

For several years the main Custtad facility was located in a Primary school in the north of the City of Glasgow, Scotland. It was staffed by teachers from the school who had been trained in the approach. It also functioned as the training base.

The following comments were prepared for a presentation to a group of Head Teachers from throughout the city who had been invited to the school to learn about the work. Included in the presentation was an opportunity to view the facility. This was intended to aid their understanding of what resources would be required if the Head Teachers became interested in using the approach as a resource within their own school.

It should be noted that, as with most recipes, there can be a deficit of very useful information. This one is no exception. It will present most of the main ingredients but to produce the best results a lot more detail is required. That level of detail is provided in the training program and is out with what can be communicated in the following comments.

Further information, including how and why the approach acquired the name CUSTTAD, can be found on this site and at [www.custtadcentral.com](http://www.custtadcentral.com)

## **HOW TO MAKE GOOD CUSTTAD: a recipe for Head Teachers**

The name of this particular dish is CUSTTAD. It has been tested and amended over a period of twenty-five years and has been enjoyed by most of the children who have tried it, although I do know of two who did not like it at all.

We have worked hard to source and combine the best ingredients and we recommend that you adhere closely to the recipe. We have had experience of people who, with scant knowledge of the essential requirements have introduced several of their own - with inedible consequences.

If made well CUSTTAD is intended to be of some benefit to everyone in a mainstream primary school.

## **THE MAIN REQUIREMENTS**

The unequivocal top-down support of those with overall responsibility for the Special Needs provision within an Education Authority.

An enthusiastic and committed Head Teacher who has a genuine appreciation of the potential benefits of having a Custtad facility in their school.

A fully trained Custtad worker - also committed to the approach but with a strengthened conviction from having completed the training program.

A room of approximately 3 metres by 4 metres and fully resourced with the materials necessary for the effective use of the approach.

A staff group, including office staff and classroom assistants, with a well informed and overall understanding of the approach and what it aims to achieve.

With these in place the next stage is to identify which children might benefit most from spending some time in a Custtad facility.

The Head Teacher acts as the Main Referrer, that is the person who will make the final decision about which children are invited to try out the facility. It is assumed that in their decision making they will be working closely with the Custtad Worker.

Potential referrals can come from anyone who might be concerned about a child's behavior: for example, this could be a parent/carer, a class teacher or a school assistant. An invitation to a child might also stem solely from knowing that there has recently been an upsetting incident or event in their life.

When a child has been identified the parent/carers would be contacted to suggest that their child might benefit from using the facility. It is only after the agreement of the parent/carers has been obtained that a child would be invited to try out the facility.

The ways in which the parent/carers respond to the suggestion and how the child responds to the invitation can vary greatly and in training we discuss the various possibilities and how to address each of them. There are however several basic requirements in how this aspect of the approach is managed.

The setting and circumstances in which the suggestion and the invitation occur need to be very carefully thought through with the aim of making it as comfortable as possible for the offers to be accepted or declined. The main aim is to arrive at a situation in which the child, without encouragement or pressure of any kind will choose to spend some time in the facility.

If the parent/carer's agreement is obtained and a child has accepted the invitation the arrangements would then be made for the child's first visit to the facility.

In addition to their role as the Main Referrer the Head Teacher also functions as the Main Receiver, that is the person to whom any information or feedback from the sessions will be taken. They will also be responsible for deciding what, if anything, can be usefully shared with other members of staff or brought to the attention of parent/carers or other agencies.

There can be situations in which the child's concerns relate to their experience in class and the Head Teacher would be best placed to deal with these.

There are no circumstances in which a Custtad worker would be sharing information arising from a session with anyone other than the Head Teacher. However before this sharing takes place it would be expected that an agreement had been reached between the worker and the child.

Whenever possible a Custtad worker aims to involve the child, in the task of devising and deciding on what strategies might be adopted to address any concerns which have arisen during their time in the facility.

The exception would be a situation in which the suspected abuse of a child may have occurred. In this case there is a statutory obligation to report it and the guidelines for doing so would be closely followed.

As regards the information which might emanate from a child's use of the facility: it is important for everyone in a school community to feel confident that anything which might aid their understanding of a child and assist them in how to respond to a child's behavior will be shared whenever appropriate.

However, as indicated earlier the first port of call would always be the Head Teacher in her role of the Main Receiver.

## **A FEW OTHER INGREDIENTS**

A child is never ever invited to the facility or allowed to spend time there as a bribe, an enticement, a reward or when they are actively upset- either sadly or more on the wild side.

We use the word unsettled when referring to children who might find the Custtad facility useful. This definition is intended to encompass those who are causing concern in a quiet way as well as those whose upset is being expressed in more obstreperous behavior.

When a Head Teacher is considering which members of her staff might be best suited to become an effective Custtad worker there is one consideration which perhaps supersedes all others. It has the potential to have most impact on the effective use of the approach and it concerns the degree of trust and cooperation which will be possible between the Head Teacher and the probably more knowledgeable Custtad worker.

We have two further considerations. One is of an entirely practical nature the other is more difficult to both identify and describe.

About the practical one: leaving aside the attributes which are most likely to be of value in the work with the children, the ideal worker would be someone who would relish the challenge of taking charge of resourcing and organizing a facility.

And once it has been established, of keeping it fully resourced and in good order. When a child arrives at the door of the room either to have a look at what's inside or having decided to try it out, they should always see before them a very well ordered and resourced environment.

And about **the** more nebulous one: a very important attribute is what we refer to as a back wall. It is familiar concept to most grownups who spend considerable time with children. It is also a characteristic which is either there or is not there.

It is intuitively recognized by most children and can be further communicated in a look or a few words delivered straight and true and sincerely meant - and with the prospect of them being followed through on if necessary.

From the training we have become well aware that not everyone takes to this approach or will become comfortable using it. This is not a reflection on their abilities which in other areas of their work with children may be excellent. Custtad is just not everybody's cup of tea. In choosing which staff member might be best suited it isn't always easy to make the right choice but it is important to be aware of this issue.

The person chosen to take part in the training should not be a member of staff who once they are trained will be working with the parent/carers.

However good parent/carers might be, a child sometimes feels unable or unwilling to share their concerns with them. This may seem like a small point to make but it is an important one. A child who observes the Custtad worker talking or liaising with a parent or carer can be deterred from sharing possible serious concerns about their home situation.

## **A PLAN OF ACTION**

During training a Custtad worker is required to work on a Plan of Action in consultation with those members of their staff group who are responsible for the overall organization and management of the school. Included in the Plan are all the procedures associated with the presentation of Custtad to parents, children and colleagues, the arrangements for the management of the facility within the school and the protocols required for negotiating with external agencies.

How these are decided upon reflect a particular school's organization, but they are expected to be in tune with certain criteria. Again, a full consideration of those criteria is addressed as part of the training.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT IF THE RECIPE IS ADHERED TO**

As regards the potential benefits of having a Custtad facility in a school: the following observations are based mainly on our experience in the primary school in Glasgow. But they

are being continually affirmed by the reports we receive from the facilities which have been established in fourteen primary schools in South Lanarkshire. The Custtad approach is now an integral resource in their early intervention provision.

The most obvious and easily observable benefits to date are that children become more settled in class, can concentrate better on their work and are less disruptive in the playground. In conjunction with these benefits are the reports from parent/carers about children being more settled at home.

Once a facility has been established in a school the Head Teacher and the staff gradually get to know which children are most likely to benefit from it. And allied to this comes an improved understanding of the children's concerns, how they may have been fueling the unsettled behavior and an increased confidence in how to respond to it.

Also, as it gains in both acceptance and familiarity- and this is an arguable outcome - there can be a noticeable improvement in the overall atmosphere within the school. This most likely stems from an increasing awareness that one or two of the previously most disruptive children have become less disruptive. And that the change may be related to their having spent time in the Custtad facility. This perception is further enhanced as other children begin to spend time there and appear to be benefitting from it.

This is a message which is very easily communicated and which spreads easily. And it brings with it a growing and comforting sense to all that they belong in a community which has a working response to the more troubled children, and where being unsettled does not automatically lead to more difficulties or to being suspended or excluded.

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