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TRAINING IN DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE IN SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS IN EVALUATING COURSE EFFECTIVENESS

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Teachers play an important part in identifying child maltreatment but find dealing with it difficult. This study examines the problems involved with evaluating a county wide training programme on this topic for senior teachers. The course was run 17 times and sixty per cent of the participants attending were sent an evaluation questionnaire three months after taking part. There was a 49% response rate. It was found the activities the participants undertook after the course were a greater reflection of the effort required than of the effectiveness of the course. It is argued this factor should be taken into account when conducting and interpreting any course evaluation.

Introduction

Previous research with courses designed to help teachers deal with child abuse issues have shown a varied take up of course activities. Johnson (1994), for example, examined primary prevention programmes in six Australian schools. It was expected that, after training, the thirty five teachers would undertake the role of delivering the programme to pupils. The findings showed that only three of them fully undertook that role, the others either selecting some items from the course or did not deliver any of it. No indication was given by Johnson (1994) as to why this occurred. One explanation offered is based on the nature of the topic. In this present article it is argued there is another explanation which has far wider implications.

Teachers, according to David (1993), play an important part in the identification of child maltreatment due to their close contact with children over long periods. The research carried out by Lawlor (1993) in the Republic of Ireland indicates a high level of denial and a low level of acceptance that abuse takes place, particularly with 'their' children. Warden (1996) also noted the acceptance that abuse occurred, but again not with 'their' children. Many teachers, according to Maher (1987) perceive themselves as being inexperienced in the field of child abuse and according to Jones and Pickett (1987) lack the confidence to deal with suspicions. Hinson and Fossey (2000) in a survey of teachers provided confirmation of these findings and found many were unable to recognise the symptoms of abuse. Teachers were also reluctant to report abuse for fear of the consequences to themselves and the child. This does suggest the issue of abuse is one in which teachers are not happy to become too involved.

There was an element of learned helplessness apparent (Seligman 1975) during the 1970's when societal attitudes tended, according to Maher (1987), to blame all abuse on poverty, drink, housing, unemployment and various other factors, rather than the family or other adults involved. More recently Polnay (2000) noted adults would not accept responsibility for the actions of their peers when children were abused.

In the present study a training course was designed and presented which was intended to raise awareness amongst child abuse co-ordinators in schools and help facilitate a requirement for all schools to create and implement a policy for dealing with child abuse. The training programme involved tutor presentations, groupwork and individual activities. In the course they were told of, and provided with, a whole range of activities and procedures which they could use. Some of these had the aim of passing on information to 'significant others' about how to deal with child abuse. These 'others' included the children in school, their colleague teachers and outside agencies.

This study looks at what effects the course had on the individuals subsequent behaviour. The work of Browne and Meuti (1999) indicates the success of an instructional workshop lies in its impact on student learning weeks after the workshop rather than the immediate reaction of the participants. This could be classed as an intermediate evaluation as defined by the model of evaluation promoted by Warr et al (1971) and involves a change in behaviour. The format commonly employed includes activity measures. In some respects this has similarities with using student performance on examinations as a measure of effectiveness used by many researchers including, for example, Maynard et al (2002) and Gomez et al (2004).

There is an alternative line of research into motivation which this author believes has a direct bearing on the validity of methods of evaluating courses. Vroom (1964) looking at motivation research highlighted the relationship between workers and the amount of effort they were willing to put in for the return they got. This idea has been refined and developed by many researchers including Siegrist (1996). He has shown how workers try to maintain the balance between how much effort they put into their work and the return or reward they get out of doing so. Siegrist's adaptation introduced the model of effort-reward imbalance (if the balance is not maintained stress levels increase), which is particularly helpful when related to the use of activity measures in evaluations.

This author suggests, on the basis of Siegrist's model, course participants act on their personal effort-reward profile rather than on the effectiveness of any particular aspect of a training course. In the training programme used in this study a number of factors were brought into the equation from the point of view of effort involved. These included the policy of the school towards staff training, the time necessary after the course to set up any actions inspired by the course and attitudes or perspectives about abuse. According to Siegrist's (1996) effort-reward principle it would be expected if something is regarded as unpleasant or extremely difficult it is less likely to be done than if it is regarded as easy to do. Developing Siegrist's (1996) idea, something which is regarded as outside the competence of the individual would involve more effort. It is the effort aspect of the model which is of concern in this present study. The issue of rewards for performing learned tasks has been considered by other researchers such as Tracey et al (2001) and Goldstein and Ford (2002) looking at the transfer of learning, and Waters (2006) looking at performance after In-Service Education and Training (INSET). They have demonstrated that if course participants are provided with appropriate incentives related to particular activities they are likely to carry them out. From the point of view of using activity measures as a means of evaluating course effectiveness once rewards are administered for carrying out an activity, then that activity can no longer be used as a measure of course effectiveness. The performance merely reflects the impact of the reward.

Siegrist's (1996) model surprisingly has not previously been applied to evaluations. Activity measures are concerned with what people do in the workplace. It does seem appropriate to relate them to a model which deals very directly with workplace activities. This model provides a theoretical background to the present study which is concerned with any possible link between evaluation measures and the effort involved in carrying out activities.

The link between knowledge, confidence and activities:

A further evaluation measure to be examined in this study is the relationship between knowledge, confidence and behaviour. Other researchers have found this to be ambiguous. Randolph and Gold (1994) provide one view when they attempted to measure the success of a sexual abuse prevention programme. The participants gained knowledge and understanding from training but not many delivered a full prevention programme to the children. Swift (1983), on the other hand, reported an increased number of sexual abuse referrals by teachers trained to take the role of prevention deliverers. Questions related to gaining knowledge and confidence are commonly included in course evaluations. They were specifically included by the researcher in the questionnaire used in this study to test the assumption that there was a link between knowledge/confidence and any specific activities carried out.

Aims of the study:

This study is concerned with two measures of course evaluations. First to examine the link between evaluation by means of activity measures and effort involved. Second, to look at the link if any, between attitudes/confidence and activities undertaken.

It was hypothesised:

Activities carried out after the course by the participants will be those requiring the least effort on their part to complete.

Knowledge about abuse issues, confidence in their own ability to deal with issues and number of activities carried out will all be related.

METHOD

Participants:

Heads and deputy head teachers attended a mandatory county wide training programme concerned with dealing with child abuse in school. In each case one representative from each school attended INSETs at a training centre. The course, for which the researcher had responsibility, was repeated 17 times with class sizes of about 25 and consisted of three one day sessions held within a period of a few weeks.

The evaluation questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of approximately 60 per cent of the participants of the courses, three months after it was held. This was done by dividing the county into geographic educational regions and posting the questionnaire to individuals who were selected blind (address labels were placed face down) from each of these areas until sixty percent had been selected from each area. From the 320 questionnaires sent there were one hundred and fifty eight responses (a 49% response rate). This compared favourably with a similar study by Lawlor (1993) which had a response rate of 45% and Paolo et al (2000) who reported an average 41% response rate in a study examining responses to student evaluation postal questionnaires.

Activity measures:

By its very nature the measures included in this study have to be carried out after an interval to allow time for the activities to be carried out. In view of Bassin's (1974) findings, that different courses have different popularity ratings amongst participants a single course was used for the collection of data, but it was repeated 17 times. The content of the course was approximately the same for each presentation.

The questionnaire was made up of three parts:

Part 1. The questions concerned details of the activities course participants had planned or done something about since the course. These are listed in table 1. An "activity score" was arrived at by allocating a score of one for each activity undertaken.

Part 2. The questions concerned the future resources required from the Local Education Authority. These are listed in table 2. These resource questions were specifically included as the resources asked for would give an indication as to what was planned. It could be argued some activities were not carried out because of the lead time required. This question took that into account by measuring what had been planned.

Part 3. A question concerning Knowledge acquired used a three point response scale, and a question concerning confidence in dealing with child abuse issues, used a four point response scale. The aspect of confidence investigated was the teacher's confidence in their ability to take some action regarding child abuse. It was thought realistic to measure this type of confidence a period after the course had ended. This provided time for the participants to try things out and so get a feeling of their own confidence in dealing with the issues.

Scale of effort required:

The procedure for establishing the scale was based on that advocated by Holmes and Rahe (1967), which they used to create stress scales. Individually thirty teachers, who had experience of child abuse procedures but did not attend the course, were asked to rank order a pack of library cards each labelled with one of the activities listed in table 1. They ranked them in terms of how much effort they thought was involved in carrying out the task. The cards were spread out on a table and each teacher was asked to put them in a pile with the activity involving the least effort at the top, the second least effort next and so on. The outcome of this process is detailed in table 1.

Table 1
Showing scale of difficulty involved in activities. Low score indicates least effort to the teacher

Activities scaled according to effort involved.	Mean score Standard deviation in brackets
1. Distributing documents to staff	1.8 (1.00)
2. Locating relevant documents	2.0 (0.64)
3. Dissemination of information about the course to staff	2.8 (1.19)
4. Informing non-teaching staff about procedures	3.4 (0.81)
5. Improving record keeping/storage	5.4 (0.50)
6. Preparing an internal procedure/guidelines document for staff use	5.8 (0.76)
7. purchasing relevant resources for staff and/or pupil use	6.8 (0.41)
8. arranging a meeting for a few staff to address child abuse/protection issues	8.4 (0.50)
9. planning a half/part day INSET to focus on child abuse/protection	9.0 (0.64)
10. planning a full day INSET to focus on child abuse/protection	10.2 (1.19)
11. Arranging a whole-staff meeting to address some child abuse/protection issue	10.4 (0.50)

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1. *Activities carried out after the course by the participants will be those requiring the least effort on their part to complete.*

There was some support for the first hypothesis. Many of the activities which matched the criteria for low levels of effort on the part of the course participants, as shown in table 1, were ranked high on the list of those undertaken. Table 2 lists the activities teachers had completed. A product moment correlation co-efficient was carried out between the scale of effort shown in table 1 and the order of the most activities completed or planned as shown in table 2. This produced a correlation of .773 which is significant at the .005 level. According to Sheehan and Duprey (1999) this correlation is meaningfully in the high range.

Table 2
Showing the activities they have planned or done something about since the child abuse course ranked in order of priority (N=158)

Activities planned or undertaken. The most done is at the top of the list. The number to the next column to right indicates order on the scale of effort. Low score indicating least effort to teacher	Order on scale of effort	Mean score Standard deviations in brackets
Dissemination of information about the course to staff	3	.91 (.96)
Locating relevant documents	2	.77 (.42)
Arranging a whole-staff meeting to address some child abuse/protection issues	8	.68 (1.03)
Distributing documents to staff	1	.61 (.49)
Preparing an internal procedure/guidelines document for staff use	6	.61 (.48)
Informing non-teaching staff about procedures	4	.58 (.50)
Improving record keeping/storage	5	.57 (.50)
Purchasing relevant resources for staff and/or pupil use	7	.20 (.40)
Planning a half/part day INSET to focus on child abuse/protection	9	.15 (.36)
Arranging a meeting for a few staff to address child abuse/protection issues	11	.13 (.33)
Planning a full day INSET to focus on child abuse/protection	10	.09 (.29)

To take into the account the time scale a further question was included to ask what resources course participants would like for future programmes in their schools. This was intended to provide information about what they *intended to do* rather than what they *had done* in the previous question. Again it does seem, as shown in table 3 preference is for information rather than facilities to carry out interactive training which requires more effort. The latter demands the use of face-to-face contact with children on the topic or a formal INSET.

Table 3
Showing the future resources required from the Local Education Authority for support of child abuse/protection programmes. A high score indicates high priority (N=158)

Resources required	Mean score Standard deviation in brackets
1. Regular information updates sent to all schools	4.86 (2.26)
2. An accessible consultant/counsellor	4.70 (2.54)
3. Refresher courses for co-ordinators	3.78 (2.21)
4. Experienced providers on the subject for schools INSE	3.63 (2.32)
5. Free loan books/training packs	3.04 (1.98)
6. Free loan videos	2.63 (1.80)

In order to determine whether the results detailed above represented a fair test in the sense that the responses were based on a representative proportion of the sample the number of participants who carried out activities was recorded. Table 4 shows all the sample actually did something and over fifty percent had carried out at least six of the activities.

Table 4
Showing the percentage of the sample who had planned or carried out the activities after about three months

Number of activities planned or done out of a total of 11	Percentage of sample of 158 who completed activities
1 activity	100.00%
2 activities	98.97%
3 activities	91.47%
4 activities	83.37%
5.activities	67.77%
6.activities	53.90%
7.activities	27.90%
8.activities	11.10%
9.activities	2.40%
10.activities	0.60%
11.activities	0.60%

Hypothesis 2. *Knowledge about abuse issues, confidence in their own ability to deal with issues and number of activities carried out will all be related.*

The results shown in table 5 indicate knowledge and confidence are related but the link with activity measures is minimal. According to Sheehan and DuPrey (1999) if correlations are below .03 they should not be considered meaningful.

Table 5.
Showing correlation for the four elements on the evaluation distributed about three months after the courses were completed. (N=158)

Elements	Pearson product moment correlation
Knowledge and understanding/ Confidence	.692 sig .000
Activities done/ Knowledge and understanding	.180 sig .024
Activities done/ Confidence	.248 sig .002

DISCUSSION

The course did appear at first impression to have an effect in that certain activities were carried out. What was actually done was shown to be closely related to the effort involved. The support for the first hypothesis suggests Siegrist's (1996) view of behaviour being related to effort-reward (in this case effort alone) can be related to activity measures on a course evaluation. If the quantitative report of activities listed in table 2 were taken at face value it would suggest certain aspects of the course listed at the top of the table were the most effective. The tutor presenting those aspects of the course, for example, may be

praised. The content may be considered good, and therefore not in need of revision. Items at the bottom of the list would be regarded very differently. The crucial implication of this finding is that using an activity measure as an indication of the transfer of learning reflects more upon the effort involved with that activity than upon the nature of the INSET. This does suggest that many researchers, for example Mattheoudakis and Nicolaidis (2005) who have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of INSETs need to examine carefully exactly what the measures they use are taking into account.

Each of the activities mentioned could have been carried out in a number of different ways. Many of the activities at the top of the list in table 2 are usually carried out on an individual basis. Disseminating information to staff often involves a very short meeting, which merely reports back from the course. This is something which is often done automatically in schools when members of staff have received special training in an area. Items listed second, third and sixth, all refer to documents concerning abuse. Towards the bottom of the list is INSET which certainly requires far more lead time to set up than, for example, locating documents or devoting a whole staff meeting to child abuse/protection issues. The participants passed on information gained in the course, in a number of ways and most appear to be doing things which they can readily do as individuals.

Participants were given a selection of six future resource choices. They were asked to rank them in order of preference. This question is important because it allows the participants to project what they might do in the future. An INSET for example, takes time to organise so it could be argued it was not a high ranking activity simply because there had not been time to organise it since the course. As an INSET does not rank highly on the list of resource support required in the future it is clear one is not planned. This does support the view that this 'high effort' activity is not popular. It is particularly interesting that the top of the list was the request for information. This fits in with the activities participants have been doing, as can be seen in table 2. High on the list was passing on information, much lower on the list, was material for running an INSET. It seems that plans for future activities follow the format of those already done.

Participants attending the courses were not volunteers. Many attended reluctantly, but there is no reason to suppose this influenced the pattern of activities displayed with those requiring the least effort occurring most. All participants did carry out some activities. The topic itself, child abuse, was a sensitive one but even so post course activities were carried out and there is no reason to believe the pattern of effort and frequency would be any different with a different subject matter, although this is an obvious area for further enquiry. It could be argued the fact that an INSET specifically, was rarely carried out probably partly reflects the relative low level of importance the head teachers put on a child abuse/protection INSET. It should be noted those attending the course were those with senior responsibility in their schools and likely to be the ones who would be important in deciding what INSETs were run. It is not intended here to criticise the head teachers for not holding an INSET as it could be argued other methods of training would be equally effective. There are only a limited number of INSETs they can afford to carry out, from the point of view of time available and other resources. Polnay (2000), however, did have similar finding with another group of professionals, medical practitioners, who gave a low priority to child abuse.

These findings do support the notion that what people do after a course is more closely related to Siegrist's (1996) concept of effort-reward than how good various aspects of the course were. It obviously does not mean that the evaluation is of no use, but it does mean that it should not be taken at face value. It should be emphasised that this study is concerned with the effort aspect of Siegrist's model and how it affects the validity of activity measures as a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of a training course. It is perfectly possible for the likelihood of specific activities to be increased dramatically if rewards, as indicated in the second part of the model, were to be introduced after the completion of a course. Evidence from other studies evaluating INSETs have shown how providing incentives for performing certain activities (eg Tracey et al 2001, Goldstein and Ford, 2002 and Waters 2006) can increase the likelihood of those activities being carried out. Further Atay (2004) has demonstrated how engaging in a dialogue with course participants after the completion of courses increases the likelihood of certain activities being carried out. Whilst these post- course interventions can be very effective they had not been practiced in the present study at the time the evaluation was carried out. It was for this reason the study was able to examine the relationship between effort and activity measures, without the intervening variable of reward being an influence.

The second hypothesis testing for a relationship between claimed knowledge, confidence and activities carried out, is only partially supported. Knowledge and confidence have a reasonably high correlation but the number of activities carried out are not linked to either. This does say something about the importance of selecting measures carefully when evaluating a course. Knowledge and confidence bear little or no relationship to the number of activities students carry out after the course. Assumptions must not be made about knowledge being transferred into behaviour. One must also question the use of concepts such as confidence as a means of evaluating a course. Here participants reported an increase in confidence, but as that was unrelated to activities carried out the question is raised as to how important it was as a means of measuring the effectiveness of a course?

The findings of this study provide some support for the model promoted by Siegrist (1996). They indicate it is a little more specific indicating that rather than effort-reward, effort alone can be important in determining behaviour. Applying this to evaluations, these results suggest the outcomes of a course, as measured by activity measure evaluations, are closely linked to this. People will do something because it requires less effort rather than because it is presented in a particularly attractive or potent manner in a course. The interpretation of the evaluation should therefore reflect this rather than the content of the course. The present study involved a child abuse INSET, however, it could be argued there are two reasons to believe the findings are applicable to courses concerning other topics or issues. First although Siegrist's model has not previously been applied to course evaluations it has been shown to be applicable in various contexts, and second, researchers such as le Roux

and Ferreira (2005) argue that there are consistencies in the characteristics of teaching INSETs which make it possible to generalise about their structure from one topic to another.

The findings of the present study suggest course evaluations based on the use of activity measures need to take into account not only the content of the course but a realistic awareness of the effort involved in the various activities in the actual working environment of those who took part. In the present study this was possible as the present author had been a teacher and therefore was aware of the circumstances the course participants would experience in their schools. Very often, however, this is not the case. Training is too often totally devolved from the work place and trainers, and often those interpreting evaluations do not know fully the situation the participants find themselves in when they return to their place of work. It could well be that failure to carry out things which are recommended in training do not reflect inadequacies of the course but rather reflect the working circumstances of the individual.

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