

CHAPTER 11

TRAINING IN THE VIOLENCE SECTOR

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This chapter outlines the development of a formal education programme primarily designed to meet the needs in the family violence sector. The programme content is described, issues for workforce development discussed, and those issues which have emerged for us in encouraging the personal and professional development of student populations are examined.

The Auckland University of Technology (AIT) first offered the Diploma in Violence and Trauma Studies in 1996 (AIT 1999). The course was developed to meet needs identified in the community and has been offered every year to an increasingly wide range of students. It is taught in a health faculty and has gradually developed into its health setting despite the initial criminal justice and family courts' focus and the varied past of its teaching staff. (Warwick Pudney is also part of the teaching team.¹) This has been particularly timely, in that the health sector has accepted its increasing responsibility to respond to family violence as a public health issue. The diploma is the first formally recognised specialist tertiary level qualification offered in New Zealand in this field. The programme draws on current theory, and on research and practice methods in the rapidly growing fields of violence and trauma studies. It is designed to provide vocational education for people who make a career commitment to work in this area and to meet the need for improved services in prevention and treatment of violence and trauma. It caters for people-helping professionals who wish to fill gaps in their knowledge and practice competencies, and for non-professionals with some experience in the field seeking a recognised qualification to advance their practice base and careers. It also provides a base from which graduates can advance to further training and research (Abbot & Curreen 2000).

To date, many of the programme's students have already held work in

relevant settings or have been volunteers in these sectors. Some are using the diploma to explore a variety of people-helping settings and will take their family violence knowledge into a range of other professions never envisaged by the original diploma development team.

The main educational needs identified in 1993 by the programme development group included relevant theoretical knowledge, group facilitation skills, professional development and crisis intervention. The programme was formally validated in late 1994. Individuals and organisations involved in its development continue to support, advise on further development and monitor the programme through membership of an advisory committee or by direct involvement in the teaching programme.

Since it commenced, changes have been made to the structure, but the programme content has remained consistent with its original intent. The programme emphasises three general types of outcome:

- Academic (comprehensive relevant theory and knowledge)
- Professional and practice-based skills
- Appropriate personal and professional attitudes and aptitudes.

The programme is underpinned by a philosophy based on various beliefs and assumptions, including a pro-feminist analysis of the causes of violence. A key perspective is that violence is supported and maintained by social structures which advance the interest of some people over others; that all people have a social responsibility to intervene in violence to prevent it and to assist those traumatised. Additionally it is held that we all have some choice over our actions. Assumptions about practice include the notion that safety is paramount and that clients can change behaviour and attitudes. While the diploma uses these theories about the causes of family violence and the theoretical perspectives attached to them as core beginning points, the programme ranges wider than family violence, devoting time to such matters as crisis intervention and critical incidents. This ensures that students have a variety skills in, and awareness of, trauma and the wider field of mental health. The programme design acknowledges the importance of partnership as embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi and endeavours to heighten students' commitment to promoting bicultural sensitivity. Māori and Pacific Island students are significant contributors in very culturally diverse classes.

The programme is taught at level 6 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (equivalent to second year of an undergraduate degree). The

papers making up the diploma, and the way they are structured, are as follows:

Theory and application. Examines theoretical models of the causes of violence and applies them to a variety of areas of practice, including women's, men's, children's, Māori and refugee issues and sexual abuse.

Personal and professional development. Examines safety issues of clients and workers, particularly in relation to codes of ethics, professional boundaries, use of language, dealing with stress, supervision, working with other professionals and examining one's attitudes and consciousness.

Violence intervention and practice. Includes the development of the skills and understandings necessary for intervention, particularly about assessment of safety and danger, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and critical incidents. Skills for brief intervention, motivational interviewing and conflict resolution are also taught.

Critical issues. Assists students to develop a critical analysis of topical and controversial subjects in the field. Includes the development of awareness of research and of relevant tools to assist in the exploration and debate of topics such as women's violence, youth suicide, alcohol and violence, and children witnessing parental violence. Students are encouraged to tease out the theoretical issues involved and to survey relevant literature.

Group facilitation and development. Mainly develops facilitation skills and group processes. Students also examine 'ideal' content and write a programme for a particular client population.

Agency placement. Involves 'live' observations in the community, with as much participation as practicable. These include spending an evening with the police, a day in the district court, participating in a civil defence exercise and attending a community-based group — which may relate to the student's own needs or interests. Students are usually encouraged to attend a group in an agency that adopts an unfamiliar perspective. The agency placement for some students is their place of employment, while for others it is an opportunity to gain experience in another field.

The programme of study may be completed full-time in one academic year, or part-time over two years. There is also provision for students to exit after completing the first three papers, with a Certificate in Violence and Trauma Studies. Some students also enrol in Theory and Application as a standalone paper. Recognition of prior learning can be granted for students with significant supervised work experience, who would then

gain credit for the agency placement paper, or for group facilitation and development.

Three of the papers, Agency Placement, Violence Intervention and Practice, and Group Development and Facilitation, have practical and workshop components.

Teaching and learning methods include:

- Lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials
- Classroom discussion and debates
- Group projects and presentations
- Simulated situations and role-play
- Case examples with analysis and discussion
- Observation and agency placement
- Supervision and consultation.

A variety of modes of presentation and teaching enable students to explore the styles of learning that most suit them. Confidence built in one type of setting then spreads to other settings. The same applies to assessment methods.

Issues for workforce development

In the seven years the diploma has been offered an important issue has emerged: the lack of workforce development and the question of who establishes competencies and criteria. There is no one key sector involved in this, but rather a blend of health, education, social welfare and development, justice and courts, corrections, crime prevention and police and some NGOs. There has been no real leadership in recent years and we need to continue asking what skills, experience and competencies we expect of a violence prevention/intervention worker. The sector has been dominated by those who hold the purse strings and some dominant flavours and ideologies have emerged without real debate about how applicable they are to a wider range of settings. This is of concern, as many communities are too small to allow resources and skills to be finely focused. For example, family court requirements have had significant impact on defining and delimiting what men's stopping violence groups offer. Many of the men enrolling in the diploma programme, however, are motivated by plans to facilitate programmes in prison, youth, or church-based settings where male-to-male violence may be a more significant issue than family violence. Skills for interventions and assessment around drugs and alcohol are also clearly needed by these workers, but prevailing

ideologies around ‘alcohol is no excuse’ mean that there is little attention given to this issue, nor is worker skill in this field required.

Another problem we face is that there are few positions in the workforce where specific family violence and trauma work is properly and permanently funded in full-time positions. The programme serves well those students who already work in the sector part or full-time, or who have created niches for themselves where part-time work (e.g. programme facilitation) joins with other income sources. The experience, however, has been that many graduates find work in the mental health/addictions sector, where their case management skills are appreciated and they find their knowledge highly relevant.

Debate about core competencies for violence prevention workers is long overdue. Critical attention needs to be directed to the problem that students who enrol in social work, psychology, and health services training programmes receive scant education about family violence.

Issues for family violence education

The major theme I explore in this chapter relates to the impact of education on students at a personal and emotional level. We have high expectations of workers in this field in terms of emotional intelligence or competence, but little clear idea about how that is achieved, or even how it might be demonstrated.

What follows is the result of my observations over several years, illustrated by anecdotes. I am sure that other academics and trainers have had similar experiences in teaching about family violence, or abuse, or trauma (Morgan 1999, Newman 1999). Teaching for several sessions or seminars, however, is a very different experience from having the same students in class 2-3 days a week for an academic year.

Selection of students includes an assessment of their ability to handle the toxicity of the course content. It is inevitable that some students have a strong response to some of the content of the diploma. This can lead to crises for those who experience difficulties coping with issues relating to their own histories of abuse and/or trauma. In some cases these reactions have disrupted student learning at both conceptual and emotional levels. For many of these students this is their first opportunity to do formal study in the area of violence and trauma. While they may have successful academic backgrounds in other or related disciplines and may have worked at a grass-roots level, many are examining issues for the first time they thought they had long since resolved. Similarly, others begin to re-

examine their personal and family histories and, in the discussion that follows, attempt to begin healing. As teachers we have been challenged by the barrier to learning that results from revisiting the past (or having it suddenly emerge in the form of a flashback in class). This is demanding work for the teachers and at times the inevitable transferences created by this work can be particularly challenging, especially for male staff. As a consequence it has been important for the teaching staff to balance the need for a team teaching approach with the need for a cohesive and contained group dynamic.

Educators work not just with the minds of learners, but with their hearts and spirits too. When we recognise that memories and information are carried not just intellectually but physically, even at the cellular level, it becomes evident how trauma, past or present, interferes with the ability to learn (Horsman 2000:10).

Some students each year have entered therapy during the course. The intersections of therapy and education continue to test us, as they do all educators in the family violence arena who do prevention work and facilitate groups. The programme aims to develop professionals, and some resolution of the individual's past is vital before this can be achieved. Other educators (Horsman 2000) write about the complexity of issues in the process of encouraging or assisting students to find the right therapeutic intervention for them. They are no less complex in this programme. A powerful, supportive group dynamic in the programme makes much personal growth and development possible. An early assessment task is the compilation of a resource folder which means that students have spent time visiting support and counselling resources in their home community and are able to self-refer should the need arise.

A proportion of students who choose to study in this area are motivated by their own or their families' experiences of trauma (generally in the context of family violence) and this impacts on the learning process, classroom behaviour and the ability to succeed academically. Each year students apply to enter the programme with, it is apparent to us, clear personal healing journeys in mind. We question incoming students about this at a pre-selection interview and some are encouraged to take more time to attend to personal issues, or to enter lower-level study. When students clearly show an ability to study at this level (and perhaps already have a degree) they are accepted, but advised that our experience indicates that some will need to engage in therapy of some sort, to assist them to complete the programme.

It is difficult to anticipate who will respond and how, and some of those with the most healing work to do are already employed in the field. We have noticed that students we accept into the programme have often worked at the coalface for some years with victims who have had similar trauma experience to themselves. They are very confident of having done sufficient personal work, but when placed in this educational setting they are often forced to significantly revisit their past and seek further therapy. Most of them are very surprised by the extent of this and some are slow to recognise what is happening to them. They make comments such as: “I read and reread the article/chapter — I just couldn’t take it in.” While such student comments are not uncommon, if the student has otherwise been managing fine and has a successful academic record, then they raise issues about the actual content. A frequent manifestation of this inner disquiet is students failing to complete written work without seeking extensions, or students who write superb pieces of work that somehow don’t quite meet the learning outcomes because they fail to demonstrate a theoretical analysis and self-analysis in an integrated manner. In other words they are coping with their past by separating material into different components in their written work. The ability to integrate theory and research with their own personal experiences is vital.

Sometimes these learning blocks are very specific; other times quite general. It is usually the early experiences that create these blocks rather than later and more adult experiences. Tasks set or chosen around child abuse and neglect, or attachment issues seem to create more difficulty than others. Student choices are also interesting. Many students choose to specialise, where possible, in areas which reflect their own experiences of victimisation, feeling that this will give them an advantage in the learning process — in reality the advantage becomes a learning block and thus a disadvantage. Noticing what the student seems to avoid can also tell us much. Some students choose material that seems to shun certain areas. While this is permissible, and thus more emotionally manageable, it is not necessarily good personal and professional development.

Attention to personal issues is essential for the people-helping workforce. We often hear stories of workers in this area who have not done so and consequently they may have acted abusively, burned out, replicated client issues with parallel processes, ‘rescued’, had strong unmanaged counter-transferences, caused conflict in agencies or prevented progress in treatment.

We have also observed in class: tears, noisy fidgeting and easy distraction, withdrawal, inappropriate comments, sudden exits from the classroom, intense questioning, body language and furniture arranging that is distancing. All of which can be bewildering to the visiting speaker! Other students are clear about their experiences but describe them in flippant and blasé ways. Good practice is to clearly notify students of upcoming class material, and to talk to them about the imminent topics, with clear identification of speakers and content, so that they have some time to prepare themselves for potentially vulnerable patches. On the whole this works well and, where students have steeled themselves for a particular seminar day or class because some aspect mirrors their own experience, they generally manage well. Those class experiences in which a feature ‘jumps out of nowhere’ at students are the most distressing. We continue to be amazed at what those points might be. Significant recurring themes have been the sessions on adolescent violence, elder abuse, attachment issues and a seminar day on refugee issues, which many Māori students respond to. Regular acknowledgements from visiting speakers that particular content may be distressing to some groups also help.

Occasionally a student will seek to withdraw from the programme, on recognising that their past trauma is going to limit their ability to complete the programme, or their ability to work in the area — rather a worry when they are already doing so! Some students are counselled through the self-doubt and self-assessment process and continue in the programme, but for others the wisest decision is to leave. The transition from victim to professional is an exciting one to watch, but very difficult to predict; nevertheless, we have become braver with our acceptance of students with histories of victimisation. The feedback from these students is that they have undergone enormous healing, together with substantial personal and professional development and, while they may not work directly in the field in the future, the processes undertaken have been very valuable to them.

Another dimension is existing workers who have become vicariously traumatised by continually working with victim populations and, conversely, those workers who lose sight of victim needs through always working with perpetrators. The diploma programme is often an opportunity to get some wider insight and to re-balance perspective. To be in a class setting with peers, some who work with victims and some who work with perpetrators, and to interact without the constraining effects

of agency politics, is very valuable.

The issue of education about trauma and the trauma of such education has occupied several health academics at AUT and in 2000 an Interdisciplinary Trauma Research Unit was set up. While the notion of trauma for many of these teachers is much wider than family violence (the faculty educates paramedics, nurses, midwives, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mental health support workers, health promoters and psychotherapists), we anticipate that significant interdisciplinary collaboration will be possible in research on these student learning issues. Sometimes what is traumatic is not so much the subject matter but the education process itself. Programmes that attract significant mature student populations will always encounter intellectually able students, who have never succeeded in past educational settings because of the traumatic experiences they had during their early schooling. Teachers of adult learners need to ensure that classrooms are safe and nurturing learning environments for those previously hurt by school experiences.

Another issue is that of gender. The diploma has pro-feminist underpinnings, and as a consequence language that is gender specific: e.g. 'male partner violence towards women' rather than the gender-neutral term 'family violence'. This leads to the exploration of a wider range of issues which impact on the status of women, for example media language and description, pornography and the focus on intervention and prevention measures which are educational and social-activist, rather than psychological and individual. Men can feel somewhat besieged in the classroom settings. It can also be a particular challenge when the class members are predominantly women but, in addition, women who may themselves have a victim past, or who work extensively with women victims and thus find males difficult to cope with. Male students are warned of this and male staff work with men to give them support. Male students generally report much greater levels of personal development than women do.

An issue for many educators and trainers in this field is, of course, the small number of men who engage in such education. Generally around 20% of students are male. They are usually older and making a deliberate career change, or they have a job and struggle to study and work full-time. They are frequently offered work or the opportunity to train with agencies while still students. There is a demand from a variety of agencies, which are unfortunately unable to offer full-time employment. Male workers

are needed in the family violence area and we need to consider how we can better support them. What can be done to recruit men to this work and to maintain them in the sector?

Student enrolment has also included recent immigrants who are health and mental health professionals, but who are unable to practise in New Zealand in their previous speciality. The diploma has worked well for these new residents by giving a socio-political and feminist context to their understandings of work in the people-helping sector, something frequently lacking in their earlier education. Family violence workers take for granted much of the structure and language of such services in New Zealand. 'Local' experience through placements is a vital learning outcome. The programme gives these students a support network, placement experience and a setting in which their English language can improve in a vocational context.

The classes as a whole benefit from such a culturally diverse education setting and this has some unique challenges. For example, I have several times underestimated how hard it is for students who come from countries where there is an abusive police state regime to spend an evening in a police car, or to have uniformed police officers in the class as part of the teaching team. Conversely, I returned after a ten-minute absence, to a group debrief session for students who had been out for an evening with the police, to find that the group of middle-aged students had all identified themselves as Springbok Tour or Bastion Point protesters. They had discovered that their visiting debriefer was not only the co-ordinator of WAVES (a multi-agency violence intervention project), but also a retired police officer who had been a member of an infamous police squad during the Springbok tour. The chilly atmosphere took a while to warm — a timely reminder that New Zealand society also has some unhealed wounds.

Issues for formal education providers

A challenge each year is to respond to the diverse students needs. Some, having had considerable community-based experience, enrol for the theory. The professionals around them make can them feel inadequate by using academic language and jargon which they do not understand fully. They want to work with their peers as equals, they want confidence to put forward their ideas, to modify the programmes they deliver in ways they see as best meeting client needs and to take their skills to other agencies and into other settings.

Another group comprises young students who have an academic degree which they had anticipated would have practical application in the people-helping field. They come for basic skills, practical experiences, to meet workers from a variety of community agencies and to talk, listen and grow personally. They have often spent three years on theory but have not yet had experiences that confirm them in their desire or suitability for people-helping work. They correctly identify family violence as a core issue in this area.

These two contrasting student populations are able to offer each other very different perspectives and learning. Those with practice experience (and generally the wisdom of years) and those with sound academic skills, language, and analysis and computer skills are able to support each other and share their skills in unique ways and with enormous respect. Another group of students enrol for the experience of the academic environment.

The growth of research, education and programme development in the area of family violence has been enormous in the past fifteen years and many workers struggle to keep abreast of the diversity of material, even in very small speciality fields. Access to databases, books, research and researchers is a significant and exciting part of teaching in this field. We are often observing agencies 'stuck' with particular models and frameworks, and formal academic education gives an opportunity to explore a range of views that may assist in broadening their perspectives. Access to technology may significantly enhance this process. Students are keen to develop computer skills make the most of electronic resources. For a number each year, this means wresting computer access from their children and exploring the internet for the first time. Many sectors are examining the use of information technology in their particular area and this applies also to the family violence field.

Each year the programme administrators receive enquiries from around the country from potential students looking for on-line study in the area of family violence and trauma. While the personal and professional development components of the diploma mean that it is not suitable for this mode of study, some content — theory for instance, is certainly suitable for on-line access. Further development for distance learning of this paper is planned.

Assessment is a challenge in formal education and a unique process in the diploma. In a work environment where there is potential for unsuitable

workers to be particularly damaging to a vulnerable client population, we, along with other tertiary sector educators, sometimes struggle with assessment issues. A student may be academically capable, but does not necessarily have the personal qualities or insight to be an effective or safe worker. Our dilemma is: what are our responsibilities as educators versus workforce gatekeepers? In the diploma we feel we have developed a useful process, which enables us to measure student learning against clearly stated outcomes. The students complete their course of study with the presentation of an Accreditation Statement to a panel. The panel consists of teaching staff and workers from a variety of community agencies. The statement involves a reflection on their personal development in the learning process and a summary of the type of work they feel they are most suited for. Students enter the programme with diverse experiences and develop and learn according to their needs. What is important for safe future practice is that they realistically assess what they are capable of. There is no assumption that all students will emerge from the programme with the same abilities. Personal histories and qualities are valued. The other important feature is the involvement of community agencies in this process; this gives them a direct involvement in the final assessment process, which is important for stakeholders in this sector.

An innovation in 2002 was making the diploma available in the context of a Bachelor of Health Science major in Applied Mental Health. This gives students credit for the diploma in a degree structure. There are opportunities to study further papers — Child and Youth Mental Health Interventions, Critical Incidents, Drugs and Alcohol Studies and specific counselling skill papers as well as core papers in Health Law, Health Promotion, Human Structure and Function and Research Methodologies. These are available to those initially attracted to study for the diploma. Many of the graduates of this degree will practise in the mental health support work area, and it is an exciting development for that particular workforce that they will have taken the opportunity to study papers focused on family violence.

Working in a university with a strong commitment to training health professionals has provided an opportunity to offer modest contributions to learning about family violence in other disciplines. We have nevertheless long been concerned about the need for family violence education, and for the theories and perspectives that accompany such learning to permeate training in a broader sense. It is hoped that, in the future, educators in a

wide range of social service and health professional training institutions will be required to address core competencies on family violence qualifications and that this will happen from a multidisciplinary perspective.

- 1 I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Warwick Pudney to this chapter. Warwick has worked in the counselling and psychotherapy field for 17 years, has managed a Men's Counselling and Wellbeing Centre and lecturers in the Diploma in Violence and Trauma Studies and the graduate Diploma in Psycho-Social Studies at Auckland University of Technology. He runs workshops, trains, supervises and writes and has a keen interest in gender issues and social-ecological approaches. He has written four books and in 2002 received a UNESCO Peace Builders award.