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Child abuse and neglect: Training needs of student teachers[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Increasing awareness of child abuse and neglect (CAN) raises questions about how well teachers are prepared for their role in child protection. This paper assesses and differentiates training needs of first-year students ($n = 216$) in Northern Ireland. Multiple-choice tests were used to assess knowledge of CAN statistics; recognising and reporting; policies, procedures, and legislative frameworks; and direct work with children. Considerable gaps in knowledge were found. Results between student groups varied and provide evidence of the need to develop pre-service child protection training. The importance of differentiation between student groups in terms of training content is emphasised.

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1. Introduction

Interest in the healthy development and adjustment of children and young people and thereby in child abuse and neglect (CAN) is by no means new. However, violence against children was viewed as a private matter for generations (Korbin & Lynch, 2002), and prevalence rates were vastly underestimated. For example, in the early 1960s, against a paucity of reliable data, Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller, and Silver (1962) estimated that in the USA fewer than 1000 children were victims of physical abuse each year. In contrast, 40 years later, 6 million children were referred with alleged maltreatment and 3.6 million of these received a full investigation or assessment (Gaudiosi, 2006).

This kind of shift in public awareness and concern fomented due to a number of high profile CAN inquiries (Bunting & Reid, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Munro, 2005). The realisation of the detrimental effects of CAN on children's learning (see for example, Creeden, 2007; Wolfe, 1999) and the parallels between childhood trauma and behaviour (Geddes, 2003) raised awareness regarding the importance of appropriate educational responses to childhood trauma (Burnett & Greenwald O'Brien, 2007; Cole et al., 2005).

Given that children and young people spend a third of their time in school, teachers and others working in the field of education are in a unique position to contribute to CAN detection and prevention (Baginsky, 2003, 2007). Although there has been an emphasis in recent years on providing in-service or post-qualifying child protection training for education staff, less emphasis has been placed on pre-service training. Yet, students on a variety of courses, such as Initial Teacher Education, Early Childhood Studies, and Health and Leisure, are placed in annual field practica in a range of educational settings from the first year of their degree. During these practical work experiences students commonly have more than 25 children in their care at any one time. Given that an estimated 2.3% of all children have experienced CAN (Gaudiosi, 2006), there is a high probability that during their training these students meet with a number of children who have experienced CAN.

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2. Child protection in education

2.1. Pastoral responsibilities

It is now well established that children and young people cannot learn effectively unless they feel secure and their basic needs are met (Perry, 2001). This means that, coupled with curriculum requirements, professionals in the education sector have a responsibility for pastoral care, described by OFMDFM (2006) as safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. Indeed, a primary purpose of pastoral care in schools in Northern Ireland is 'to help children and young people make progress in their learning' (Burnison, 2003, p. 4). Consequently, Departments of Education in the UK (e.g., DENI, 1999; DE, 2007) require schools to make child protection procedures explicit in school policy documentation.

Clearly, teachers have a unique role in child protection. Indeed it has been argued that teachers' role in this type of work has far reaching influence because they are able to observe early signs of abuse, such as changes in behaviour or failure to develop typically (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997). In order to be able to do this, teachers and early childhood professionals need to realise the realities of CAN (Briggs, 2001; Briggs & Potter, 2004) so they may recognise the relationship between children's emotions, levels of self-esteem, and other areas of academic learning (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; MacBlain, McKee, & MacBlain, 2006). Webster-Stratton (2004) and others (Briggs, 2006; Briggs & Hawkins, 2005; Howe, 2005) argue strongly for promoting children's social and emotional competence in schools and highlight how traumatic experiences, such as abuse and neglect, can affect children's self-esteem and delay emotional development, resulting in changes in physiological, cognitive, behavioural, and social functioning (Perry, 2001).

2.2. Child protection training

Today, much of child protection work is carried out in multidisciplinary teams, including social work, police, health, and education (ACPC, 2005; Glennie, 2007). Baginsky (2007) highlights that teachers need to be clear and confident about their own pastoral role with regard to sensitive issues of child protection, especially when collaborating in multidisciplinary child protection work. As such the importance of child protection training for those working with children and young people, including teachers and early years specialists, is without question (McKee & Dillenburger, 2006; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001).

Against this backdrop, a survey commissioned by the UK's National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC; Baginsky, 2001) found that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) were not prepared to deal with childhood trauma upon entering professional practice. While NQTs took their responsibility toward the protection and safeguarding of children in schools seriously and indeed a large number found themselves involved in a child protection case within the first 18 months of professional practice, the study pointed out that these NQTs did not feel informed nor were they prepared to respond effectively due to the lack of pre-service child protection training (Goldman, 2007; Rossato & Brackenridge, 2009).

As a result of these findings, the NSPCC (2003) developed 'Learning to Protect', a child protection resource pack for teacher education in England, that addresses many of the complex issues of child protection, including detection, responding, reporting, and roles and responsibilities within education. Although the 'Learning to Protect' resource pack has been used in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in some colleges in England and Wales, in most pre-service education courses child protection training was not compulsory. This is despite the fact that public inquiries of child deaths, such as that of Victoria Climbié, recognised the role and responsibility of many professionals in child abuse and neglect prevention (Laming, 2003). In particular, the Capon Inquiry into the death of Lauren Wright identified the failure of education staff to detect obvious signs of abuse (Norfolk Area Child Protection Committee, 2002).

This responsibility and indeed the importance of multiagency training, is emerging as a key element in some child protection training initiatives (Glennie, 2007). For instance, it has been argued that multiagency and mixed group training is useful because, as well as sharing practice experiences and information during training sessions, participants will form useful links with each other and use these links to create a community of practice (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2009). Indeed, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) uses a multidisciplinary model in its protocol for international training of CAN professionals in developing countries (Gray, 2008).

In most places a 'Tiered' approach to CAN training is used. For example, the North East Scotland Child Protection Committee's training programme 'Emotional Abuse and Neglect' (NESPCPC, 2006) deals with CAN awareness at Tier 1; interagency child protection work and direct work with children at Tier 2; and specialised child protection training at Tier 3, while the NSPCC's (2003) 'Learning to Protect' includes two foundation modules and one consolidation module.

The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003) conceptualised the approach to CAN training in 4 Tiers, whereby each Tier equates to a different level of training and service need. This 4-Tiered approach is used in the context of the research reported in this paper.

- Tier 1 training and service relates to universal issues and includes an introduction and raising of basic awareness of issues regarding CAN;
- Tier 2 training equates to an intermediate level and concentrates on professional and multiagency practice and early prevention issues;
- Tier 3 training offers consolidation and reflection related to services provided directly for children in need; and
- Tier 4 focuses on specialist issues that are advanced and offer specialist subject based training.

In Northern Ireland (NI) education as well as social services departments have identified the need for adequate and effective child protection training (DE, 2007; DHSSPS, 2005; OFMDFM, 2009). While a number of post-qualifying child protection training programmes are offered to teachers and early years specialists and most workers are well motivated and keen to engage in ongoing professional development (Moran, Dallat, & Abbott, 1999; VDA, 2005), they generally do not regularly update their child protection training as they are already overstretched in their work (Rossato & Brackenridge, 2009). At the same time, during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students are enthusiastic about the need for training in CAN and time could be made available in the pre-service curriculum (McKee, 2008a), yet some ITE programmes offer less than 2 hours of child protection training (Baginsky, 2001). In fact, students in ITE feel that they would be able to adequately identify or respond to child protection issues, if only they were afforded the opportunity to engage in pre-service child protection training that follows the 4-Tier approach outlined earlier (McKee, 2006).

Internationally, the picture is similar. For example, in Spain (Cerezo & Pons-Salvador, 2004) and Portugal (Catarino, 2007) as well as in Australia (Laskey, 2007; Mathews & Walsh, 2004) only limited child protection training is offered to pre-service and in-service teachers. Even in places where basic child protection training is a pre-requisite for licensure for educational staff (Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Social Services, 2003), a 2-hour online course is deemed sufficient to meet training requirements (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009).

A number of studies have considered the adequacy of pre-service training. McKee (2003) in Northern Ireland and Kenny (2004) in the US used similar research tools, i.e., the Early Years Questionnaire on Child Protection (EYQCP; McKee, 2003) and the Educators and Child Abuse Questionnaire (ECAQ; Kenny, 2004) to assess pre-service training. The children taught by participants differed somewhat in age, i.e., early years and pre-school (McKee, 2003) and middle school (Kenny, 2004). Nonetheless, both studies reported a low percentage of educators having received pre-service child protection training: 34% in Kenny's study and 24% in McKee's study. Nearly two-thirds of participants in Kenny's study felt that the training was either minimal (43%) or inadequate (23%). In general, student teachers did not feel that they were "aware of the signs and symptoms of neglect, physical, or sexual abuse" (Kenny, 2004, p. 1315). In fact, a large percentage of participants (87%) did not even know their own school procedures for reporting child abuse. Both studies highlighted inadequacy of knowledge in detection and identification of early indicators for all types of abuse and more specifically neglect, child sexual abuse, and physical abuse. These findings are worrying especially since lack of familiarity with the early indicators of CAN and lack of knowledge of procedures makes it extremely difficult to effectively report suspected abuse (Catarino, 2007; Sundell, 1997; Zellman, 1992).

2.3. Child protection guidelines

The education sector generally relies on government policy documents that outline the pastoral role and safeguarding duties within schools and early years settings. In NI, schools and early years settings are guided by several key policy directives, such as the *Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection* (DENI, 1999), which offers guidance with regard to child protection and suspected abuse as well as complaints against school staff; the *Education and Libraries (NI) Order (2003)* which, apart from school funding and other organisational matters such as admissions, deals with how Boards of Governors are to safeguard and promote pupil welfare, child protection issues, and school discipline; Department of Education Circulars (DENI, 2006/06, 2006/07, 2006/08, 2006/09) and *Regional Policy and Procedures* (ACPC, 2005) which offer guidelines for everyone who works with children and which therefore emphasise that child protection is 'everyone's business'.

These guidelines, coupled with the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (NI) Order (POCVA, 2003), the Education (Prohibition from Teaching or Working with Children) Regulations (NI) 2006, and AccessNI (2008) give schools the responsibility to contribute to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and ensure that those deemed unsuitable to work with children will not gain employment in education. In fact, the link between pastoral and academic dimensions in schools means that those who work directly with children and young people in education must achieve 'school preparedness' (McKee, 2008a) and be in tune with their pastoral responsibilities before embarking on professional teaching practice.

This paper addresses two practical questions:

- Is there a need for pre-service child protection training for undergraduate college students in Initial Teacher Education (BEd), Early Childhood Studies (ECS), and Health & Leisure (H&L)?
- Is there a need to differentiate the training needs between groups of students?

To answer these questions, the research reported here took an authentic baseline by assessing the overall level of knowledge of CAN in first-year undergraduate students prior to any CAN training, and analysed the knowledge differential between groups of students on different courses.

3. Method

Ethical approval was granted for this study from the Research Ethics Committee, Queen's University of Belfast.

3.1. Participants

A total of 216 first-year student volunteers took part in this study; 25 males and 191 females, reflecting an overall under-representation of male students typical for teacher training colleges. In the college in which the present study was conducted the typically overall male:female ratio was 21:79. All participants attended the same college but were enrolled in three different courses: Initial Teacher Education (BEd Primary and Post Primary) ($n = 135$), Early Childhood Studies (BA ECS) ($n = 49$), and Health and Leisure (BSc Health & Leisure with school placement option) ($n = 32$).

3.2. Research tool

Baseline Assessment Test (BAT): A self-completion, multiple-choice Baseline Assessment Test (BAT) was designed for this study. The content of this test was adapted from the Early Years Questionnaire and Child Protection (EYQCP) (McKee, 2003) and consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions, addressing 6 CAN categories: CAN statistics; defining and recognising CAN; causes of CAN; responding to and reporting of CAN; government CAN policy, school procedures and legislative frameworks; and direct work with children and young people. Each of the six categories had five questions. Each multiple-choice question had four possible responses, only one of which was correct. Correct answers were scored 1 and incorrect answers were scored 0; there was no negative scoring.

3.3. Procedures

To ensure authenticity, the baseline measure was collected during specially convened class meetings at the beginning of the first academic semester, prior to any CAN teaching input. To ensure data integrity, the three groups of participants met separately and returned the BAT to the researcher immediately at the end of the 1-hour class meeting. All students in attendance at the class meeting completed the BAT and participation was voluntary.

4. Results

Table 1 shows results of the BAT in relation to frequency and percentage of correct responses for all five themes (questions) in each of the six categories, according to the three student groups.

4.1. Group comparison by category

Category 1: CAN Statistics: There were no major differences between groups in terms of knowledge of CAN statistics; all groups scored low in 4 out of the 5 themes. BEd students scored higher than the other two groups in *Detection* of abuse and in percentages related to *Case Reviews*. ECS students scored slightly higher than the other two groups in *Prevalence* and *Outcomes*. H&L students did not score highest in any of the themes within the statistics category of the BAT, although their score for *Outcomes* was similar to that from BEd students (44% and 43%, respectively).

Category 2: Defining and Recognising CAN by Type: All groups had a similar percentage score in relation to defining and recognising abuse by type, and the impact of abuse on the *Development* of children. H&L students scored higher in relation to defining *Neglect* (81%) compared to BEd students (61%) and ECS students (57%) and in defining *Physical Abuse* (78%, 65%, and 49%, respectively), yet they scored slightly lower in defining *Sexual Abuse* (44%), compared to BEd students (48%) and ECS students (61%). None of the groups scored over 47% in defining or recognising *Emotional Abuse*.

Category 3: Causes of CAN by Type: All three groups had a similar level of knowledge in relation to the most likely cause of *Neglect* and most students within the groups were aware that *Social Standing* had no bearing on the prevalence of child abuse and neglect. None of the groups scored more than 50%, with some slight differences between groups, in relation to knowledge on causes of *Emotional Abuse* – BEd (38%); ECS (47%); and H&L (28%). None of the groups scored greater than 14% in the understanding of the causes of either *Physical Abuse* or *Sexual Abuse*.

Category 4: Responding to CAN: In relation to the different types of, and occasions for, responding to abuse, all three groups scored slightly higher in their *Observational Role* than the other four questions within this category. Although ECS students scored higher than the other two groups in four out of five themes, they scored lowest when asked about the *Involvement* of the teacher in the investigation aspects of the child protection process.

Category 5: Government CAN Policy, Procedures, and Legislative Frameworks: The majority of students scored lower than 50% in four of the five questions in this category. Where all groups had a similar score for questions related to the general principles of legislation and Government policy, ECS students scored higher when asked about the specifics of the *Welfare Checklist* within the Children (NI) Order (47%) compared to BEd students (27%) and H&L students (28%). All three groups scored over 70% on the question regarding the significance of the *Role of the Teacher* in the detection of child abuse and neglect.

Category 6: Direct Work with Children and Young People: Finally, the majority of students from all three groups scored well when asked about changes in children's *Behaviour* as a result of abuse and neglect, however, they were less well informed regarding indicators of how to respond to specific types of abuse such as *Sexual* (highest score ECS students, 16%), *Physical* (highest score H&L students, 28%) or *Neglect* (highest score ECS students, 30.5%). Only 50% of H&L students scored correctly

when asked about how to respond to symptoms of *Emotional* abuse compared to over three quarters (77%) of ECS students and 63% of BEd students.

4.2. Training requirements

These results are important particularly when pre-service training needs are mapped onto the 4-Tier training paradigm recommended by the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003). When each of the Tiers is considered to require a certain

Table 1
Frequency and percent correct in BAT themes by category by student groups.

Category 1. CAN statistics											
Themes within category											
Groups		Prevalence		Case reviews		Outcomes		Detection		Female sexual abuse	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	29	21	43	32	58	43	99	73	57	42
ECS	49	17	35	11	22	24	49	32	65	23	47
H&L	32	6	19	6	19	14	44	18	56	12	37
Category 2. Defining and recognising CAN by type											
Theme within category											
Groups		Emotional		Neglect		Development		Physical		Sexual	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	36	26.5	82	61	106	79	88	65	65	48
ECS	49	13	26.5	28	57	45	92	24	49	30	61
H&L	32	7	22	26	81	27	84	25	78	14	44
Category 3. Knowledge of causes of CAN by type											
Theme within category											
Groups		Emotional		Physical		Sexual		Neglect		Social Standing	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	51	38	17	12.5	18	13	58	43	90	67
ECS	49	23	47	4	8	7	14	23	47	30	61
H&L	32	9	28	2	6	4	12	15	47	16	50
Category 4. Responding to, and reporting of, CAN											
Theme within category											
Groups		Initial		Inform design- ated teacher		Case confer- ence		Involvement		Observational role	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	44	33	61	45	46	34	28	20	70	52
ECS	49	25	51	27	55	24	49	6	12	37	75.5
H&L	32	7	22	9	28	10	31	6	19	19	59
Category 5. Government CAN Policy, school procedures and legislative frameworks											
Theme within category											
Groups		Principles		Duty to care		Social services		Welfare checklist		Role of teacher	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	41	31	63	47	59	44	37	27	118	87.5
ECS	49	18	36.5	24	49	25	51	23	47	38	77.5
H&L	32	9	28	13	40	14	44	9	28	23	72
Category 6. Direct work with children and young people											
Theme within category											
Groups		Behaviour		Sexual		Emotional		Physical		Neglect	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
BEd	135	125	92.5	2	1.5	85	63	7	5	30	22
ECS	49	47	96	8	16	38	77.5	13	26.5	15	30.5
H&L	32	29	90	0	0	16	50	9	28	8	25

Table 2
4-Tiered pre-service child protection training requirements.

BAT score in %	Tier of training	Description of training Tier
>70	4	Advanced: Specialist Subject Based Training
60–69	3	Consolidation: Reflective
46–59	2	Intermediate: Professional and Multiagency Practice
<45	1	Introductory: Basic Awareness

Table 3
Existing CAN knowledge scores mapped onto 4-Tiered CAN training requirements.

BAT category	Group	% Score	Existing Tier CAN knowledge	Required Tier CAN training need
Statistics	BEd	42.5	1	2–4
	ECS	44	1	2–4
	H&L	35	1	2–4
Defining/recognising	BEd	56	2	3–4
	ECS	57.1	2	3–4
	H&L	61.8	3	4
Causes of CAN	BEEd	34.7	1	2–4
	ECS	35.4	1	2–4
	H&L	28.6	1	2–4
Responding to CAN	BEd	36.8	1	2–4
	ECS	48.5	2	3–4
	H&L	31.8	1	2–4
Policy, procedure and legislation	BEd	47.3	2	3–4
	ECS	52.2	2	3–4
	H&L	42.4	1	2–4
Direct work with children	BEd	36.8	1	2–4
	ECS	49.3	2	3–4
	H&L	38.6	1	2–4

knowledge base, it could be said that Tier 1 requires relatively low-level knowledge while Tier 4 requires comprehensive knowledge of CAN. Table 2 illustrates how knowledge levels assessed by the BAT can be mapped onto a 4-Tiered training package.

Given the alignment illustrated in Table 2, Table 3 identifies the existing knowledge levels of the three groups of participating pre-service students and details the remaining Tiers of child protection training necessary for each of the groups in each of the categories.

The alignment of existing CAN knowledge scores at baseline mapped onto the 4-Tiered CAN training requirements is particularly significant in view of the limited training offered on most pre-service education and early childhood degrees in NI. Most of the students in this study evidenced some basic introductory awareness in most areas, although their knowledge was limited and could be described as patchy. Only H&L students showed knowledge up to Tier 3, and then only in the category *Defining and Recognising CAN*. Although not surprising nor indeed expected for first-year students, none of the groups evidenced knowledge at Tier 4. Accordingly, the vast majority of students require comprehensive training at Tiers 2–3, in other words, they require intermediate training in professional and multiagency practice (Tier 2), and consolidation training in reflective practice (Tier 3). Advanced, specialist subject based training (Tier 4) is not required for beginning teachers in NI and is commonly accessed in post-qualifying training.

5. Discussion

This paper addressed two questions. First, the question regarding the general need for pre-service child protection training for undergraduate students in education was answered by taking an authentic baseline of CAN knowledge of three groups of pre-service students in education, early years and health and leisure (with teaching option). Results showed that while these students generally had some basic awareness of CAN issues, their knowledge base was inconsistent and did not reach the required levels for those working with young children. Given that these students will be in direct contact with children and young people in schools within weeks of starting their degree course, child protection training needs to be delivered early in the course of professional study.

The second question about the need to differentiate training requirements between groups of students was answered by detailed analysis of the differential in the existing knowledge base and through mapping the results of this study onto a

4-Tier training model as outlined by the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003). Differential training needs were identified at Tiers 2–3.

Although it has now become widely recognised that the teaching of a basic knowledge base of issues related to child protection needs to begin during Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005), studies have also shown that, during ITE, child protection training is often overlooked in favour of other core curriculum areas (Baginsky, 2003). Furthermore, because most ITE programmes do not make pre-service child protection training compulsory (Baginsky, 2001), some students will graduate without the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to effectively protect children. The necessity for pre-service child protection training for educators is of course particularly urgent because, apart from parents or other primary care-givers, educators have the most continuous and regular contact with children (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Sinclair-Taylor & Hodgkinson, 2001).

Research reported here found that the majority of students scored less than one third of the BAT correctly. Most of the correctly scored questions were related to general teaching practice components, such as the use of observations to note changes in children's behaviour, the general role of the teacher, and social standing amongst families. The more intricate questions relating to CAN, such as indicators of abuse, legislative requirements of the child protection process, responding to and reporting abuse, CAN statistics, and preventive work, received much lower scores. While practical aspects of child protection during training are important (Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, OFMDFM, 2009), recommendations from the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People's 'Rights Review' (McMahon & Keenan, 2008) highlighted the need for professionals to understand the depth of social problems associated with CAN in schools and indeed within the wider community. In addition, following the report of the statutory inquiry into child protection matters at Cabin Hill School in NI, DHSSPS (2005) clearly emphasised the safeguarding role of educators, including preventive work. Findings reported here support these assertions with empirical evidence of the need to prepare educators prior to their first professional contacts with children.

5.1. Statistics

Many of the statistical reports, such as the NSPCC document 'Key child protection statistics in Northern Ireland' (Bunting, 2004) and others (DHSSPS, 2007; Hall, 2007) highlight the stark reality of increasing levels of child abuse and neglect. Research reported here identified that all participants required increased knowledge about statistics on CAN related issues. This is particularly important as new statistics, policies and recommendations regarding safeguarding children are emerging (McMahon & Keenan, 2008). Appropriate pre-service child protection training beginning in first year of undergraduate programmes are necessary to allow for new research to be integrated and therefore the myths and misinformation surrounding child abuse and neglect could be dispelled early in training.

5.2. Defining and recognising CAN

Most of the students were not familiar with and could not distinguish between some, or all, of the different types of CAN. This further highlights that there is a need to develop students' ability to, not only define CAN, but to be able to recognise it in all its forms. Additionally, thorough knowledge of the definitions of CAN and the associated indicators has been shown to make newly qualified teachers more confident in their role in the reporting process (Baginsky, 2003). Recognising the required level of involvement of education staff is also important. Although participants in this research ultimately will not be expected to make a diagnosis of abuse (Swann, 2000), they will need to be able to raise concerns and make reports where necessary. Data reported here show that prior to training many of the students were unable to define abuse or neglect accurately.

Swann (2000) pointed out that professionals working with children and young people could contribute to breaking the cycle of abuse, if appropriately trained. A number of public inquiries in the past, e.g., Maria Colwell (DHSS, 1974), Jasmine Beckford (London Borough of Brent, 1985), Lauren Wright (Norfolk Area Child Protection Committee, 2002) and Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) have led to fundamental changes to policy and practice and raised the issue of professionals, including teachers, being enabled to recognise when children are at risk (Parton, 2004). Others have argued that these same professionals, many of whom have almost daily contact with children, have an important role in the recognition of abuse and neglect because of their unique opportunities to observe and assess children on a regular basis (Baginsky, 2007; Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Cole et al., 2005; Walsh, Farrell, Bridgstock, & Schweitzer, 2006). Given that neither the ECS nor the BED students scored high on recognising any of the four types of abuse, this is an area that needs attention. Interestingly, the H&L group scored higher when asked to define neglect and physical abuse. Being able to identify the physical indicators of abuse rather than the behavioural indicators may be due to the fact that H&L students have had more direct contact with children in health, leisure, and sport settings, or their greater interest in health related issues, giving them the opportunity to identify physical symptoms of abuse more readily. However, when these students are placed in a school setting, they also need to be able to recognise behavioural changes in children.

5.3. Causes of CAN

Dagleish and Drew (1989) presented a number of factors which may contribute to child abuse and neglect, ranging from difficulties in early bonding, feeding, establishing boundaries and relationships, to alcohol and drug misuse, socio-economic

status, and lack of family support. Participants in this study were able to recognise that child abuse and neglect crosses social as well as cultural boundaries. However, the majority of students did not evidence sufficient baseline knowledge in other causes or contributing factors of CAN. For example, they did not realise that CAN, while it occurs in all socio-economic and racial groups, is not equally distributed among the groups. Conditions of poverty and disadvantage obviously place some children at greater risk of CAN and there is a cumulative effect of multi-type maltreatment.

5.4. Responding and reporting

Many of the participants felt that the first response to suspected CAN should be to either reassure the child that everything will be 'sorted out' (when in fact it will not) or to obtain a notebook to record details immediately. Over three quarters of the sample did not know that teachers, early year's specialists, or health and leisure staff, are not directly involved in child protection investigations. This suggests that the majority of students were not familiar with the role of the designated child protection officer or the role of social services. These findings raise concern regarding responses to direct disclosure of abuse by a child and participant knowledge of appropriate reporting procedures. The findings concur with previous studies (Cerezo & Pons-Salvador, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Walsh et al., 2006) revealing school-based professionals' lack of knowledge and awareness of reporting protocols and reinforce the need for training to promote teacher and pre-service teacher confidence in their child protection role.

5.5. Policy and procedures

Adams (2007) outlined the key messages for schools in relation to child protection procedures, based on relevant guidance documents in child protection. Yet, few of the participants in the present research were familiar with the key principles of the *Children (NI) Order 1995* and the key issues surrounding the welfare checklist, both of which provide a knowledge base for professionals in terms of decision making with regard to reporting CAN (ACPC, 2005).

There is a recognised need to involve a range of professionals in the child protection process and the failure of multidisciplinary communication has been blamed in fatal child abuse cases (Reder, Duncan, & Lucey, 2003). Skills in multidisciplinary work can be developed through training (Laskey, 2007; Walsh et al., 2006). For example, McKee (2004, 2005) proposed that during initial teacher education students need to become fluent in CAN statistics; defining and recognising CAN; causes of CAN; responding to and reporting of CAN; government policies, procedures, and legislative frameworks; and direct work with children and young people. Baginsky and Green (2007) are clear that training should include the development of skills, such as recognising potential signs of abuse and knowing how to respond as well as enabling teachers to bring elements of 'staying safe' into a classroom where children feel confident and are listened to.

However, over half of the participants in the current study had no awareness of the role of Social Services nor were they familiar with their own 'Duty to Care' (DHSS, 2005), i.e., to report concerns about a child to the designated child protection officer. Moreover, while multidisciplinary working is high on the local government agenda (OFMDFM, 2006), it may place additional stress on those involved and some fear that it may hinder successful child-centred approaches in the child protection process (McKee, 2005). This highlights the need to take a multidisciplinary approach to pre-service child protection training that includes information sharing, understanding of differing value bases amongst professionals and the need for acknowledging and rectifying weaknesses within the system (Glennie, 2007; Laming, 2003). In fact when pre-service educators and social workers are provided opportunities to engage in interprofessional education, which is when 'two or more professions learn with, from and about each other in order to improve collaboration' (Freeth, Hammick, Reeves, Koppel, & Barr, 2005, p. 11), they develop a sense of shared understanding, effective communication and positive working relationships (McKee, 2008b).

In terms of relevant legislation and local government policy and guidelines, namely the *Children (NI) Order 1995*, 'Our Duty to Care' (DHSS, 2005), and Department of Education guidelines (DENI, 1999), a mixed range of knowledge was in evidence. This is of particular significance given that a number of documents pertaining to child protection in education in NI clearly advocate that anyone who has direct contact with children and young people has a moral duty to protect (ACPC, 2005; DENI, 1999). One aspect of this moral duty is not only to report to designated personnel if concern has been raised about a child, but obviously to have the knowledge of who this designated person is and what their role entails.

5.6. Direct work with children and young people

Students need to develop skills in direct work with children who are at risk of CAN. When students are on school-based placements and, indeed, during their entire subsequent professional practice, they must establish a balance between the rights and protection of the child, the rights and responsibilities of parents/carers, and the requirements of the legal system. Professionals need to recognise their professional responsibilities and their personal feelings and reach the fine balance between ascertaining accurate information about abuse whilst not placing children at risk of further abuse by their response (Brock, 2000). Overall, while students appeared to recognise the importance of their role and the contribution they can make in the child protection process, they were less informed about the practical components of addressing the issue of child abuse and neglect. Taylor and Lloyd (2001) argue 'teacher training programs need to develop greater understanding of abuse within the family unit' (p. 3). Appropriate training should enable these students to develop their ability as 'tightrope walkers'

(Brock, 2000, p. 113) or as Feng, Chen, Wilk, Yang, and Fetzer (2009) aptly refer to, enable them to be 'dancing on the edge' (p. 405). Further research is currently underway to uncover how these training needs can be met effectively (McKee, 2009).

6. Conclusion

The study reported here supports the argument that there is an urgent need for the inclusion of pre-service child protection training programmes for students in Initial Teacher Education, Early Childhood Studies, and Health and Leisure studies. It adds further weight to the notion that particular groups of students are involved in direct work with children and young people and therefore need to be provided with specialist CAN training. Indeed, basic pre-service child protection training is already compulsory in other countries and should be developed to a greater degree as well as being expanded to all students who will have a professional role in child protection, such as nursing, social work, health visitors, and play specialists.

While Kenny (2004) recommends that training efforts can be established within College curricula, this training needs to be developed with an emphasis on different training levels for different groups. We concur with Laskey (2007) and Walsh et al.'s (2006) recommendation for enhanced training, with compulsory study at pre-service stage. Further and Higher Education Colleges and Universities can support this by having clear, accessible, written policies for academic personnel, students, and others involved in relevant curriculum delivery. In particular, a child protection co-ordinator should be appointed with responsibility to implement and monitor differential training procedures, provide support to both staff and students, and provide ongoing, integrated pre-service child protection training that meets the specific needs of individual groups.

7. Practice implications

The lack of student knowledge regarding CAN must be addressed through the development of pre-service child protection training. A 3-year pilot programme, the 'Pastoral Pathways Programme', is presently being developed for use in undergraduate programmes of Initial Teacher Education, Early Childhood Studies and Health and Leisure Studies (McKee, 2009), and has since been used within the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (Early Years) and MA Early Childhood Studies. Preliminary findings suggest that student knowledge increases rapidly, when training content is specific to individual needs (McKee & Dillenburger, 2007). To date, this project has addressed training at Tiers 1–3 and an evaluation of the effectiveness of this training will be available in due course.

Although the research reported here did not identify specific training programmes as appropriate, it did identify in great detail the training needs of these students. Others have included these training requirements into the compulsory curriculum for teacher licensure and certification (e.g., Office of the Professions, 2006; Reiniger, Robison, & McHugh, 1995; Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Social Services, 2003) and developed at least some level of training courses aligned to the needs of staff (e.g., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009). It is time that these requirements are met in NI as well.

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