

Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions in Conflict Management Education:  
The Role of Teacher Preparation Programs in Ohio

By

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Teacher educators are committed to preparing effective teachers. Regardless of the licensure or certification level, teacher educators preparing candidates under National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards identify curricula to develop capacities in teacher candidates. Preparing teacher candidates with the capacities of knowledge, skills and dispositions to meet the needs of all students in today's schools is challenging in response to *No Child Left Behind*, Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and standards-based programs.

Dr. Kenneth Leighfield, a secondary level teacher educator at Shawnee State University, and I, an early childhood and special education teacher educator at Ohio University Chillicothe, questioned our roles in building the capacity of teacher candidates in Conflict Management Education. As student teacher supervisors, we recognized that an area where teacher candidates need capacity-building strategies is conflict management. Identifying curriculum, strategies and supporting resources to prepare teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively manage conflict in classrooms appeared essential. Moreover, we recognized that teacher candidates at our institutions were instructed explicitly through courses designed to teach conflict resolution or implicitly when embedded in courses that provided field and clinical practice components. To find additional support to strengthen and enrich the conflict management areas of our respective course offerings, Dr. Leighfield and I attended an Annual Conflict Resolution Education Institute for Professional Preparation Faculty sponsored by The

Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management and The Ohio Department of Education.

Based on our work with NCATE folios in our licensure areas, we recognized the links among conflict resolution education (CRE) and teacher preparation. This recognition inspired us to investigate ways in which teacher preparation programs in the state of Ohio address this need. Recognizing how the Commission's work supports the goals of teacher educators, we sought a means of validating our opinions, creating a broader base of awareness among teacher education colleagues, and disseminating information about our findings. This article presents an overview of the survey and a few of the findings.

A survey containing quantitative and qualitative components was developed, piloted and mailed to all two-year and four-year public and private institutions of higher education in the state of Ohio during the winter and early spring of 2002. It was recognized that two-year institutions prepare early education and care educators and four-year institutions prepare teacher candidates for their appropriate licensures at the early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescent, young adult levels. The purpose of the survey was to identify if undergraduate teacher preparation programs in Ohio prepare teacher-candidates in the knowledge, skills and dispositions of conflict management within the licensure areas (Prekindergarten Associate, Early Childhood, Middle Childhood, Adolescent/Young Adult, Early Childhood Intervention Specialist, Intervention Specialist/Mild-Moderate); to identify the degree to which teacher education programs prepare teacher candidates in conflict management; and to gather information from teacher educators about resources and time devoted to curriculum and strategies for conflict management education by licensure areas. It was hoped that the data received would provide feedback for planning additional programs, training, enriching and building curriculum, and offering resources to teacher candidates and the institutions' practicum sites.

A total of 226 surveys were mailed and distributed among teacher educators in various licensure programs. A total of 51 were returned: 35 participants completed the quantitative and

qualitative portions of the survey; 14 participants completed the quantitative portions of the survey; and 2 provided reasons for the choice not to participate. The information provided in this article reflects the 35 surveys with quantitative and qualitative data. Of the 35, 2 prepare educators for the Prekindergarten Associate license, 8 prepare educators for the Early Childhood license, 1 prepares educators for the Early Childhood Intervention Specialist license, 5 prepare educators for K-12 Mild Moderate Intervention Specialist, 11 prepare educators for the Middle Childhood license, and 8 prepare educators for the Adolescent, Young Adult license. Feedback from participants of the survey follows. A listing of prompts that revealed interesting data from our colleagues is presented below.

Participants were asked to respond to the following prompt: the “teacher preparation program at this institution of higher education prepares all teacher candidates in conflict management knowledge, skills and dispositions.” Respondents revealed that 48. % of the universities in this survey prepare teacher candidates in conflict management knowledge, skills and dispositions. Respondents were asked to indicate if their teacher candidates have conflict management knowledge, skills and dispositions. Approximately 50% indicate their teacher candidates have knowledge, and approximately 45% indicated their teacher candidates have the skills and dispositions. Those teacher educators who recognized knowledge, skills and dispositions in their teacher candidates indicate it was due in part to shared responsibility between the cooperating teacher at the teacher candidate’s field/practicum site and the university student teaching supervisor

Teacher educators were asked about conflict management terminology to seek information about the teacher candidates’ abilities to use conflict management terminology with students, their cooperating teachers and supervisors, and with students’ families. Approximately 50% of teacher educators felt the teacher candidates are able to effectively use conflict management terminology with students in their licensure area; 43% with their cooperating teachers and university supervisors; and 36% with the families of the students in their

clinical/field placement. Teacher educators indicated that when teacher candidates are successful it is due to their involvement in peer mediation programs, case studies, role play scenarios, a teaming approach and reflective practice.

Regarding the prompt, “teacher candidates prepared in my licensure area have knowledge (... skills, and dispositions) in teaching students in the licensure area about conflict management,” approximately 35% indicated teacher candidates have the knowledge and skills to teach their students about conflict management; and, 53% of the respondents indicated that even though teacher candidates lack the knowledge and skills, they do have the dispositions. In order for teacher candidates to teach conflict management strategies, most participants indicated they need resources such as training and materials. Materials suggested by teacher educators are case studies, curriculum, and problem-solving videos where effective strategies and techniques are modeled.

When prompted, it “is important that teacher candidates in my licensure area have knowledge, skills and positive dispositions in conflict management,” approximately 92% of teacher educators concur. However, according to data from this survey only 58% of teacher educators integrate conflict management knowledge, skills and dispositions into courses they teach. Further, when conflict management is integrated it is most often during the student teaching experience. Teacher educators who do integrate conflict management strategies provide teacher candidates with tools for active listening, a process model taking them through the steps of conflict resolution, problem solving strategies, token systems for reward and punishment techniques, parent-teacher conference training, and non-violent crisis intervention. The teacher educators reported bringing in guest lecturers who are also guidance counselors, school administrators, and mental health professionals to speak to and train their teacher candidates.

In summary, this survey reveals that most teacher educators recognize their teacher candidates need the knowledge, skills and dispositions in conflict management to be effective teachers in their licensure areas. Most educators indicate they feel this preparation should be a

shared responsibility among the teacher preparation program and individuals with expertise in the field such as guidance counselors, school administrators, and mental health officials. Further, data reveals that among those surveyed, private schools prepare their teacher candidates and infuse conflict management into their curriculum more often than public institutions of higher education. By licensure area, teacher candidates in intervention specialist programs receive preparation in conflict management more often than their non-intervention specialist peers.