

Staff evaluation of training on Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) and positive handling strategies: a social validity assessment

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Executive summary

This case study is a social validity assessment and will report on the extent to which staff members employed at BeyondAutism consider training in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) and Positive Handling strategies acceptable and satisfactory. This case study will review whether staff members find value in being trained and certified in the 'Team Teach' approach and whether staff consider the training to be pertinent to their work role. Given that the Team Teach approach is implemented across the services including but not limited to Early Years through to Post-19, it is important to consider the social validity of such training, especially for those who directly implement Team Teach strategies with learners that exhibit behaviours perceived to challenge.

Introduction

In their 'Positive Handling Policy', BeyondAutism reflects the working realities and acknowledges the likely consequences of working with learners that may not effectively communicate their needs and therefore exhibit behaviours perceived to challenge.

Team Teach strategies have been adopted at BeyondAutism. These strategies encompass 95% of non-physical intervention whereby staff members consider their use of space, environmental changes and time management as well as adopt calm stances, postures, gestures, positive facial expressions, voices and words. The remaining 5% of Team Teach strategies (which includes physical intervention) are employed as BeyondAutism acknowledges that some behavioural incidents may likely involve the use of force whereby staff members use prompts, guides, escorts, holds, restraints and restrictive physical intervention.

This case study aims to evaluate whether staff members feel that this type of training is valuable and relevant to their role. The case study will also summarise qualitative reports and testimonials from staff members related to dynamic risk assessments, safeguarding and considering the best interests of the learners.

Method

Internal and closed Team Teach training is delivered by accredited trainers. Trainers attend 5-day courses which are re-accredited annually. Not all staff members working for BeyondAutism are trained in Team Teach but those that are, will either attend a 6-hour (1 day) or 12-hour (2 day) Team Teach course.

Within the 6-hour or 12-hour courses, attendees are provided with theory and background information related to the legal framework and guidance surrounding physical intervention and the consequent reporting and recording. All course attendees are continually encouraged to consider what is 'reasonable, proportionate and necessary' via table-top exercises, role play, group discussions, quizzes and feedback. In line with the positive handling policy outlined by BeyondAutism, the safety and dignity of all individuals, including learners and staff members are highlighted as being of paramount concern. Materials including workbooks are also provided which detail the rationale for specific interventions and how these should look. The courses also contain practical elements whereby the trainers will model and assess the attendees on their ability to demonstrate specific techniques such as prompts, guides, escorts and holds.

Following the initial training, certificants attend formal refresher training and receive re-accreditation every two years. During the two years, internal training is conducted when needed.

After every course, evaluations are completed by course attendees. Social validity as defined by Kazdin (1977) and Wolf (1978) concerns the appropriateness and acceptability of [ABA] interventions as both process and outcome measures. In this case study, we will be investigating whether Team Teach attendees (and consequently certificants) consider the outcomes of their Team Teach training to be socially significant for the learners they work with.

The responses to two specific questions will be outlined. They are as follows:

"Rate how valuable this training was"

"Rate how pertinent the training was to your work role"

The data gathered derives from staff members who attended 6-hour or 12-hour courses in September 2019, January 2020, March 2020, September 2020 and February 2021.

Results

Team Teach course attendees completed evaluations at the end of their 6-hour or 12-hour course.

The evaluation form is separated into thirteen questions across three areas:

- 1) Rating of training
- 2) Standards of the trainers/ materials and venue
- 3) Relevance of training

All questions enabled attendees to respond using the scale in figure 1.

For the purposes of this case study, all responses marked as 'Excellent' will be considered as 'Yes, fully' and all other responses (Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor) will reflect a previous evaluation form and its responses (see Figure 2).

Summary evaluations were collected from courses that occurred in September 2019, January 2020, March 2020 and February 2021. The findings were as follows:

- In September 2019, 41 out of 42 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 39 out of 42 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In January 2020, 16 out of 19 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 15 out of 19 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In March 2020, 11 out of 13 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 10 out of 13 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In September 2020 (refresher course), 14 out of 16 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 14 out of 16 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In September 2020 (new course), 27 out of 33 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 30 out of 33 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In February 2021 (refresher course), 14 out of 15 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 12 out of 15 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.
- In February 2021 (new course), 16 out of 19 attendees considered the training to be valuable and 15 out of 19 attendees considered the training to be pertinent to their work role.

Across the seven training courses between September 2019 to February 2021, there were a total of 157 attendees (see Figure 3). Of these, 139 attendees considered the Team Teach training to be valuable (88%), whilst 135 attendees (85%) considered the training to be pertinent to their work role. This data along with the following qualitative responses and testimonials around PBS strategies and positive handling strategies covered in the course illustrates high social validity.

"The course-built confidence for me"

"A strength of the course is knowledge of what methods are appropriate and when"

"The course equips you for difficult situations and how to keep yourself safe and the kids safe during those times"

"A strength of doing the course is my knowledge now of risk reduction and de-escalation techniques"

"It was really helpful in teaching methods to protect yourself and others. It was very practical with a focus on reasonable and proportionate reactions"

"We had practical experience in the course and that helps when we encounter similar situations at work"

"A strength of doing the course is that I know how to restrain appropriately to keep myself out of danger"

"The course was helpful in helping us to understand how to support behaviours in school"

Discussion

This case study has considered whether Team Teach attendees consider the training around positive behavioural support and positive handling strategies to be valuable and whether this training has pertinence to their work role. Such findings regarding social validity could help Supervisors and Consultants (as well as the Senior Leadership Team) determine whether behaviour plans and risk assessments

when it relates to staff members that will directly support, manage or intervene with behaviours that challenge that may require more physical intervention.

To extend this case study further, we could compare those who are Team Teach certified vs. those who are not Team Teach certified and see whether their thoughts differ around PBS and positive handling strategies. Furthermore, we could compare those who have different roles within the organisation e.g. school staff vs. admin staff/ site managers vs. Head of Pastoral. It would also be imperative to look at the social validity from a learner perspective or even parent perspective to determine how learners feel about this type of training, especially if they have the means to communicate how positive handling strategies support them.

Whilst social validity is a subjective measure, it is undoubtedly an important one. It is useful in helping us determine if the interventions (Team Teach staff training) are acceptable and appropriate, especially for the learners we interact with and for those that interact with the learner.

References

Kazdin, A.E., 1977. Assessing the clinical or applied importance of behavior change through social validation. Behavior modification, 1(4), pp.427-452.

Positive Handling Policy

<https://www.beyondautismschools.org.uk/files/policies/26/Positive%20Handling%20Policy.pdf>

Wolf, M.M., 1978. Social validity: the case for subjective measurement or how applied behavior analysis is finding its heart 1. Journal of applied behavior analysis, 11(2), pp.203-214.

Figure 1. Example of evaluation form (January 2020 onwards)

Relevance of training	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Value of Training	✓				
Pertinence to Work Role	✓				

Figure 2. Example of previous evaluation form (September 2019)

	Yes, fully	More or less	Only some	No
Was the training valuable to you?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was it pertinent to your work role?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If either response is no, please explain:

Figure 3 displays the percentage of attendees across each course that felt the Team Teach training was valuable and was pertinent to their work role especially when being applied to managing behaviours that are perceived to challenge.

