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**Title: The Victoria Climbié case: social work education for practice in children and families' work before and since.**

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**Abstract**
Based on their research into the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, the authors outline an analysis they undertook of literature which had made substantial comment on either the inquiry itself and/or the subsequent inquiry report. An overview of seventeen published papers and a report is provided, with four categories of themes emerging. These themes are outlined and then connected with concerns the authors of the current paper identified in journal papers written 10 years or more ago.  It is argued that the gap between recognition that society needs competent, well trained and skilled social work and other professionals to safeguard the lives of children and families and understanding of what education, training and employment support mechanisms are necessary in order for workers to become and remain well trained, skilled and effective, remains as wide as ever. The paper concludes with an outline of teaching approaches the current authors have adopted in pursuit of the kinds of learning opportunities they believe need to be put in place to improve professional practice in children and families' work. These include creative use of child abuse inquiry reports themselves, role plays and simulations and workshops designed to enhance critical reflection skills.
**Key words:** Child safeguarding; Victoria Climbié; social work; professional education.

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**Introduction**

This paper has been written by two 'middle aged' female social work academics whose coffee-break conversations about what we used to do as social workers, what we do now as social work educators and academics and what we think needs to be much more the focus of education and training for practice in social work with children and families have made us feel like the 'Grumpy Old Women' of recent television popularity[1].

The central tenet of this piece is that the tension between the notion of competent social workers and the complex reality of human lives, particularly the lives of those who may have extremes of need and/or psychological disturbance and distress, continues to be played out within social work inquiries, such as that led by Lord Laming into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003), within social work agencies and within social work education. We argue that, in many ways, the gap between recognition that society needs competent, well trained and skilled professionals to safeguard the lives of children and families and understanding of what education, training and employment support mechanisms are necessary in order for workers to become and remain well trained, skilled and effective, remains as wide as ever.

Following a brief introduction to the nature of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, we describe the literature search we undertook, as part of a wider research study, of recent papers and a report which provide a commentary on the inquiry findings, before focusing on our own thoughts on the implications for education and training in child welfare and safeguarding

social work.

**The Victoria Climbié Inquiry**

The inquiry investigated the circumstances surrounding the tragic and horrific death of Victoria Climbié in February 2000 at the hands of her aunt, Marie-Therese Kouao and her boyfriend, Carl Manning, who were both found guilty of her murder. The Inquiry took evidence from all those involved in the case, from social services, health, housing and the police and a series of seminars with invited contributors were also held. The findings of the Inquiry were damning, not only about individual practice failings, poor or non existent inter-agency working and the lack of focus on the child, Victoria, but also, for the first time, about the failure of senior managers in various organisations to account for the shortcomings of their departments and their resistance, in most cases, to accept responsibility for them.

**Literature Search**

*Purpose*

As part of a larger research project in which we have categorized and coded the transcripts of the Laming Inquiry cross-examinations (Gabb *et al.*, 2006), we decided to explore the education, training and practice issues identified in journal papers and other publications about the Victoria Climbié case and the subsequent Inquiry. We were interested to compare these issues with those we ourselves had identified in papers written more than a decade ago (Lawson *et al.*, 1995; Masson, 1990; Taylor & Balen, 1995). The questions we had in our minds included: were the issues raised in the Climbié-linked literature the same as those commented on in our earlier writing? Were the solutions recommended the same as those we had highlighted? How did the recommendations made in the Laming Report (Laming, 2003) and associated literature square with what we, as experienced social work educators, perceive social workers now need help with in order to be skilful, competent and confident, both at the qualifying and post qualifying level? Are our ideas compatible with current social work education and training requirements?

*Method*

Our exploration of literature related to the Victoria Climbié case started with an electronic search of databases using our library's Metalib facility, using key phrases such as *Victoria Climbié* and *Lord Laming.* This was supplemented by a search via Google Scholar, using the same search terms, a study of reference lists in papers with which we were already familiar and a call to academic colleagues within our School for any other leads. This produced a list of some 60 English language publications which we then checked for actual relevance to our interests. Papers excluded were those that made only very passing reference to the Inquiry report or were very brief news-related pieces in 'popular' social work publications. Thus, in terms of inclusion criteria, we finally identified seventeen papers and a report which had a substantive and prime focus on the Inquiry

report and its implications. Table 1 lists these papers, which we then considered in more detail.

**TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

**Findings**

What we found was that the focus of these various publications could be grouped into four thematic categories, three of which reflected the contributing factors which Munro (2005) identified in her systemic analysis of child abuse deaths. Table 2 presents these four categories and their sub-themes and identifies in which of the papers studied these themes are to be found. Our reading of these papers highlighted, yet again, that there are differing perspectives regarding what is required in order to maximize the possibility of effective social work practice and to minimize the possibility of flawed social work practice in child welfare and safeguarding. There are, in addition, a range of views about the purposes and value of public inquiries into child deaths. Each of these four categories is discussed in turn, although it should be noted that they are not mutually exclusive. There is overlap between them but, nevertheless, their particular foci can be distinguished.

**TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE**

***The nature and purposes of Inquiries***
Official inquiries into child deaths in England and Wales have been conducted since the 1970s and have been held either as a result of the magnitude of the public outcry or when the Government's view has been that such an inquiry was in the public interest. Although not always held in public, their findings have been made public.

A number of the papers we studied considered and questioned the purpose and value of such inquiries, although it is recognized that their character and scale and the context in which they have taken place have changed significantly since the first Inquiry into the death of Maria Colwell (Parton, 2004; Butler and Drakeford, 2005). Cooper (2005) comments that such inquiries have 'significance as forms of public memorial' (p.2) and, by implication, that they may serve a useful purpose. However, most commentators are heavily skeptical about their value, particularly when set against their cost and the drawn out timescales within which they are conducted. They are viewed as alienating and traumatic experiences for the individual professionals who are publicly 'named and shamed' (although it is noted that at least the Victoria Climbié inquiry also shared out the blame amongst senior managers rather than just front-line staff as has been the case with earlier Inquiries (Parton, 2004; Sibert, 2004; Johnson & Petrie, 2004; Rustin, 2004; Munro, 2005). Sibert (2004) criticizes the subsequent media attacks as having 'made work in child protection very difficult' (page 622) for all professionals. Thus, Inquiries are seen as having the consequence of reducing professionals' willingness to co-operate with such events, which only serves to increase the public's mistrust of professionals (Parton, 2004; Sibert, 2004; Hall, 2003; Johnson & Petrie, 2004). Corby (2004), therefore, argues for a 'new means of inquiry into child abuse cases' (2003: 229) to

overcome the worst aspects of public inquiries. He suggests an independent system of scrutiny, organized via the establishment of permanent bodies at regional level, which draw on the expertise of social work professionals and lawyers. Inquiries conducted by such bodies would be conducted within clear time limits, with their findings made available to the public and relevant bodies and agencies whilst, at the same time, preserving confidentiality.

It is also argued that inquiries, over the duration of their process, typically narrow down their focus onto structures, policies and procedures for managing practice (see, for example, Butler and Drakeford, 2005; Cooper, 2005; Reder & Duncan, 2004; Ferguson, 2005), rather than also considering why, for instance, the performance of the individuals involved, as they typically acknowledged, fell so short of the standards they professed to set for themselves (Rustin, 2004). It is also suggested by some that there should be much greater study of successful practice and its lessons for future practice (see, for example, Ferguson, 2005) and consideration of 'near misses' and their implications, something which a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) report has also suggested (2005).

The above comments notwithstanding, we will argue later in this paper that such reports can provide very useful learning and teaching material in professional education, providing opportunities for pre and post qualified social workers and, indeed, other professionals, to dissect and reflect on cases in great detail in a safe environment, complemented by appropriate inputs on relevant research and literature.


### *Resources and Constraints*

What many of the publications we studied noted was that, particularly in the social care agencies, the practice described was undertaken in circumstances where there were overworked and often temporary staff functioning in a situation where there were few resources to call on to meet the relatively basic needs of often very disadvantaged and deprived children and families (see, for example, Rustin, 2005; Ferguson, 2005; Conway, 2003; Sinclair & Corden, 2005; Hall, 2003). Hardly surprising, then, that various defensive practices were in evidence in some professional responses, such as 'fending off' or 'funneling out' referrals. As Reder & Duncan comment (2004): 'It is well recognized that inadequate resources, with pressures of caseloads and time, seriously impair professionals' thinking' (P. 111). Indeed, Sinclair & Corden (2005) go so far as to suggest that it might be argued that the judgments made by individuals could be conceived of as reasonable in the light of the legal constraints under which they were operating, the organisational demands on them and the need to make decisions on the basis of partial understanding of a situation. Decision making in these circumstances is a risky business and one which, as hindsight demonstrates, does not always lead to the best or most appropriate decisions being made.

Given the reality of life in many social care agencies, where similar staffing, resource and

other constraints apply, it is important that education and training provide space for pre and post qualifying students to understand how judgments and decision making can be affected in such conditions. At the same time they can be helped to identify warning signs, strategies and supports which have the potential to reduce the likelihood of them making decisions which may have tragic consequences. The strategies we outline later in this paper aim to assist in this process.

### Organisational Factors

Some papers include a focus on organizational aspects, for example, that written by Johnson & Petrie (2004). The authors consider some of the implications of the Victoria Climbié case from the perspective of risk analysis and focus on the dynamics of issues and tensions within and between organizations and those individuals who work within or come into contact with them. They argue that the organizational dysfunction identified in many public inquiries of the 1980s remains despite the fact that, as they also point out,

> the development of 'risk' sensitivity in the commercial sector has emphasized the importance of an organizational culture where employees not only know where to go to voice any concerns they may have about the organization but also can be confident that they will be heard and not adversely affected if they identify organizational failures. (p.195).

One of their conclusions is that front-line practitioners should have a role to play in national organizational policy and resource provision by being able to make stronger and more effective contributions to relevant debates. Lord Laming's recommendations contain a strong emphasis on organizational aspects too, but here these are weighted towards the setting up of new agencies and structures, the introduction of new policies and the development of new organizational systems including procedural guidance and databases.

If front-line practitioners are to be helped to develop their role as commentators and contributors to debates about future policy and provision, then they have to understand how their particular role and work setting fit into the bigger picture of welfare policy and practice. Education and training have a vital role to play in this regard as well as focusing on micro skill development and competence. Certainly, our experience is that students, in their course evaluations, often appreciate, in particular, the opportunity to 'step back' and look at welfare work in its broader contexts and to develop an interest and skills in researching and critiquing developments. The three approaches we discuss later contribute to such micro and macro knowledge and understanding.

### Individual factors

Various papers focus on the psychological and emotional aspects of carrying out child protection work. Harry Ferguson (2005) sees the Laming Report (2003) as exemplifying a one-dimensional and limiting rational-bureaucratic approach to understanding professional practice. This, he argues, ignores the possibility that 'disgust, and fear of contamination and…concerns with the smells, dirt, and notions of disorder of child protection work' (p.790) might explain some of the emotional and psychological

processes that lay behind workers' (in) actions in their handling of Victoria's case. He points out that 'it is one thing to know about something, quite another to act upon that knowledge' (p.785), a view Rustin (2005 p.13) appears to share:

> The kind of training and support made available to staff does not seem    to have helped them to mobilize more adult mental capacities to cope with the unavoidable emotional disturbance of this difficult work.

Again, education and training opportunities at pre and post qualifying levels have a significant contribution to make in this regard, firstly, in giving permission to social work students to have their (positive and negative) feelings about the nature of the work they undertake and, secondly, to help them think through how they deal with these feelings (often with the support of others) so they can continue to function competently in complex and often emotional debilitating situations.


## The Inquiry report, training and education recommendations and comments from the literature

The Chair of the Inquiry, Lord Laming, reported to both the Home Office and the Department of Health in January 2003, making 108 recommendations, directed at Government, Social Care, Health and the Police. These recommendations contributed to major legislative and structural change in child welfare services in England and Wales, including the implementation of the Children Act 2004 and a wide ranging programme of change led by the Department for Education and Skills which carries the title *Every Child Matters* (accessible at http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ ). In essence, Laming's recommendations focused on increased governance at the local authority level, organisational change and even greater procedural prescription. In other words, as a number of the papers we studied commented, more of the same kind of recommendations that have been put forward following other child death inquiries since the 1970s (see, for example, Cooper, 2005; Sinclair and Corden, 2005).  Sibert (2004 ) notes that Lord Laming hoped his report would be used for the future training for social workers, police, doctors and nurses and Laming does make several such recommendations: Recommendation 20, (p.374), is concerned with ensuring that social work staff have received 'appropriate training' and the cross-referencing to paragraph 4.16 of the Report indicates that what is seen as 'appropriate' is induction and the provision of up-to-date practice manuals. Other recommendations refer to training in carrying out Section 47 assessments and 'regular continuing training so as to ensure that their practice is kept up to date'. (Recommendation 31, p.375). Laming's focus, then, is proceduralist, based on in-service and agency training, there is no sense of a rather more holistic understanding of the educational processes and outcomes required for effective social work practice, of what Reder and Duncan (2004.109) refer to as 'the capacity to think' or of the 'coherent psycho-social perspective' that Ferguson (2005 p.781) has argued should be at the core of social work education and practice. Rustin (2004) is scathing in his criticism:
> Demands by the Report that all social workers should be qualified for working with children

are largely pieties, given both the shortage of qualified social workers in London, and also the inadequate quality of training that many qualified social workers have received, and the perfunctory nature of much that is offered by way of continual professional development. (p.15).The seminar reports make a few gestures in a holistic direction, for example in 17.70, on the need for a 'learning culture', but these do not offset the proceduralist emphasis of the whole Report. (p18)

We are doubtful that Lord Laming's reworked solutions will have their desired effect, much as we would want them to succeed. What we notice in our daily contacts with qualified and experienced children and families' social workers (and indeed other professionals working in child safeguarding) is more and more 'war-weariness', dissatisfaction about the demands made of them and concerns about the quality of supervision and support they can access. Aside from the constant re-organisations and changes of emphasis which have occurred since the mid 1990s when *Messages from Research* (Department of Health, 1995) heralded the 'refocusing debate' and all that has come since, whole new areas of work have opened up or been highlighted which place additional demands on  professional and agency responses. These include, for example, the plight of refugee and asylum seeking children, the increased and proper emphasis on the need to attend to the impact on children of domestic violence, parental mental ill-health and substance abuse, new constructions of child abuse such as child prostitution, forced marriage and internet abuse and so on. The tension between the related expansion of the social work training curriculum and the loosening of the entry criteria for social work training brought about by the new degree qualification may compromise the welfare of graduate social workers once they begin employment (Humphrey, 2006) affecting the retention of frontline child protection workers (DfES, 2005) and leading to an exacerbation of the already chronic shortage of social workers. Vacancy rates for children's social workers rose from 11.3% in 2001 to 12.6% in 2002 and London vacancy rates are double the national average (Social Care and Health Workforce Group, 2003, 4).

Whilst government is heralding the potential benefits of the integrated children's system and the ContactPoint (previously the Information Sharing Index), what we hear from our pre and post qualified social work students, practice assessors and other agency contacts are endless stories about administrative constraints and poor access to computers and what we see when we visit students in placements are filing cabinets of unallocated work and long term staff sickness and stress.

In some ways the situation in social work education and training has mirrored the kinds of developments that have taken place in social work practice. For most university staff groups, gone are the days of small class sizes and realistic amounts of time to deliver the social work curriculum. Even though there have been positive developments such as the three year qualifying degree in social work and associated bursaries for social work students, we are also faced with an ever expanding social work curriculum and a much greater staff-student ratio, so teaching to groups of 60 plus is now common. Despite the introduction of bursaries we find that students are under great pressure from increased student poverty, the need to study and work part-time, and the worry of accumulating debt. Moreover, as fast as one develops a quality product, such as the Post Qualifying

Child Care Award (PQCCA), it is overtaken by the introduction of a new GSCC PQ Framework (GSCC, 2005). Whilst it is too early to say whether this new framework will positively enhance the continuing professional development opportunities for qualified social workers, we do know that its introduction has involved, for us and our employer partners, large amounts of planning time and upheaval, in the context of very little new funding and ongoing agency difficulties in releasing staff anyway.

There is little comfort to be drawn, either, from governmental publications which focus on the skills and knowledge required for children's work and on the future development of the children's or social care workforce. The Department for Education and Skills' consultation document *Children's workforce strategy. A strategy to build a world-class workforce for children and young people* (HM Government, 2005a) identified key strategic challenges around, for example, recruitment, retention, strengthening inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working and promoting stronger leadership, management and supervision. However, the document had most to say about pre-qualifying training, such as suggesting social pedagogic training for the generalist social carer. Nowhere in all 91 pages, is there proper recognition or discussion of the complexity of much (post qualifying) social care, such as in child welfare and safeguarding work, and the education and training implications for such practice. Alongside this publication, the Department for Education and Skills also published *Common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce* (HM Government, 2005b). This addresses knowledge and skills for practice at a basic (pre-qualifying) level, in six areas: effective engagement and communication; child and young person development; safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child; supporting transitions; multi-agency working and sharing information. We cannot argue with the document's contents, so far as they go, but they provide little source of inspiration for addressing the complexity and stresses of the kind of child welfare and safeguarding work discussed in this paper. The DfES/DOH review publication *Options for excellence. Building the Social Care Workforce for the Future* (Department for Health, 2006) contained some interesting ideas: the possibility of newly qualified social worker status (NQSW); support for continuing professional development, support for new managers and training in effective supervision and workload management. However, one of the review's outcomes has been to commission the GSCC to review the roles and tasks of social workers (to report to Government in late 2007). If this means yet another overhaul of pre and post-qualifying social work training, then the subsequent upheavals for education and training providers could prove hugely counter-productive and would mirror what happens continually in public service organizations – constant reorganisations (or moving the furniture) as a solution to problems of poor practice, inefficiency and so on.

**What about other kinds of solutions to promoting best practice?**

We are not naïve enough to think that all of above can be addressed quickly, if ever. To really provide the kinds of welfare services that can deliver effective help to the most deprived and disadvantaged and/or disturbed in our society, would require huge injections of resources which may be politically and publicly unacceptable. However, in a context of the pressures outlined above, how can we help social workers and other

professionals to cope with these pressures, pursue best practice and get some measure of satisfaction from their work?

A paper co-written by Taylor & Balen (1995) commented upon the then new two year qualifying Diploma in Social Work's

> reflection of the profession's anxiety to improve its public and professional credibility. This is evidenced in the emphasis upon a core curriculum; legal and procedural knowledge, the development and application of technical skills in assessment, planning, decision-making and evaluation as well as the adoption of a competency model to assess performance. (p.75)

In our view, current social work education and training continue to be framed by notions of competence and specialist knowledge, rather than by opportunities to develop openness to the exploration of feelings and the management of uncertainty and anxiety, as well as the capacity to contribute to the reflective organizational cultures called for by Ferguson (2005) and Rustin (2005).

In another, much earlier paper by one of the current authors (Masson, 1990), competence in child protection work was defined not in terms of technical skills but in terms of workers' abilities to express and deal with their emotions and reactions to their professional activities and to make best use of high quality supervision opportunities. She stressed the importance of training in team work and team building, e.g. via team meetings, so that workers care for each other and share their good and bad moments in their work, as opposed to focusing only on business matters and the allocation of cases. Also highlighted were the need for more opportunities for multidisciplinary, experientially based training, with specific training in skills in investigative work, such as those required for dealing with resistance and denial (Turnell and Edwards, 1999; Turnell & Essex, 2006).

So what teaching and learning approaches may be helpful in developing the kinds of skills which social workers and other professionals need? Below we briefly discuss three strategies we have developed over the years, strategies we have employed at both pre-qualifying and post-qualifying levels involving, at the latter level, health and other social care professionals as well as social work practitioners. Specifically, we have employed these approaches with third year students on our social work degree course, on our part-time MA in Child Welfare and Safeguarding course and on GSCC approved post qualifying courses in work with children and families.
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### Direct use of child abuse inquiry reports

Notwithstanding the mixed critiques of the purposes and outcomes of child abuse inquiry reports outlined above, we would argue that they provide an invaluable source of teaching and learning material. As Corby & Cox (2000) have commented:

> ….they exist and there is a clear public expectation that professionals should learn

from them; secondly, they provide detailed accounts of professional involvement in child abuse cases of a kind which is rare elsewhere in social work literature: in effect, detailed 'real-life' case scenarios.' (p. 220)

We share their views and have, over the years, used a number of child abuse inquiry reports for training purposes with pre-qualifying social work students, post-qualified social work and health professionals and in multi-disciplinary training events with managers (Lawson *et al.*, 1995).

In our experience, very few qualified professionals (let alone undergraduate students) have ever read a child abuse inquiry report before participating in our sessions. This is often due to the negative media coverage which accompanies the publication of such reports, which has made them feel defensive and 'got at' as professionals, thus reducing their motivation to read the reports in full. Another practical consideration is that many reports are long (the Victoria Climbié inquiry report is approximately 400 pages) and busy professionals do not have the time to read them until seconded or released to pursue some form of continuing professional development. However, when given the opportunity to do so, they regularly report that the time spent discussing the details of the case described in a report and learning from the mistakes made has been invaluable. Many of the qualified and experienced professionals comment 'There but for the grace of God…' and go on to describe how they can recognize similar situations in their own work places where the outcome could have been very similar, except for good luck or a last minute recognition that a situation was highly risky and required swift action.

What is essential, when discussing the contents of such reports, is the need to pay careful attention to the feelings and emotions aroused in participants, as they read the very distressing accounts of the lives of the children who have been killed. This is especially the case with pre-qualifying students who will not have the same level of understanding of the nature of child abuse/safeguarding work as their qualified counterparts. It is also important to structure the analysis of the particular case being studied so that what can be learned from the mistakes made is the focus of attention. Thus a simple exercise we use with participants towards the end of the process is to ask them to complete the sentence 'one thing I will do differently having read this report is…..'. This usually produces many highly pertinent points and, in the case of qualified professionals and managers, clear ideas about what they intend to change in their own practice and/or their supervision of others. We support this part of the exercise with reference to a number of very helpful papers and reports which, over the years, have undertaken the task of summarising key practice issues which emerge from public inquiry or serious case review reports (Reder *et al.*, 1993; Reder & Duncan, 1999; Sinclair & Bullock, 2002) but, in our experience, such analyses have more impact and immediacy when our students have also read at least one report for themselves.

### *Critical Reflection workshops*

Within our own teaching to health and social care students (particularly nurses, midwives, health visitors and social workers), mainly at the post qualifying level, we have developed a number of strategies aimed at promoting what we see as some of the skills

and experiences essential for effective practice. We want students to develop the ability to question realities and to develop ways of thinking about their work that may be somewhat different to the ways they have usually thought about what they do. Thus, we use workshop opportunities to engage with the students in critical reflection, a process that involves participants considering how situations are influenced by their actions, their preconceptions, their presence and other people's perceptions of them. This reflection includes looking at different, often wider or missing perspectives on the situations they present (usually in the form of 'critical incidents') and questioning how theory and actions might change as a result of such reflections (Balen & White, 2007). Such workshops are informed by literature such as Fook (2007) and White *et al.* (2007).

Interestingly, in the light of the views of Johnson and Petrie (2004) that workers should question and challenge their employing organisations, the majority of the 'critical incidents' chosen by our post-graduate PQCCA students focus on situations where they have felt unable to do so at all, or at least not effectively. Student evaluations of these workshops are generally very positive. So, for example, comments have included:

> "The critical incidents workshops showed me how to really break down and question every part of my practice…"
> "There is something empowering in realising just how complex work with children and families is in order to be an effective practitioner…"
> "Re-engaging in the learning process has not always been easy as it has meant stepping out of my comfort zone of being seen as an experienced practitioner and question my own practice, reflecting on my own value judgments and knowledge base…."
> "I question much more openly and consistently as to 'why' I am approaching a case in a particular way…"
> "I am more pro-active about challenging departmental policy and making contributions towards identifying service needs and best models of practice in order to elicit optimal outcomes for children…."
> "I generally feel that my practice has had a new lease of life… " (PQCCA, year of 2004-2005).

However, alongside these very positive comments, there are also common refrains, including comments that there is little time to undertake this kind of reflection at work, that managers are too hard pressed to provide developmental supervision and support and that their agenda is about processing cases quickly. It would appear that managers too need training and experience in reflective supervisory skills and more space at work, in order to enable their staff to be able to make continuing use of the benefits they report from the kinds of training processes described above.

What we have realized in relation to the undergraduate students on our social work degree is that many of them arrive at the University from an education system that has not always encouraged them to *think* for themselves.  They may be motivated and keen but they demonstrate, within their assignments and within their conversations with us, that their view of social work education is based on the premise that we (the teachers)

will give them knowledge which they will recite back to us in order to show us that they have learned it. Whilst this may be an oversimplification, we have increasingly recognized the importance of giving these students opportunities to think for themselves and to understand that other people's perspectives on situations may be different from their own. As the majority of these students have very little social work practice experience to draw upon we have developed a range of materials, from children's stories to cartoon-style drawings, to offer them 'safe' opportunities for exploring and questioning what they see and hear (Balen and White, 2006).

### *Role plays and simulations*

Role plays and simulations by students with each other and with members of staff have a long association with social work and other professional training and we have employed such approaches on both qualifying and post-qualifying courses for many years. However, we also now use actor simulators in teaching sessions where possible, with both pre and post-qualifying students, although this is not a frequent activity due to budgetary constraints. The use of simulators injects 'realism', based on the actors' skills and professional training which enable them, for example, to stay in role as well as give constructive feedback about the effect on them of student interventions. Students are given the opportunity to rehearse skills such as asking questions, using authority, dealing with conflict, breaking bad news and so on and the actors provide them with 'human' responses in return – ranging from tears to anger and threatened violence. This year, on our Masters course, we used particular incidents described in the Victoria Climbié report as examples of typical situations that students could practise dealing with. Thus, for instance, students played the role of a junior member of staff attempting to challenge a senior colleague who is convinced that a case is not child abuse; a newly qualified social worker trying to signal to an over-worked and rather brusque team manager that they are stressed and in need of urgent, good quality supervision; and role-playing a worker trying to engage with a defensive and elusive parent whom they have observed interacting with a child in worrying ways.

These kinds of learning opportunities are time-consuming to set up and staff-intensive but they seem to us to be enormously productive in terms of what students get out of these experiences, that is skills and strategies that will enhance their future professional practice. While student evaluations are uniformly enthusiastic, a finding echoed in literature on the subject (see, for example, Petracchi, 1999), such approaches are, however, difficult to maintain within the teaching and learning contexts described above, namely, increasing staff-student ratios, tightening budgets, higher admissions numbers, a lack of suitable teaching rooms and the ever present pressure on staff to deliver on, for example, periodic research assessment exercises and quality assurance targets.

### Conclusion

So, whether we look backwards or forwards, the view seems to be much the same. Ten years ago we, as social work educators, wanted to offer our students opportunities to care, to share and to engage with uncertainty but we felt frustrated by assessment targets and practice skills in place at that time which, we felt, were framed essentially by 'mechanistic' notions of competence and an emphasis on procedure rather than process.

Today, we perhaps feel more confident in our ability to include opportunities for critical reflection and for exploring emotion, and the membership of our student groups has appropriately expanded to include health and other welfare professionals. However, the Laming Report (2003) and official guidance and statements on the education and training of  the social work and social care workforce still neglect these crucial aspects of learning, aspects commented on in various papers included in our literature review and aspects  which inform our own approach.  Our enthusiasm for the challenges of our role in developing skilled and effective practitioners is (mostly) undiminished, our commitment to improving the lives of service users and to protecting the vulnerable is undimmed, but the landscape is a depressingly familiar one. Little wonder, then, that we feel 'grumpy' from time to time!

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|Table 2 – Categories and Themes          |Papers

**Themes & sub themes |1 |2 |3 |4 |5 |6 |7 |8 |9 |10 |11 |12 |13 |14 |15 |16 |17 |18 | |1. Nature and purpose of Inquiries: |** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |Part of public mourning process? | | |( | | | | | | | | | | | | | |( | | | |Constraining Framework – not looking at the nature of practice 'fine grain of emotional engagements and transactions' | | |( | | | | | | | | | | |( |( |( |( | | |Concentrating on structures, policies and procedures (is reductionist) | |( |( | | |( | | | | | |( |( |( | |( | | |( | | |Seek solutions by asking – why did intelligent, well motivated professionals function at such a low level? | | | | | | | | | | |( | | | | | | | |What about learning from successful practice? And near misses? | | | | | |( | | | |( | | | | | |( | | | |Comparing Colwell and Climbié | |( | | | | | | | | | | |( | | | | | | |A new approach to inquiries –combining the best of large scale inquiries and serious case reviews | | | | |( | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |Managers 'blamed' for the first time | | | | | | | | | |( |( |**(** | | | |( |( | | |Public's lack of trust in professionals/experts and workers' lack of trust in inquiries | |( | | | | | | | |( |( | |( | | | |( |( | | |**2. Resources and Constraints: |** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |How to respond to very needy children when no resources? How much deprivation can we allow ourselves to be aware of? Distancing processes//fending off/funneling | | | | | |( | | | |( | | | | |( | | |( | |At best CP is about 'snapshots' but used to make enduring judgments, partial info | | | | | |( | | | | |( | | | | | | |( |Overworked staff, poorly paid, temporary staff | | | |( | | | | | |( |( |( | | | | | | |( | |Reasonable judgments by individuals in the light of what was known, legal constraints and organisational demands. Risk taking by organisations is normal. **| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |( | |** |**3. Organisational Factors: |** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |Structures, procedures and protocols are 'surface' instruments |( | |( |( | | | | | | | |( | |( | | | |( | |Supervision needed to help practitioners admit and cope with the intensity of emotions, think, reflect and exercise analysis and judgment |( | |( |( |( | |( | |( | |( | |( |( | |( |( |( | |Dysfunctional worker and organisational processes mirroring dysfunctional individual and family processes | | | | | |( | | | |( | | |( | |( |( | |( | |The context in which communications take place (including IT information management systems) | | | |( | |( | | | |( |( | |( |( | | | |( | |**4. Individual Factors: |** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |(Infantile) human emotions and (defensive) processes are normal in (complex and ambiguous) CP work e.g. turning a blind eye, not seeing the child |( | |( | | |( | | | | |( |( |( | |( | | | |'The dirt, disorder and smell which defies imagination' | | | | | |( | | | | | | | | | | | |Understandable wish to believe that what is presented is not child abuse - optimistic |( | |( | | |( | | | | | | | | | | | |( | |Resistant, hostile, manipulative and disturbed service users – impact on workers – fears for safety |( | | | | |( | | |( | | |( | | |( | | | |The child's emotions & strategy of secrecy and deception to be safe – lack of trust – hard to engage with? | | | | | | | | | | | | |( | | | | |Fears about being seen as racist or lacking ethnic sensitivity versus hostility to immigrants | |( | | | |( | |( | | | | | | |( |( | |( | |Problems of communication - with the child, the adults and other workers |( | | | | |( |( | |( |( | |( |( | |( |( | | |( | | |The need for training in communication skills and reflective thinking | | | | | |( |( |( |( | | | |( |( | | | | |

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[1] This is a TV series which involves a group of women, well known through acting, TV presenting and other visible careers, who are all aged fifty years or older, who identify and rage (often very amusingly) against the irritations and insanities of modern day life, drawing on their roles as women, workers, partners or wives, and as mothers.