



Australian Centre
for Child Protection

Professionals Protecting Children

*Child Protection and
Teacher Education in Australia*



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Executive Summary



The Australian Centre for Child Protection is a federal government initiative funded through the Department of Education, Science and Training and located at the University of South Australia. The Centre's professional education initiative, *Professionals Protecting Children*, supports a broad range of professions to prepare graduates and practitioners who feel confident and competent to address and respond to the needs of all children who face adversity due to abuse or neglect.

The professions include teaching, nursing, psychology, social work, childcare, medicine and allied health workers.

In support of this outcome the Professional Education initiative is investigating -

<i>Focus Question</i>	<i>Strategy</i>
What is currently being taught about child protection within professional education programs?	Map the undergraduate and graduate courses in relevant disciplines across Australia to identify the curriculum content that promotes professional competence for recognising and responding to child protection issues
What do professionals know, think and do about protecting children?	Explore, promote and evaluate processes for effectively enhancing professionals' child protection knowledge, beliefs and practices
Where does child protection fit into the respective professional education programs and who takes responsibility for its delivery?	Promote quality teaching and effective learning about child protection and diffuse exemplary models of professional practice through the development of high quality curriculum support materials

Purpose and Content

The findings reported herein focus on the first question only. That is, how issues of prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect are currently addressed within teacher education programs. As such the findings provide a valuable benchmark in time. Within the broader context of teacher education and child protection, however, the process provided invaluable opportunities for professional engagement and discussion of ways in which the key issues of interest may be explored, with and by key stakeholders in the future.

The research study builds on two Australian Government Senate Committee reports commissioned in response to the increasing and convincing evidence highlighting the poor educational and life outcomes of Australian children in State or Territory statutory care, or those considered to be vulnerable and at-risk due to abuse and neglect, namely:

- 1) *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004),
- 2) *Protecting Vulnerable Children: A National Challenge* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005) report.

In both reports, it was recommended that tertiary institutions establish courses of study that address child protection related issues in a range of disciplines. Specifically with regard to teacher education, the reports recommended that the longer term and broader effects of child abuse or neglect, and being a child or young person in care, be incorporated as components of future teacher education programs.

In light of recommendations from the two Reports, and in line with the Centre's mission, all Faculties/Schools of Education across Australia were invited to help map child protection curriculum content in teacher education programs.

The full account of findings begins with a brief review of literature on child protection and teacher education nationally and internationally. It then presents the analysis and results of the curriculum mapping survey data, and outlines issues raised in the subsequent National Teacher Education and Child Protection Forum.

The Research Process

The curriculum Mapping Process consisted of three stages.

Stage 1 encompassed the research design phase. Specifically it examined previous studies and relevant findings, in addition to –

- scoping the sample group
- identifying the content to be mapped
- establishing time frames, and
- planning subsequent actions and outcomes.

Stage 2 involved the actual mapping of child protection content in teacher education. In December 2005 the survey instrument was trialled, evaluated and refined following a small-scale trial. The Board of the Australian Council of Deans of Education offered support in principle and endorsed the curriculum mapping process. The Deans also nominated a liaison person in their respective school/faculty to coordinate the completion of the surveys on behalf of the Australian Centre for Child Protection. Survey data was then collected from May to August 2006.

In addition to the survey, a national roundtable forum was held on the 1st December, 2006. Invited participants included the Dean of Education (or his/her nominee) and one staff member from each School/Faculty that provided data, together with a representative of the Teacher Registration body of each State or Territory.

The forum enabled –

- preliminary results from the survey mapping process to be presented,
- discussion of perceived barriers and facilitators to including relevant content across a range of undergraduate and graduate programs,
- the establishment of networks to explore future actions and directions; and
- the identification and promotion of good practice in the delivery of child protection content in teacher education.

At the completion of the forum, expressions of interest were invited for future collaborative ventures within and between Schools/Faculties and the Australian Centre for Child Protection, together with nominations for membership of a collaborative network.

Stage 3 of the research process addressed the analysis, evaluation, reporting and dissemination of results. Building on the findings and input from teacher educators possible future directions are being investigated.

Participants in the Project

Participants across all universities in Australia that offer teacher education programs were invited to participate in the mapping of child protection content. Surveys were sent to 41 universities across Australia that offer undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate teacher education programs. A high return rate of 80.5% was achieved, with 33 Universities returning a total of 292 surveys.

Response patterns revealed that 17 of the 33 responding universities provided data for 100 per cent of teacher education programs offered by their School or Faculty of Education. Overall 72.7 per cent of the universities provided data for more than half of the teacher education programs offered.

High returns were recorded from South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, which are among the largest providers of teacher education programs in Australia.

The problematic nature of reporting on types of teacher education programs across Australian Universities became apparent during the initial exploration of data. Issues related to discrepancies between States and Territories became evident in regard to: the organisation of school structure; the inclusion of specialisations that prepare teacher educators to teach over a broad range of year levels; and in some instances an overlap of teacher education programs that prepare teaching graduates for a broad range of year levels e.g. middle primary and secondary or early childhood and primary.

Examination of the data confirmed that the majority of programs represented in the sample could be categorised. It was therefore considered appropriate and efficient to assign all programs to one of three broad categories - Early Childhood, Compulsory Years of Schooling and Secondary Schooling.

Roundtable Participants

All Schools of Education who responded to the survey were invited to participate in a National Roundtable Forum to further discuss the facilitators and barriers to including child protection content in teacher education. The Forum was facilitated by 4 representatives from the Australian

Centre for Child Protection. A total of 28 participants attended, including representatives from 15 universities and 3 teacher accrediting agencies from around Australia.

Findings related to the delivery of child protection-related content

As a result of trialling and refinement, the survey instrument was organised into 5 sections.

Section 1A identified discrete or stand alone courses specifically addressing the prevention, identification and response to child abuse and neglect. Findings from this section revealed that –

- 76.6 per cent of teacher education programs in the sample did not include any discrete child protection related content,
- of the 23.4 per cent that reported providing discrete child protection curriculum content, two-thirds allocated less than 7 hours to the teaching and learning of the associated content throughout the entire award program.

Furthermore, the data showed that the majority of discrete units were described as identification and reporting training sessions, and that this trend was most prevalent in States and Territories where legal requirements for identification and response training exist as a prerequisite for teacher registration. Further support for the notion that child protection teaching and learning is primarily limited to identification and response training was provided by data that showed a higher percentage of non-university based employees facilitated the teaching of the child protection content.

In extrapolating these findings to the overall teacher education graduate population, the data suggest that of the 14,500 potential teacher education students graduating annually, approximately 1,200 students will have been exposed to a day or less of dedicated teaching related to discrete child protection content. Similarly it can be inferred that only around 850 students will have experienced more than 8 hours of discrete child protection content. With regard to the remaining 12,450 graduates, the exposure to dedicated learning related to child protection issues is unknown due to the lack of information provided in this regard.

In contrast to the provision of discrete courses, Section 1B identified courses, units or subjects offered that addressed child protection issues explicitly but in an integrated teaching and learning context. On one hand, encouraging findings were revealed in that 47 per cent of teacher education programs reported integrating elements of child protection content within a semester course or unit. On the other hand, further analysis revealed that the majority of these courses or units allocated as little as 10-15 per cent of the unit to the specific teaching of child protection related content.

When considering a typical course structure, in reality this may equate to as little as 2.5-4 hours of time allocated to the integrated discussion of child protection related content. Additionally, it is important to note that in some programs, this may be the only exposure to child protection issues a student experiences throughout the entire teacher education award program. This raises concerns related to the time constraints and the restricted opportunity students have to engage in deep learning about child protection related issues.

On the basis that many child protection issues and concerns may be discussed incidentally throughout an award program, Section 2 listed a number of risk factors and proactive strategies associated with child abuse and neglect that could potentially be addressed but not documented in course curriculum guidelines. The format adopted utilised a model, which placed the child within the family and the community. Thus, the respondents were asked to record if the strategies and

factors listed in this section were *'taught but not linked'* to child protection or if, in fact, the issues were explicitly *'linked'* to child protection. The findings from this data revealed that students who are enrolled in early childhood programs or four-year undergraduate programs have greater exposure to a range of risk factors and strategies than students in other teacher education award programs. The data, however, does not support the notion that these factors and strategies are necessarily linked explicitly to child protection within related discussions, nor that the students may appreciate the inherent connections between the factors and the need to respond to the issues.

Further, it was acknowledged by a large number of participants in the forum that generally the factors and strategies listed were not typically considered as indicators of adversity. However, by making the links to child protection explicit it was considered that this may help to broaden the notion of child protection in future discussions with students. It was further considered that in cases where factors and strategies were taught but not linked to child protection, the process of making explicit links to child protection would, in reality, require minimal investment of time and resources within current curriculum constraints.

The final two sections provided the opportunity for respondents to record comments, issues or concerns related to child protection in teacher education curriculum, and to discuss any curriculum issues that their school or faculty were interested in exploring at a Roundtable forum¹.

¹ These issues and concerns were further explored by participants attending the National Teacher Education and Child Protection Forum.

Facilitators and barriers to change

A range of barriers and facilitators were raised in the survey responses and the National Teacher Education and Child Protection Forum.

Barriers

- Overcrowded Curriculum
- Lack of Ownership
- Lack of Consistency in Delivery and Approach
- National Inconsistencies in Legal Requirements
- Narrow Perceptions of Child Protection
- Negative Societal Perceptions

Facilitators

- Working together to meet Professional Needs
- Potential for Workplace Learning
- Quality Support for Novice Teachers
- Networks and Resources
- Professional Development

Future Research Directions

Given the issues discussed and the need for quality research in this field, it was concluded that the teacher education community would benefit from further exploration of the following issues –

- effective utilisation of discrete or integrated approaches that best support the teaching and learning of child protection content
- relevant pedagogies that support
 - the teaching of sensitive and often controversial issues inherent in child protection
 - effective student learning in this domain and the influence it has on future teaching practices and epistemological beliefs
 - consistency and quality of teaching, particularly when there are numerous delivery agents from various disciplines and with varying qualifications
- compelling concerns about overcrowded curricula, time and resource constraints, consistency and quality of content across teacher education programs and how these issues can be addressed effectively
- establishing if the necessary skills are developed that enable graduates to address confidently and adequately the needs of vulnerable and at risk children within educational settings.

Conclusions

The numerous issues reported on and discussed throughout this research study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of child protection in teacher education. The data collected from the curriculum mapping process provides a snapshot of the current coverage of child protection in teacher education. Furthermore, the findings, discussions, insights, and suggestions raised, in both the survey instrument and roundtable forum can help to inform future directions and approaches to the development of child protection related content.

Notwithstanding uncertainty about the most efficient and effective way to address and deliver child protection content in teacher education programs, a commitment to exploring and improving the current approaches was shared.

Although recent international studies have begun to inform this debate, further Australian research in this area would provide much needed insights into the benefits and challenges associated with the inclusion of child protection content in teacher education. The merits of providing discrete child protection content as opposed to integrating child protection content, and multidisciplinary as opposed to domain specific approaches, consistently emerged as areas requiring further investigation within an Australian context.

Furthermore, while the importance of child protection content in teacher education was undisputed, issues related to ownership and responsibility for incorporating and overseeing the inclusion of this content, both within and across disciplines was perceived by respondents as generating substantial challenges. Further discussions with tertiary educators and relevant stakeholders were recommended in order to find acceptable and feasible solutions to the issues.

There was recognition among participants that this is a highly sensitive, and often controversial, area of discussion for both students and educators. Subsequently it was felt there is a need to

carefully consider the philosophy and the most effective pedagogies that will support the effective teaching and learning of child protection content.

Another consistent concern raised by survey respondents and forum participants was the need for accrediting and registering bodies to work towards consistency across States and Territories with regard to policies and professional responsibilities. In particular the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect, and the associated requirements for teacher registration. It was noted that the current move towards a national accreditation and registration system may be able to address many of these concerns.

The benefits of having school educators who are well informed about child protection issues, and can competently respond to the needs of vulnerable and at-risk children within school contexts was strongly supported.



Recommendations emerging from the Study

In order to ensure teacher education graduates have the knowledge base and the confidence to competently meet their legal obligations, and to address child protection related issues in educational settings that improve the learning outcomes for all children experiencing adversity due to abuse or neglect:

- 1) the narrow perceptions of child protection need to be challenged
- 2) child protection should remain on the agenda for universities, teacher registration and accrediting bodies, schools and governments
- 3) ongoing collaboration and consultation between all educational stakeholders should continue, and be a matter of high priority
- 4) further consideration should be given to undertaking a range of research investigations in accordance with the suggestions and areas of identified interest outlined herein.

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