the teaching of physical techniques and an increased focus on things that were ‘*really applicable to the school*’.

Discussion

It would appear that introducing Team-Teach into New Zealand has not affected the perceived usefulness of Team-Teach training as reported by course participants. New

Zealand research participants have been quick to endorse this approach as a means to address the difficulties they are encountering. The research participant ratings in this study match or exceed the ‘overwhelmingly positive ratings’ (Hayden and Pike, 2004, p. 27) reported in previous studies in the United Kingdom. This positive finding continued further into implementation, suggesting that the initial course was found to be relevant in the real working environment. There is, however, a large variation between research participant feedback for the four providers within New Zealand, suggesting different levels of success. This is perhaps directly related to the stage of implementation of Team-Teach within each institution, the commitment to the programme from school management, and the quality and personality of the internal trainers.

Many of the identified strengths and suggested areas for improvement from New Zealand recipients of Team-Teach training support the views of their UK counterparts. The development of confidence in staff members and the formalising of their existing strategies for behaviour management featured prominently. Concerns were identified over the need for regular refreshers, development of supporting documentation, and systems to support the full implementation of Team-Teach. This demonstrated that participants realised, at an early stage, that there would need to be continued investment of time and resources post-training in order for Team-Teach to be effective.

In terms of application to New Zealand, there is clearly a danger in importing elements of training from another country and making the assumption that it will automatically work within a different context and culture. The legal aspect of Team-Teach training must be tailored to New Zealand law and guidance, otherwise the training at best lacks relevance and reduces confidence in the course, and at worst provides potentially misleading information.

Although it is not clearly discernible from the data collected, it is possible that more experienced staff members, who have a deeper experience base of both student behaviour and past training courses and have had longer in the system to see the impact of Team-Teach, may have a greater appreciation of the quality of the training than those who have only recently been trained and are new to special education.

The compelling endorsement of ‘in-house’ trainers perhaps reflects the ability of those on the inside to take the basic Team-Teach package and deliver this in a way that resonates with the staff members at the school using contextual examples. Research participants in New Zealand clearly approved of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the physical interventions taught. There is, however, a strong indication that teaching a generic set of predetermined physical interventions can result in participants leaving the training room with unresolved issues and an excess of unwanted techniques that they will most likely forget.

There may therefore be a case for the course structure to comprise an initial theoretical component that can be delivered generically to the group, complemented by a second component comprising the teaching of a minimum amount of physical interventions delivered in the classroom environment and tailored to identified needs. The Team-Teach training framework facilitates the development of internal trainers; therefore this should be more than achievable for schools following this mode of implementation.

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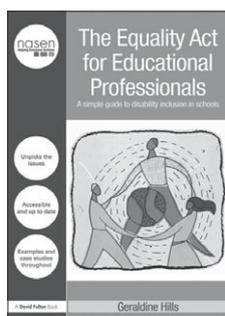
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