

A Study of Seven Midwest States Teacher Education Programs: A Study to Determine if These Programs Include Specific Designated Courses Dealing with Child Abuse and Neglect Detection

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Abstract: *It has been said that one of the greatest failures in the education system has been a long-standing problem of public and private school educators failing to recognize victims of child abuse and neglect in their classrooms (Jennings, 1989). The maltreatment of children is a prevalent problem as we know that the number of child maltreatment cases far outnumbers the cases reported, such as the 800,00 cases in 2011 (Lusk, 2014). While the 16% of cases in 2009 that were reported by educational professional may seem standard, we still see a big gap in the amount of contact teachers have with students and their reporting rates (Krase, 2013). The lack of recognition of abuse and neglect indicators can be attributed, in part, to a lack of competent training on this topic (Sinanan, 2011). Other variables such as teachers or administrators being uncomfortable with the reporting process, and or not understanding the reporting protections available can also be responsible for inadequate reporting rates, which are all variables that could be addressed with proper training. The study included Teacher Education programs in Nebraska and the six contiguous states on its borders, including public and private Universities. The methodology included viewing the current catalogues for each institution to identify required degree course work which had wording specific to child abuse and neglect. While course work descriptions do not contain all topics covered, they do outline the subjects that are a priority to the course. Education programs included Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Middle School Education, High School Education, Physical Education, and Special Education. If the school lacked specific course work information on child abuse and neglect, individual course descriptions were examined to see if the topic of child abuse and neglect was specified as a clear component. Examples of required coursework that were examined included Human Development, Educational Foundations, Educational Psychology or School and Community Relations. These courses were examined to determine if they contained substantial teaching components on Child Abuse and Neglect.*

The catalogues were all available on the respective school websites. It was assumed that the course catalogue description would indicate the major elements of each course. It is recognized that individual course syllabi might well include content on child abuse and neglect detection

and reporting. It is the researcher's contention that this topic necessitates more attention than simply being a small component of a given course.

There were 110 accredited Teacher Education programs that were examined. Of these programs, only one, 0.9 percent of the total, Peru State College, had a specific, standalone course dedicated to child abuse and neglect detection. Five institutions, 4.5 percent of the total, had courses which appeared to have components dealing with child abuse and neglect detection. Not only did many required Teacher Education courses lack these components, but most of the colleges did not offer a Child Abuse and Neglect class at all, even as an elective class the student could choose to take.

Given the findings of this study it would appear that there is minimal attention provided with respect to training teachers to detect child abuse and neglect. This condition certainly contributes to the failure of many educators to recognize and properly report possible victims.

Key Words: Child abuse and neglect detection, teachers reporting child abuse, teacher education and child abuse

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that one of the greatest failures in the education system has been a long-standing problem of public and private school educators failing to recognize victims of child abuse and neglect in their classrooms (Jennings, 1989). The recognition and reporting regarding abuse and neglect indicators can be attributed, in part, to a lack of competent training on this topic (Timpe, 2012). M.C. Kenny states:

“Seventy-three percent of this sample reported that they had never made a report of child abuse, while those who had made reports made an average of one report. Only 11% of teachers reported that there were instances in which they believed abuse may have occurred but failed to report. Additionally, these teachers felt that their pre- and post-service training did not adequately prepare them for abuse reporting. The most common reasons cited for not reporting abuse were fear of making an inaccurate report, feeling as though child protective services do not help families, and no apparent physical signs of abuse. There were no gender differences in reporting.” (Kenny, 2001).

It is notable that there is limited literature that would indicate what would be an appropriate curriculum supporting child abuse and neglect training for teacher education candidates. In virtually all the states covered in the current study, there were community programs or presentations available through area public social service agencies or private child advocacy organizations. In all instances these were limited in length and in scope. Given the complex nature of child abuse and neglect and the many categories of identification, it is interesting to note that there appears to be a long-standing misconception that one can learn necessary identification indicators in brief workshops (Jennings, 1989). There are, of course, other variables such as educators being uncomfortable with the reporting process, and/or not understanding the reporting protections available, which can also be responsible for inadequate reporting rates. Regardless of the reasons, children are left vulnerable to further abuse and neglect when educators fail to report

suspicion or fail to recognize the warning signs, and many of these reasons can be addressed with proper training.

Peru State College, from which the current study originates, has for the past thirty-four years offered a course specifically designed to provide information concerning child abuse and neglect detection and proper reporting for educators. In recent years, 4 years ago, this course became a requirement for all Special Education majors. Furthermore, it has been a highly recommended elective for all other education majors.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Educators are mandated reporters of all suspected child abuse and neglect, in all states. There is an urgent need to evaluate the level of training offered to teacher candidates through mandated course work at teacher preparation institutions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Q1.** Do accredited teacher training programs in Nebraska, and its six contiguous states, require courses specific to child abuse and neglect detection and reporting protocols?
- Q2.** If required courses do not exist, are there other courses that provide information containing segments on child abuse and neglect detection?

DEFINITIONS

- **Child Abuse:** An act of commission such that it interferes with normal development. At the Federal level, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) has defined child abuse and neglect as "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caregiver that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).
- **Neglect:** An act of omission such that it interferes with normal development. Neglect is frequently defined as the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).
- **Mandatory Reporter:** A person required by federal or state statute, as a consequence of their professional endeavor, to report suspected child abuse and neglect to designated authorities. A report must be made when an individual knows or has reasonable cause to believe or suspect that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).
- **A specific child abuse and neglect detection course:** One which specifies child abuse or neglect in the catalogue course title and course description.
- **Non-specific but required courses:** Courses which are required for the teacher preparation program and contain information on child abuse or neglect within the course description.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research going back twenty years noted the following: Suspected cases of child abuse often go unreported by elementary-school teachers because they are inadequately trained to recognize and report the problem, according to a report that will be released this fall. The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse has released preliminary results from a national survey of teachers' knowledge of child abuse, as well as child-protection policies in the teachers' districts. The survey was conducted in 1988 following reports that while 57 percent of the 2.1 million child-abuse cases reported in 1986 involved school-age children, only 16.3 percent of the reports originated with school personnel (Jennings, 1989).

Being that teachers have more contact with children than any other professional, the reporting rate of 16.3% was very inadequate. This is especially concerning when one considers that the numbers of abuse victims only reflect cases which have been brought to the attention of authorities. There are an abundance of authorities who will state that reported cases only represent one third or one fourth of all actual child victims. M.C. Kenny reported seventy-three percent of their sample mentioned they had never made a report of child abuse, while those who had made reports made an average of one report. Only 11% of teachers reported that there were instances in which they believed abuse may have occurred but failed to report. Additionally, these teachers felt that their pre- and post-service training did not adequately prepare them for abuse reporting (Kenny, 2001).

Goebbels examined the variables which contribute to teachers failing to make appropriate child abuse or neglect reports, when abuse or neglect was suspected. One of the variables was fewer years of teaching experience and lower academic qualifications when compared to educators who made reports. There was also a difference between educators who had successfully made reports and those who had never attempted to report abuse (Goebbels et al., 2007). For example, once an educator was familiar with the reporting process, they were more confident and more likely to report cases (Goebbels et al., 2007). This proves that familiarity with the process does make a difference in the amount of successful reports. This study gives some credence to the notion that there is a relationship between child abuse and neglect training and the probability of an educator reporting abuse when it is suspected. Sinanan stated: Several studies report that teachers do not receive adequate training on child abuse during their college education or in-service training programs (Hazzard, 1984; McIntyre, 1987). Abrahams and colleagues (1992) found that the majority of teachers receive minimal instruction on identifying, reporting, and intervening in suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. Further, teachers are dissatisfied with the quality and amount of child abuse education they receive (Sinanan, 2011). This article further suggests that teacher training programs should provide more training from professionals in the field of child abuse detection. It was also emphasized that prospective teachers needed to better understand their legal obligation in the reporting process and what it means to be a mandated reporter. Brown also noted that there was a need to assess the preservice teachers' understanding of their role as professionals in facilitating the protection of children with respect to child abuse and neglect (Brown, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

This study included Nebraska and the six contiguous states on its borders, which included South Dakota, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Colorado, and Wyoming. Colleges and universities

offering accredited teacher training programs, both public and private, were included in the study. It should be noted that these teacher training programs were located within a variety of college and university departments and schools. The methodology included viewing the most recent electronic catalogues for each institution identifying required degree course work which had course descriptions specific to child abuse and neglect. The assumption was made that the published catalogues represent the current requirements for each institution. Teacher training programs reviewed included: early childhood education, elementary education, middle level education, secondary education, physical education, and special education. If the teacher training program lacked specific course work on child abuse and neglect, individual course descriptions were examined to see if the topic of child abuse and neglect was specified as a clear component of a related course. Required coursework on human development, educational foundations, educational psychology or school and community relations were particularly examined, as these topics frequently include information about child abuse and neglect.

The catalogues were all available on their respective school websites. It was assumed that the course catalogue description would indicate the major elements of each course. It is recognized that individual course syllabi might well include content on child abuse and neglect detection and reporting which was not included in the course description. The research team's contention is that this topic necessitates more attention than simply being a small component of a given course given that this needs to be a major element in a course for proper teacher preparation.

LIMITATIONS

1. The study is restricted to Nebraska and its six contiguous states.
2. Only on-line published college and university catalogues were used as a source of information.
3. Syllabi for each individual course offerings were not examined.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

There were 110 accredited teacher training programs examined. Of these programs, only one, 0.9 percent of the total had a specific standalone course dedicated to child abuse and neglect detection. Five institutions, 4.5 percent of the total, had courses which appeared to have components dealing with child abuse and neglect detection.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of teacher training programs having specific courses on child abuse and neglect detection, those that offer components of courses with child abuse and neglect detection content, or those that do not indicate any of the aforementioned.

Figure 1

Number of Teacher Training Programs with Child Abuse and Neglect Courses

Number of Institutions where Child Abuse and Neglect Course Required

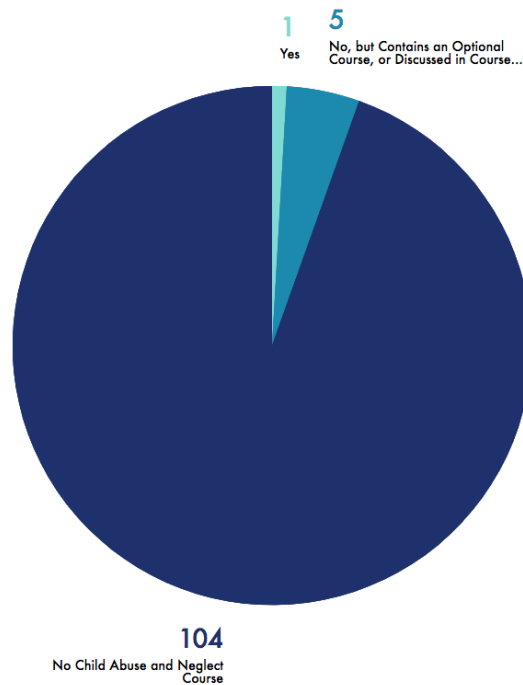


Table 1 shows the number of teacher training programs reviewed in each state, and designates the programs having specific course work or courses containing content on abuse and neglect detection as indicated by published course descriptions.

Table 1
Teacher Training Programs Reviewed in Each State

State	Number of schools reviewed	Number of schools with required course specific to child abuse and neglect	Number of schools with required course(s) not specific to child abuse and neglect, but clearly contains a component dealing with the topic
Nebraska	12	1	0
Kansas	20	0	1
Colorado	13	0	1
Wyoming	1	0	0
South Dakota	9	0	0
Iowa	25	0	2
Missouri	30	0	1

Given the findings of this study it appears that there is minimal attention provided with respect to training teachers to detect child abuse and neglect either as a separate required course or as a component of a program requirement.

IMPORTANCE TO THE FIELD

For many years teacher training programs have treated the topic of child abuse and neglect as a minor component of the content of pedagogical or foundational courses. The purpose of this

study is to encourage the readers to be more aware of the need to greatly enhance educators' knowledge of this topic. As educators are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, in all fifty states, it only seems logical that they should have a high level of expertise with respect to the detection of children who are at risk.

This study has further indicated the need for additional research. The current study will be expanded upon in a second follow-up study. This could possibly determine exactly how teacher training programs, which lack specific courses on child abuse and neglect, are currently providing information on this essential topic. The second study will be a survey of all the schools included in this study and will involve college and university deans or department chairs. This compilation of information might provide a baseline assessment of current educational methodologies in child abuse and neglect detection and reporting.

There will be a third study which will expand the methodology of the first two research efforts to include a random selection of all teacher education programs in the United States and will seek to see if the results of the first two studies remain consistent with a national population.

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