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Newly Qualified Teachers and Child Protection

A Survey of Their Views, Training and Experiences

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Context

Schools are part of the multiagency approach to child protection. The role of local education authorities as a constituent part of every local authority is made clear in the Children Act (1989), and subsequently in *Working Together Under the Children Act* (Department of Health *et al.*, 1991) and the updated *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health *et al.*, 1999). The Department for Education and Science (1988) issued guidance for schools on child protection in a Circular and its successor, the Department for Education and Employment (1995), has updated this guidance. Despite the fact that many local authorities do have training programmes for teachers and there was government funding which supported this in the mid-1990s, much of this was targeted on designated teachers for child protection. As important as their role is, every teacher has a responsibility for the welfare of children and, because of their daily contact with children and young people, needs an awareness of the issues and possible indicators alongside knowledge of child protection procedures. The obvious place to begin to achieve this is on the initial training courses.

A survey of the coverage of child protection on initial teacher training (ITT) courses in colleges and in SCITTs (school-centred ITT) was undertaken in 1997. This work was done by the author with Keith Hodgkinson of the University of Loughborough (Baginsky, 2000). There was a great deal of variation across institutions concerning how they went about this—as well as some uncertainty about what should be covered and who should teach it. A maximum of 3–4 hours was being devoted to child protection on a few courses but

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sometimes it was as little as 1 hour. There were one or two courses where students were said to be able to develop an interest and submit some written work for assessment on child protection, but that was very unusual.

In 1996, the specific coverage of child protection had been discussed as a future requirement on ITT courses. In Circular 4/98 *Teaching: High Status, High Standards* (DfEE, 1998), there was the requirement for one standard in the new ITT curriculum to relate directly to child protection. As a result of the survey and this new requirement, the decision was taken within the NSPCC to develop a course for student teachers on child protection. This decision was taken in the spring of 1999 and a course was in draft form by September of that year.

All the ITT courses that had replied to the survey were invited to consider taking part in piloting this course. Twenty-eight courses expressed an interest, but in the event 14 courses were involved. The decision about participation was usually based on whether or not the courses could timetable an additional input when the academic year was just about to commence. While 10 courses were anxious for NSPCC staff to teach the course, the staff on two courses were prepared to teach the material themselves and two other courses agreed to be involved in the evaluation as 'contrasts'. The evaluation was extensive, involving students, tutors, trainers and experts in the field of child protection. (The results of this evaluation are reported in an unpublished NSPCC report by M. Baginsky, 2000, 'Report on the evaluation of the piloting of child protection in initial teacher training 1999–2000'.)

Students who followed all the courses expressed a high level of satisfaction with them. The NSPCC courses, both those taught by NSPCC staff and those taught by their own tutors, were generally rated higher on the areas explored. However, the confidence and understanding shown in the questionnaires were not reflected in the discussion groups held with students after their next long school placement. The experience of working in schools left many confused by the mismatch between the messages they had received in the training and the reality which they had faced. Many reported hearing colleagues question the point of making a referral to social services when so often they were not aware that anything was then done. There was also a great deal of confusion around the issue of neglect. There were children judged by students to fall into this category of abuse on the basis of what had been said in the training but schools had taken the view that social services would be very unlikely to define them as 'neglected'. A range of other issues were

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examined but this discrepancy, plus the comments made by experts on the materials, led to a recommendation that the course be rewritten, with an emphasis on the role of teachers within a multiagency approach to child protection. NSPCC staff are currently writing such a pack.

Survey

However, this evaluation also produced a group of 461 students who were willing to answer more questions in the future. It provided the opportunity to follow them up during their early years of teaching to see what involvement, if any, there had been with child protection concerns and how confident they had felt in dealing with the issues they had encountered. Questionnaires were distributed to all of these and 308 replies were received (67%) from those who had followed the NSPCC course (36 replies were also received from students who had followed the contrast courses, but they have been excluded from this analysis). Not only did it seem opportune to capture the views of these students as they entered professional practice, it seemed worthwhile to extend the survey to a wider sample. The question was how to identify a wider sample. This was done by e-mailing a number of courses, explaining what was intended and asking if they would circulate a questionnaire to former students who had qualified in the past 2 years. A notice describing the project was also placed in *The Times Educational Supplement* (TES) which invited newly qualified teachers to make contact with the researcher if they were willing to complete a questionnaire. In addition, questionnaires were sent to a total of 34 schools with whom the researcher was working on another project with a request that they should be given to any teacher who had qualified in 2000 or 2001. A few questionnaires were also distributed through persons known to the researcher to be in this cohort, some of whom passed them to friends. The unorthodox methods of distribution make it impossible to even estimate a response rate for the 1119 responses received. The figures in Table 1 add up to 1118, as one respondent had not taught since qualifying as a teacher.

Responses

In answer to the question whether they thought teachers should have a role in child protection, the overwhelming response (98%) was that they should, mainly because of their

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Table 1. Impact of child protection training on confidence and knowledge

	NSPCC ITT course ($N = 308$)	Other ITT course ($N = 586$)	No ITT but subsequently ($N = 71$)	No training at all ($N = 153$)
Confidence about role and responsibility	69% 83% of those with subsequent training; 65% of those without subsequent training.	58% 75% of those with subsequent training; 42% of those without subsequent training	75%	44%
Confidence about child protection concerns	84% 96% of those with subsequent training; 80% of those without subsequent training.	80% 85% of those with subsequent training; 76% of those without subsequent training.	98%	66%
Know what to do re suspicion of abuse	94% 98% of those with subsequent training; 92% of those without subsequent training.	86% 88% of those with subsequent training; 88% of those without subsequent training.	98%	73%
Know what to do if pupil discloses abuse	92% 98% of those with subsequent training; 91% of those without subsequent training	91% 94% of those with subsequent training; 89% of those without subsequent training.	97%	68%
Know what to do with a third-party disclosure	74% 83% of those with subsequent training; 71% of those without subsequent training	72% 70% of those with subsequent training; 73% of those without subsequent training.	57%	46%
Know what to do if a pupil makes an allegation against a member of staff	57% 53% of those with subsequent training; 59% of those without subsequent training.	57% 71% of those with subsequent training; 45% of those without subsequent training.	49%	33%

daily contact with children and also because of their general responsibility for children's welfare. It was known that the NSPCC respondents had attended a course while training but the other respondents were asked if they had received any training on child protection while training. Seventy-two per cent replied that they had. While it was not known whether training had been provided for the respondents recruited through the TES or through personal contact, it was known that child protection training was available on the two courses. Four hundred and ninety-one teachers had attended these courses, yet over a quarter (26%) said they had not received training. It may be that training was not provided but it is also possible that they chose not to attend specific inputs or were unaware of them. Even among those who said they had received training, there was an enormous variation in what they remembered about the input and its structure.

Ninety-two per cent of those who had followed one of the NSPCC courses rated it as useful or very useful in their professional practice, compared with 65% of those who had

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followed other courses. It is possible that this reflects reality or it may have been a 'halo effect' created by responding to an NSPCC questionnaire. However, 97% of those who claimed they had not received training replied that they would have liked to have done so. The importance of providing good-quality training on ITT courses is underlined by the fact that only 36% had received some training on child protection since they started training and, in fact, 13% of respondents had not had any child protection training before or after qualification.

One of the advantages of this sample was that it provided the opportunity to see if there was any difference between those who had followed the NSPCC course, those who had received other training while qualifying and those who had not had any training.

In answer to the question of whether or not they knew who the designated teacher for child protection was in their schools—a key figure in the referral process—75% of all those who had any child protection input on their ITT course knew their identity. But so did 69% of those who did not have that training while they were students. However, this figure falls to 58% of those who had no training at all. It is interesting that while 62% of those who had been on the NSPCC course knew their designated teacher, the figure rose to 82% of those who had followed other courses during their initial training. It may be that the NSPCC course dealt more with issues around child protection rather than process (although the role of the designated teacher was covered), while other courses stressed policies and process.

Table 1 summarizes the responses to various other questions which explored knowledge, confidence and reactions in relation to child protection issues. The four groupings do differ in size but they allow an initial examination of issues which has not been explored before. The figures show there was very little difference between those teachers who had followed the NSPCC course and those who had followed another child protection course during their initial training. What is perhaps surprising is the level of confidence and knowledge expressed in relation to some aspects by those who did not attend a course during their training but who did so subsequently. (This training was mainly provided by schools or LEAs.) That group expressed a very high level of confidence in relation to responding to child protection concerns and in reacting to suspicions and disclosures, and a higher level than was evident among all those who had child protection input

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during their training in relation to their role and responsibilities. There were also some marked differences in the confidence of teachers who had training as students between those who had a subsequent input and those who did not.

However, those who had only received training since qualification showed a significantly lower level of confidence in their reaction to a third-party disclosure and to an allegation against a member of staff than those who had followed a course while students. It is only fair to point out that the general level of confidence about allegations against colleagues was low. Of those who had any training, it was at its lowest among those who had followed a course while training with no subsequent input, but it was not at the level found among those who had no training at all. Only one-third of that group claimed to know what to do if a pupil made an allegation against a member of staff.

All the respondents were asked to say if they had been involved in a child protection issue. Fifty-two per cent of respondents had been involved with at least one child protection case since leaving college; 50% of those who had received some training had such involvement, but so had 54% of those who had received no training at all. Given the willingness of teachers to accept their responsibilities to respond to children and protect them from abuse, trainers and employers have a responsibility to ensure that teachers are prepared for the task. Two-thirds of respondents identified at least one area where they thought they required more assistance. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned area was how to deal with allegations against members of staff, but a large proportion of these teachers also asked for training in how to talk with children, further inputs on child protection and guidance on where to go for advice and on how to work more effectively with social services. (In discussions with student teachers, many commented on both the lack of training in communicating with children and the omission of any significant input on child development, both of which they attributed to the pressures on courses to meet curriculum requirements.)

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Discussion

This study and the one which preceded it have implications for how teachers are prepared to meet their responsibilities in relation to child protection. These teachers had trained

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when there had been a specific requirement in relation to child protection in the teacher training curriculum. Although the new standards required to attain qualified teacher status and for initial teacher training courses mention the need to be:

> 'Aware of, and work within, the statutory frameworks relating to teachers' responsibilities'

it remains to be seen if the lack of a specific reference will lead to even less coverage of child protection. The amendment to the Education Bill in the summer of 2002 requires that:

> '(1) A local education authority shall make arrangements for ensuring that the functions conferred on them in their capacity as a local education authority are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
> (2) The governing body of a maintained school shall make arrangements for ensuring that their functions relating to the conduct of the school are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children who are pupils at the school'.

It is likely that this will lead to a greater emphasis being placed on child protection training.

Teachers are likely to be involved in a child protection case during their early years in the profession, so it makes no sense to delay training. The teachers involved in this study wanted the subject covered during their initial training. It is important that it is prominent in that curriculum, both because it is an intrinsic aspect of promoting the welfare of children and because it is unfair to children and teachers alike if they are not prepared. *Safeguarding Children: A Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health, 2002) recommended that child protection training should be part of the core training of all professionals working with children.

However, relevant training needs to be provided again once teachers are in practice. The results of this study indicate that in-service training for newly qualified teachers impacts on the confidence of both those who have had and those who have not had training prior to qualification. This may be because they are fitting the training into the reality of their experiences in schools, or because those providing the training have recent experience of child protection issues and cases, or it may be for reasons yet to be determined. The pressures on newly qualified teachers may well push details of lectures attended at college to the back of their minds or, as Morrison (1997) concludes when discussing the training of social workers:

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> 'We may not assume that learning has occurred just because training has taken place, and if learning has not occurred then change will not follow'

However, despite the confidence, in some areas, of those who had only been on courses after qualifying as teachers, the prudent approach is to advocate good training on ITT courses and in the period after qualification. Any programme on an initial teacher training course should recognize the fact that it is being taught outside the context where the participants will be practising. It should reinforce the need for them to avail themselves of further training opportunities, become familiar with the policies and procedures in their schools and access both formal and informal support. It also has to be recognized that there is very little time devoted to child protection training on initial teacher training courses. While the argument for a more significant input should be made, the reality is that these courses are under considerable pressures to achieve a great deal in a short time. In 1997, a survey of higher education institutions offering initial teacher training courses found that the majority devoted between 2 and 3 hours to child protection (Baginsky, 2000). A similar survey was conducted in the summer of 2002 and it was evident that the same proportion of time was being devoted to this subject. The courses are either 1-year PGCE courses or 3- or 4-year degree courses, but there were no significant differences between course length and child protection input except that 4-year degree courses were more likely to have a slightly longer input than on 3-year degrees. One of the clearest messages from the survey is that there will be no additional time for child protection training, even though it is considered to be a very important topic. There is a multitude of components for ITT providers to fit into their courses and they are left with a very difficult balancing task. While course staff recognized the importance of preparing student teachers for this work, they are subject to many demands and a considerable proportion of the students' time is also spent in schools.

Some LEAs take their role in preparing their newly qualified teachers to meet these responsibilities very seriously. But too many do not have the resources to do so or choose not to offer such training. It also has to be recognized that LEAs are powerless to force schools to send their teachers on this training. Only 17% of the newly qualified teachers surveyed had been on a child protection course run by their LEAs. Schools are another source of training, but again only 20% had received any child protection training in their schools.

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The figures explored above confirm the importance of providing training on a continuum. Such an approach would allow students to acquire an understanding of child protection. Hopefully, they would then be able to approach the subject without apprehension, which might disempower them and leave children unprotected. It would also provide the foundation for training they would receive in their first year of teaching and subsequent regular inputs to support them in meeting their responsibility to protect children from abuse. It would be a challenge to develop, co-ordinate and finance this training, which could be supported by specific programmes and maybe by distance learning materials. There is also much to be done in developing appropriate materials for teachers and others in schools which address the realities which they face and increase their confidence in being effective partners in the child protection process.

One approach would be to make pre-service and regular in-service training in this area a requirement for teachers to continue in employment. As controversial as such a requirement might prove, especially at a time of teacher shortage, it may be what is required to make sure schools really are in a position to be part of a joined-up, multiagency approach which does protect children. The results of this study indicate that teachers are more confident after child protection training, which would seem to have implications for more effective practice and reduced levels of stress.

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