CHILD PROTECTION PROTOCOL TRAINING IN SPAIN: TEACHER’S RECOGNITION AND REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

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Abstract
While reporting of child abuse and neglect has become mandatory for all school staff in Spain, training for professionals working in educational settings is still inexistent or conducted on a voluntary and personally driven basis. This work describes the process followed by an international school located in Spain, to design and implement a child protection protocol. It also examines the educational program on child protection procedures, conducted as an initial effort to make this type of knowledge accessible for all people working with children in the school. The aim of the training was to introduce the recently created protocol in order to improve teacher’s awareness, recognition skills, personal confidence and practical knowledge on how to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect. Some challenges in shaping the best possible type of course are shared here, as was the awareness that the lessons delivered had to cover many different contents and skills, since the vast majority of Spanish professionals had never received any prior education on child protection. On the other hand, most foreign staff -despite being more familiar with these issues- was completely unaware of the local institutions and also of regulations by which our school had to abide. It was important to communicate the specifics of the reporting steps that had to be followed by all staff, in any procedure regarding reporting a breach in children’s safety. After careful planning and consideration, the training was designed and delivered by the guidance counsellor’s team, during a professional development day for all teaching, support and assistant staff. The session was structured as an intensive four hours’ workshop, divided into: instructional conference, practical work in multidisciplinary groups and case studies presentation by the local social services authorities. Data from a survey conducted with all participants is used here to explore teachers’ perceived changes as a result of the professional development day. In conclusion, shortly following completion of training, most participants expressed an improvement in the knowledge of: both the local region and national legislation on child protection, the different types of abuse and neglect, indicators for different types of abuse and neglect, how to talk to students upon disclosure, steps to take when there is a suspected case of abuse or neglect. In the future, the Spanish regulation for teaching and support staff in schools, should evolve to resemble more that of countries such as the USA, where periodical child abuse recognition and reporting training is a requirement to be accredited and allowed to work with children in any educational environment. In the process of designing and implementing a child protection protocol, school provided training can be a useful mean to support all staff in fulfilling their role and responsibility in safeguarding the children’s safety and well-being.

Keywords: child protection, protocol, teacher training, psychology, legislation.

1 INTRODUCTION
While reporting of child abuse and neglect has become mandatory for all school staff in Spain, training for professionals working in educational settings is still inexistent or conducted on a voluntary and personally driven basis. Despite other countries having a longer history of child protection policies and protocols [1,2,3], teacher training experiences [4] -and in general staff training developments [5,6,7]- are still in the process of being implemented and tested internationally. This work describes the process followed by an international school located in Spain, to design and implement a child protection protocol. It also examines the educational program on child protection procedures, conducted as an initial effort to make this type of knowledge accessible for all people working with children in the school. The aim of the training was to introduce the recently created protocol to improve teacher’s awareness, recognition skills, personal confidence and practical knowledge on how to report suspected cases of abuse or neglect. Some challenges in shaping the best possible type of course are shared here, together with teacher’s perceptions of the training process.
2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Pre workshop steps

There was an initial awareness that the lessons delivered had to cover many different contents and skills, since the vast majority of Spanish professionals had never received any prior education on child protection. On the other hand, most foreign staff -despite being more familiar with these issues- was completely unaware of the local institutions and also of regulations by which our school had to abide. It was important to communicate the specifics of the reporting steps that had to be followed by all staff, in any procedure regarding reporting a breach in children’s safety. We took a long time to understand the overlapping amongst the different Spanish laws and the regional laws and protocol. We also translated into English the most important parts of the applicable laws and the whole reporting protocol, to make it accessible for all foreign staff. A pre workshop survey was carried out and the teachers were questioned about their perceived knowledge of the two main topics for the workshop: knowing when to report -recognizing signs of different types of abuse in children- and how to report inside the school system. Several classroom and teacher child protection training programs were reviewed. After doing a search on several programs, the school purchased the Second Step Child Protection Unit and all counselors followed the teacher training provided online. Some counselor also followed the ECIS webinars course “Child Protection: Moving Past Compliance”. The counselors team arranged a meeting with the social services in Valencia, to know more about the reporting protocol and complex issues on when to carry out a report.

2.2 The workshop

After careful planning and consideration, the training was designed and delivered by the guidance counsellor’s team, during a professional development day for all teaching, support, and assistant staff. The session was structured as an intensive four hours’ workshop, divided into: instructional conference, practical work in multidisciplinary groups and theory illustrated with case studies by the local social services authorities.

The instructional conference -led by the counselors team- had the following structure:

- Types of abuse and neglect
- Levels: At risk and Neglect
- School’s Child Protection Team
- Child Protection Protocol. Reporting Process
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Spanish Law

The practical work in multidisciplinary groups consisted in a matching activity about differentiating the different types of abuse or neglect and their indicators.

The presentation by the local Social Welfare and Integration Services, covered the following topics:

- Detection
- Reporting
- Child Support
- City Hall responsibilities
- Actions of the City Hall of Valencia
- Case studies

Participants in the workshop were provided with a dossier containing all the materials and copies from the legislation and protocol. A post workshop survey was carried out to measure teacher’s self-perceived knowledge after the workshop.

3 RESULTS

Data from a survey conducted with all participants is used here to explore teachers’ perceived changes as a result of the professional development day.
The questions designed for the workshop were:
1. I am familiar with the child protection laws in Spain
2. I am familiar with the child protection laws according to the Valencian laws
3. I know which are the different types of abuse and neglect
4. I can differentiate the indicators for different types of abuse and neglect
5. I know which are the best practices for appropriate physical behavior with students
6. I know which are the best practices for appropriate communication with students
7. I think that probably some children in our school are suffering from some type of abuse or neglect
8. If a student tells me he/she is being abused, I know how to talk to them.
9. If I suspect a student is being abused or neglected, I know which steps to take.
10. In the forthcoming workshop I would like to learn more about...

The answers were gathered from a linear scale 1 to 5, being 1: Completely disagree and 5: Completely agree.

Table 1. Pre-test Question 1.

1. I am familiar with the child protection laws in Spain - on average: 1.82

Table 2. Pre-test Question 2.

2. I am familiar with the child protection laws according to the Valencian laws - o...

Table 3. Pre-test Question 3.

3. I know which are the different types of abuse and neglect - on average: 2.58
Table 4. Pre-test Question 4.

4. I can differentiate the indicators for different types of abuse and neglect - on...

Table 5. Pre-test Question 5.

5. I know which are the best practices for appropriate physical behavior with student...

Table 6. Pre-test Question 6.

6. I know which are the best practices for appropriate communication with student...

Table 7. Pre-test Question 7.

7. I think that probably some children in our school are suffering from some type of a...
Table 8. Pre-test Question 8.

8. If a student tells me he/she is being abused, I know how to talk to them. - on...

Table 9. Pre-test Question 9.

9. If I suspect a student is being abused or neglected, I know which steps to take. -...

Table 10. Post-test Question 1.

1. I am familiar with the child protection laws in Spain - on average: 3.55

Table 11. Post-test Question 2.

2. I am familiar with the child protection laws according to the Valencian laws - o...
Table 12. Post-test Question 3.
3. I know which are the different types of abuse and neglect - on average: 4.65

Table 13. Post-test Question 4.
4. I can differentiate the indicators for different types of abuse and neglect - on...

Table 14. Post-test Question 5.
5. I know which are the best practices for appropriate physical behavior with student...

Table 15. Post-test Question 6.
6. I know which are the best practices for appropriate communication with student...
4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, shortly following completion of training, most participants expressed an improvement in the knowledge of: both the local region and national legislation on child protection, the different types of abuse and neglect, indicators for different types of abuse and neglect, how to talk to students upon disclosure, steps to take when there is a suspected case of abuse or neglect. There was not a significant change in the perception of teachers that some children in our school may be suffering from child abuse or neglect. In the future, the Spanish regulation for teaching and supporting staff in schools, should evolve to resemble more that of countries such as the USA, where periodical child abuse recognition and reporting training is a requirement to be accredited and allowed to work with children in any educational environment. In the process of designing and implementing a child protection protocol, school provided training can be a useful mean to support all staff in fulfilling their role and responsibility in safeguarding the children’s safety and well-being.
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REFERENCES


