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Training Teachers to Safeguard Children: Developing a Consistent Approach

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Earlier work on the preparation of student teachers to deal with child protection concerns had indicated that initial teacher training (ITT) providers were often struggling to determine what to include on the subject and who should provide the input, as well as coping with the difficulty of trying to fit it into an overfull curriculum. In an attempt to support this work, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) developed a course for this group of students. Although an evaluation indicated the need for the materials to be redrafted, the views of both those involved in the exercise and a subsequent survey of ITT providers not only contributed to the redraft but also to the debate around the most effective approach to training professionals to protect children and young people. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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'Providers were often struggling to determine what to include on the subject and who should provide the input'

Alongside health and social services agencies, schools and the education service have long had a vital role in promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children. While schools have traditionally taken responsibility for the welfare of the children in their care, this role has become more formalized since the late 1980s. Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities in England and Wales have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and, so far as is consistent with their duty, to promote the upbringing of children by their families. As a result of cases that have gone tragically wrong, there has been a deliberate attempt to coordinate action and develop interagency collaboration and cooperation. While social services departments have been the lead agency in this respect, other agencies have been involved in child protection work. The Children Act (2004) will now reshape the landscape with the development of Children's Service Departments, which

'There has been a deliberate attempt to coordinate action and develop interagency collaboration and cooperation'

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follows on from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) having assumed responsibility for children's social services in 2003.

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 establishes a clearer duty for local education authorities (LEAs) and maintained schools (state-funded schools) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Section 157 of the same Act places the same responsibilities on independent schools. Earlier guidance has meant that every school must have a designated teacher with responsibility for child protection. While training for this group has been well established, it has been a more hit-and-miss matter for other teachers. Yet the effectiveness of a designated teacher depends to a large extent on the ability of other teachers to report their concerns and respond appropriately to children who may be at risk or in need (Baginsky, 2000). Until relatively recently, very little attention was paid to the training which was or should be available to student teachers. In the late nineties, a survey of higher education and school-based initial teacher training (ITT) courses showed that the overwhelming majority were doing something in relation to child protection. However, in many cases, based on the admission of those involved, its adequacy was open to debate (Baginsky and Hodgkinson, 1999; Baginsky, 2000). Circular 4/98 *Teaching: High Status, High Standards* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) laid down the Secretary of State for Education and Employment's requirements for all ITT courses. This circular has now been replaced by *Qualifying to Teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training* (DfES and TTA, 2002). Although there is no specific requirement in relation to child protection, newly qualified teachers are required to be aware of their professional responsibilities. These have now been significantly redefined by the Education Act 2002 and clarified in the Handbook of Guidance that accompanies *Qualifying to Teach.*

'Every school must have a designated teacher with responsibility for child protection'

'Newly qualified teachers are required to be aware of their professional responsibilities'

The guidance from the DfES in relation to the organization and management needed to safeguard children (DfES, 2004b) now makes it clear that all designated teachers with responsibility for child protection should not only receive appropriate training on child protection and interagency working but should attend refresher training every 2 years. All other staff should attend refresher training every 3 years, having attended induction training for all new staff in an authority. The guidance recognizes that teachers should receive training as part of their initial training but does not elaborate upon what this should entail other than to add that it may need to be reinforced on appointment. This means that each teacher

training institution still determines the duration and structure of the training of its students and, without consistency, schools and local authorities cannot assume any knowledge and will need to start from scratch.

The First Training Pack

The survey of training programmes carried out in 1998 indicated considerable variation and some uncertainty about what was and should be covered on ITT courses on child protection. The NSPCC made the decision to attempt to devise a training pack for these courses. The aim of the pack, 'Child protection in initial teacher training tutor pack', was to give trainee teachers basic introductory information to prepare them for their role in protecting children from abuse. The objective of the programme was that trainee teachers would know what to do if a child disclosed abuse to them. It was built around a series of headings—recognizing, responding, reporting, roles and responsibilities, and reflecting—and included tutor presentations supported by video material, overhead transparencies and handouts; small group problem-solving activities based on case study and other practical material; and directed time tasks which could be undertaken while students were on their school placements.

'Trainee teachers would know what to do if a child disclosed abuse to them'

Evaluating the First Training Pack

The pack was piloted in 13 higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK during the academic year 2000–01. Two of these courses agreed that their own staff would deliver the NSPCC materials and another course wanted to involve their own staff alongside those from the NSPCC. Course staff in three other HEIs agreed to allow the researchers to observe courses they had developed themselves An attempt was made prior to the start of the evaluation, as well as during the process, to recruit a number of school-based training courses into the evaluation, but this was not possible. Two other HEI courses allowed the evaluators to pilot questionnaires and other instruments with their students and tutors and were available to advise at various points.

'Allowed the evaluators to pilot questionnaires and other instruments with their students and tutors'

The evaluation comprised:

- Questionnaires to students. There were usually two questionnaires, one immediately after the input and a second after the next teaching practice, and responses were received

from 1247 students, which represented 69% of students involved in these courses
- Discussion groups with students (25 groups, involving 248 students)
- Interviews with tutors on all courses involved in the evaluation in any way (24 tutors)
- Feedback on the materials from all those who had used them
- Feedback from experts in the fields of education and child protection both in the UK and overseas (25 individuals)
- Observation of all the taught courses

At the time of the first questionnaire, 59% of students said they were confident in their role and responsibilities in relation to child protection. This rose to 73% by the time they completed their second questionnaire, but there was considerable variation between those who had received different types of input and between different courses. As Horwath and Morrison (1999) point out, learner satisfaction when expressed on an evaluation sheet at the end of a course cannot be used to indicate learning gains. Despite the high confidence levels recorded in the questionnaires, there was a significant number of respondents expressing some anxiety and confusion, even among those who had indicated that they were confident. It was evident that many students recognized their responsibilities but were also reflecting on the difficulties that they believed they could face in handling a case of suspected abuse. The concerns focused on:

'A significant number of respondents expressing some anxiety and confusion'

- The sensitivity of the subject matter
- The belief that the reality would be much harder to cope with than they had been led to believe by the course
- The importance of the approach taken by the school and the support offered
- A recognition that time constraints and other factors meant that the coverage had been superficial and was not adequate preparation
- The failure to deal with the subject in an integrated way throughout the initial teacher training course
- A fear of dealing inappropriately with a disclosure

One of the intrinsic difficulties in the evaluation was that some issues identified as problematic by the evaluators during the observations were not necessarily identified by students. This was, of course, because most of them had very little or no previous experience of child protection. Their lack of prior knowledge also meant that most were not able to assess the input comparatively, so some caution had to be exercised in judging how much importance to place on these data in the full evaluation. It was vital that the responses to the questionnaires were viewed alongside the more detailed

'Lack of prior knowledge also meant that most were not able to assess the input comparatively'

and reflective comments made by students in discussion groups. Although the students reported higher levels of confidence in a number of areas related to child protection at two points after the courses, this confidence was not evident in the discussion groups. Despite the fact that the introduction to the pack said that the materials had been designed to provide students with a variety of learning experiences and 'to address the fact that effective understanding is dependent on *deep learning*' which engages students' affective and personal responses to factual material (Entwistle and Tait, 1990), it was evident that on this level they had failed (Baginsky and Davies, 2000).

'Evident that on this level they had failed'

Reflections on the Evaluation

Both the responses to the questionnaires and the discussion groups provided valuable insights into how students viewed the input on child protection, as well as their reactions to wider aspects of their ITT courses. The key messages that emerged from this evaluation, which were then used to contribute to a second draft of the materials, were that the pack needed to:

- Determine and recognize previous training which students might have received
- Include input on how to listen and respond to children which could be delivered across ITT programmes rather than confined to the child protection training
- Adopt a more focused approach to the recognition of possible concerns and the reporting of suspicions
- Include more input on how to respond to a disclosure and on what support might be available
- Include detailed preparation on how to deal with parents in relation to sensitive situations
- Recognize student teachers' feelings of vulnerability to accusations from children/students
- Relate to the reality of schools and the responsibilities and roles of other agencies
- Provide guidance prior to teaching placements, specifically with reference to appropriate methods of reporting and appropriate levels of restraint and where students could obtain support if required
- Be the first stage in ongoing professional training

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As a result of the evaluation, the decision was taken to redraft the material but, for various reasons, this was delayed. Partly to update the survey of ITT providers conducted in 1998 (Baginsky and Hodgkinson, 1999; Baginsky, 2000) and partly to assess the views of those teaching on ITT courses on what materials, if any, they would find useful, a questionnaire was sent to all ITT providers in the early summer of 2002.

Table 1. Initial teacher training providers responding to the 2002 survey

Training provider	Award	Nature of teacher training programme				
		Primary	Secondary	Key stage 2/3	All sectors	Total
HEIs	**PGCE**	34	36	1	—	71
	Degree	38	14	—	—	52
	Total	72	50	1	—	**123**
SCITTs	**PGCE**	16	16	—	1	33
	Total	16	16	—	1	**33**

2002 Survey of Initial Teacher Training Providers

At that time there were 75 higher education institutions involved in offering at least one initial teacher training course. It was difficult to determine the number of ITT courses which each HEI was offering, so at least two questionnaires were sent to each and it was made clear that additional questionnaires would be sent if requested. At least one questionnaire was returned from 53 of the 75 HEIs (71%), and 123 questionnaires were received in total. Fifty-one school-centred initial teacher training courses (SCITTs) were also identified. SCITTs are based in schools and the training is run by them. Groups of schools design the training programme and may choose to work with a range of partners such as HEIs or LEAs. Thirty-three of the 51 SCITTs (65%) returned a questionnaire. This meant that responses were returned from a total of 156 ITT courses. Table 1 summarizes the responses.

Respondents' Views

As in the previous survey conducted in 1998, most courses expressed a very high commitment to including an input on child protection. However, 10 of the institutional courses (five PGCE and five degree courses) were not doing so, and neither were three of the SCITTs. Nine of these 13 courses wanted to provide such an element and had even identified agencies they might approach for assistance, including LEAs, schools, social services and the NSPCC.

'The majority of courses (83%) had a specific element dedicated to child protection'

The majority of courses (83%) had a specific element dedicated to child protection. Most combined a lecture with a workshop, discussion group or seminar, but some were incorporated into other aspects of the ITT course. Over a third of those courses with a specific, defined element claimed that

aspects would also be covered in other parts of the ITT course. Despite the level of commitment expressed, only a small proportion of PGCE and degree courses in HEIs devoted over 3 hours to child protection. Two-thirds of the PGCE courses in HEI and in SCITTs devoted less than 2 hours to child protection. Slightly more time was given to the subject on degree courses, although over three-quarters of degree courses still gave it less than 3 hours. One of the clearest messages was that, even though child protection is considered to be a very important topic, there will be no more time available for it in the curricula. There are many important components for ITT providers to include in their programmes and they are left with a very difficult balancing task.

Most PGCE courses (HEI and SCITT) covered the subject in the autumn or spring terms, with over half doing so after the first major teaching placement and before the second, although a small number of courses (8%) did not cover the subject until after the final placement. While a quarter of courses gave at least a briefing before the first placement, this meant that most students went on their first placement without any introduction to the subject. There were references to how mentors would support students but there was very little detail about how this worked. Most courses included core content on one or more of the following areas: child protection procedures, the Children Act, and indicators of abuse. However, there was also considerable variation over what was covered. For example, just under two-thirds of courses included an input on how to deal with allegations made against a member of staff and only one in five courses even mentioned the *Framework for the Assessment of Children and their Families* (Department of Health *et al.*, 2000). Table 2 records the areas which were covered by the courses responding to the survey.

'Most students went on their first placement without any introduction to the subject'

Table 2. Aspects related to child protection covered on initial teacher training courses responding to the 2002 survey

Aspect	Number of courses ($N = 156$)
Child protection procedures	125 (80%)
Children Act 1989	124 (79%)
Indicators of abuse	122 (78%)
Work of other agencies	110 (70%)
Case studies	97 (62%)
Allegations against staff	95 (61%)
Incidence in schools	85 (54%)
Incidence in society	67 (43%)
Working together to Safeguard Children guidance	57 (36%)
Framework for the Assessment of Children and their Families	30 (19%)

On the majority of courses at least one specialist from a related profession was involved in the course, although on 17% of courses covering child protection the course was taught only by a non-specialist.

Views on the Proposed Pack

Just over 80% of respondents reported that they would welcome the provision of a pack by the NSPCC on the subject of child protection for their students. Many of the respondents were very clear about the format and structure which this pack should take, sometimes drawing on examples of other materials which had proved effective.

'Most students would not have had professional or personal experience'

One of the points most frequently made was that in relation to a subject such as child protection, where most students would not have had professional or personal experience, no prior knowledge should be assumed. There was, however, a split between those who wanted a very focused approach centred on recognizing the indicators of abuse and what action to take and those who wanted a wider-ranging course, which placed the material within a broader professional and social context. Those in the former category believed that it would be wrong to go beyond awareness-raising at the pre-service stage when so much had to be fitted into overcrowded professional programmes. They considered that it was up to schools and LEAs to continue the support and further training. In a survey of newly qualified teachers (Baginsky, 2003), only 36% of the newly qualified teachers surveyed had been on a child protection course run by their LEAs or schools during their first year of teaching. However, LEAs are now required to:

'Only 36% of the newly qualified teachers surveyed had been on a child protection course run by their LEAs or schools'

> 'make sure that induction training for all new staff in the authority . . . includes training on safeguarding children that will enable them to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of child protection effectively.' (DfES, 2004b)

Respondents from both HEIs and SCITTs emphasized the importance they placed on working in partnership with schools and they wanted any materials which were produced to be addressed to schools also. Those based in HEIs acknowledged the growing importance of distance learning materials and, in view of the limited time which would be available for this topic, wanted the pack to lend itself, at least in part, to independent study. There was a definite preference for succinct information rather than an extensive pack, but respondents wanted it

linked to other sources of information. It was thought important that the material was photocopiable and, given the difficulties facing those working outside their subject domains in keeping up with recent developments, regular briefing sheets would also be welcomed.

The respondents indicated the pack should contain:

- Information on emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect, together with a focus on verbal abuse/psychological abuse
- Information on the short-term and long-term consequences of abuse
- Case studies which emphasized interagency cooperation and good practice and which illustrated the impact of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department of Health *et al.*, 1999), the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* (Department of Health *et al.*, 2000) and Section 175 Education Act 2002
- Guidance materials with flow charts and decision matrices
- Guidance on how to respond to children
- A video with a guide which did not overdramatize the issues
- Directed reading and additional reading lists, supplementary materials, legal summaries, links to websites and examples of LEA and school policies/procedures

Not only did the respondents have clear and reasonably consistent ideas about what they wanted to see in any pack on child protection prepared for use on ITT programmes, there was also a surprising degree of agreement in their additional comments. While there was a recognition that it should be those with expertise in the area who determined the exact content, respondents believed that materials which shock were ultimately counterproductive. There were, of course, mentions of specific areas which individuals wanted to see included, but over half the respondents mentioned three issues as requiring particular attention:

'A surprising degree of agreement in their additional comments'

'Over half the respondents mentioned three issues as requiring particular attention'

- Safety of children when using the internet
- How teachers deal with allegations against colleagues and how they protect themselves from unfounded allegations
- The particular difficulties which male teachers may face in primary schools

Two of these three issues featured prominently in a survey of newly qualified teachers which addressed their experience of training in child protection and of dealing with child protection cases since qualification (Baginsky, 2003). Two-thirds of these newly qualified teachers identified at least one area where they wanted further training. The most frequently mentioned area was how to deal with allegations against

members of staff, and many of the male respondents referred to their concerns about being particularly vulnerable to allegations. While these issues are dealt with in the pack, the degree of concern which students expressed, particularly around allegations against themselves and colleagues, indicates that these need to be addressed within the school context and on subsequent training. It would seem more likely that teachers will be in a better position to safeguard children if they are confident about what to do if they are concerned about a colleague's behaviour and how they should behave to protect themselves. The issue has received a great deal of media attention, and although many professionals now believe that allegations are being dealt with more effectively (see Baginsky, 2005), high-profile cases alongside a reported increase in the number of 'false' allegations made against teachers have fuelled concerns. The reality is that there is no existing information on the number of false allegations, although some parties have wrongly labelled all those cases which have not proceeded to a prosecution as 'false'.

'There is no existing information on the number of false allegations'

Besides preparing trainee teachers for their role in providing for the protection of children, research and feedback from students has shown that a small but significant number of them experience direct involvement in a child protection case while on placement in school (Baginsky and Davies, 2000). This involvement usually constituted awareness of an individual child's situation, contributing to the class teacher's support for the child, and monitoring and recording, but some had been accused of assault by a child and had gone through the necessary process of investigation. It emphasizes the need for HEI providers to have access to and use training materials to help students meet the professional challenges they face when teaching in school.

It is also interesting that those who train students identified the importance of including a section in child protection training on how to respond to children while a large proportion of newly qualified teachers also thought they needed more training in how to talk with children, both generally and specifically, in relation to a disclosure of abuse (Baginsky, 2003).

'A large proportion of newly qualified teachers also thought they needed more training in how to talk with children'

Matching the Ideal with Reality

While those involved with child protection think such training is vital for teachers, it is necessary to acknowledge the realities of contemporary teacher training, where too much competes for too little time. Given the demands, it is not

realistic to expect a significant increase in the time given to the subject. But this does not mean that the situation cannot be improved. A few respondents referred to the input provided by social services departments and this was clearly valued, both in terms of the content and the fact that it provided a bridge between the two professions. Others preferred to work with designated teachers for child protection, who they felt were able to provide clear guidance from an informed educational perspective. While the materials included in the pack are important and, it is hoped, will provide a more consistent basis for professional practice, it is equally important to recognize what can and cannot be achieved. The pack 'Learning to protect' is designed to be delivered in a period of between 2½ hours and 1 whole day, to reflect the differences in the time which may be made available. Its purpose is to 'cover the essentials in child protection training' (NSPCC, 2003, p. 8) by introducing the subject and setting it within an educational context, exploring values and attitudes in relation to child abuse, and providing information on how to recognize indicators of abuse and what to do about concerns. The materials also deal with:

'Others preferred to work with designated teachers for child protection'

- Interagency practice and procedures
- The role of the 'designated teacher', who after September 2004 would be the designated *person*, who need not be a 'teacher' but should be a member of the school's senior management team (DfES, 2004b)
- What happens when a referral is made to social services

There is also a consolidation module designed, among other things, to reflect on what has been learned, share feedback from school placements and provide support on communicating with children and parents.

Once a training pack is published, those who have developed it usually have little control over how it is used. This is the case with this pack, but there is a strong recommendation that the training is undertaken by two people—one with an educational background and one with a social work background. It would probably also benefit from being integrated into teaching on individual needs and inclusion. Everything we know about learning supports the idea that one-off courses, which are not embedded into other elements of programmes, will not be effective. While there are severe restrictions on the time available for any additional input on initial teacher training courses, the efficacy of 'isolated' workshops or the like is questionable. Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) looked at one-off workshops which focused on particular initiatives and concluded that they did not work because they did not

'Strong recommendation that the training is undertaken by two people'

'Teachers need to be engaged in rigorous examination of practice, set within a range of possible situations'

sustain 'meaningful changes'. Teachers need to be engaged in rigorous examination of practice, set within a range of possible situations which allows for close examination of the subject and reinforcement over time.

It is suggested that this 'bolt on' approach may have contributed to the disparity between students' confidence as evidenced in the questionnaires and their greater diffidence in discussion groups. Indeed, the early discussions around the development of the pack had recognized this shortcoming and discussed the idea of weaving the content into the rest of the curriculum. The NSPCC was not alone in advancing it as an alternative and the possibility has been developed by others (see Goodyear, 1994). Despite the fact that learning theory would suggest that this would mean that the 'lessons' would be more likely to become embedded in students' practice and understanding, given the pressures under which initial teacher training operates it seemed unlikely that such a suggestion would be widely adopted when it would require a radical re-structuring of courses.

'Teachers operate under different levels of pressure'

Students would benefit from the opportunity to reflect on the course in the light of their experiences in schools. Teachers operate under different levels of pressure. In some circumstances, they will have very little time to reflect on practice. They need to be able to respond quickly when faced with a situation in which they have little time to think (Korthagen, 1995), but their responses must be based on understanding and confidence, not checklists.

While reality will present situations for which it is very difficult to prepare teachers, those educating the next generation of teachers were convinced that this could not be done without the support of schools. In the evaluation of the original pack it was evident that, while students had felt reasonably confident after the course, their experiences in schools led them to question what they had been told and had undermined their confidence. The fact that the original pack was abandoned and a second pack (NSPCC, 2003) developed was an attempt to arrive at something which would maintain and support teachers' confidence in dealing with this area of their work. It seems likely that there will be less chance of success with a course which is delivered to, rather developed with, those responsible for using it. Although it has not been possible to respond to all requests from training providers—for example, a video is not included in the pack—the pack is an example of how an outside agency has worked with academics and others to develop training materials for use in higher education. The success has yet to be evaluated.

Currently, policy in England and Wales is tied to *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004a), a programme of change designed to improve outcomes for all children and young people. It assumes a more fully integrated service for education and childcare which will have an impact on all teachers, including those who are newly qualified; subsequent revision of the training materials will be necessary. It is likely that teachers, along with other professionals working with children and their families, will need to reconsider their role in protecting children through:

'A programme of change designed to improve outcomes for all children and young people'

- Working to align potentially competing perspectives from social work and education
- Engaging in what has been referred to as the discourse of welfare versus control (Stainton Rogers, 2001)
- Contributing to a wider debate on the need for a social constructivist approach to the definition of child abuse
- Helping to devise and implement a curriculum for protection

'Learning to protect' (NSPCC, 2003) has now been available for several years, and in view of the changes introduced through the *Every Child Matters* agenda, *Safeguarding Children in Education* (DfES, 2004b) and the Children Act 2004, the materials will need to be revised. It is an appropriate time to examine how what was learnt from the evaluation of the original materials may contribute to an evaluation of 'Learning to protect'. But it will also be important to consider how best to involve a range of stakeholders and professionals in this evaluation to ensure that the training meets the needs of students, trainers, the relevant services and, most of all, children.

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