

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Over the past month, as I finalized the contents of this issue, I have had the opportunity to participate in several meetings concerning conflict resolution education and the future policy and research agendas for this portion of our field. I have been heartened by the consensus of support for CRE and reinforced in my belief that one of the major contributions of *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* is to promote and report research on the efficacy of CRE and related efforts. I have been alarmed by the sense of urgency and the evaporating opportunity to share “research proven practices” with the educational community in a timely manner so they can use this information to secure rapidly dwindling resources from the federal government. I have been comforted by the new and renewed commitment to partnership among major organizations in the field, “walking their talk” of collaboration with each other rather than competing against the other. I have also been profoundly saddened by the challenge to several institutions that have been leaders in this field. Mostly, I have been emboldened to assertively pursue what I perceive to be the most important next step for conflict resolution education: the development of preservice education initiatives for elementary and secondary school teachers in conjunction with mentoring structures supported by solid in-service work.

Although it is highly unusual, and certainly precedent-setting in my editorship, I would like to dedicate this issue to Jennifer Batton, director of the schools programs at the Ohio Commission for Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management. This past year, faced with serious financial shortfalls, the Ohio legislature proposed cutting the commission's funding. As June proceeds quickly to a close, it appears that all efforts (some of which were almost heroic) to save the school programs of the commission and get funding restored by the legislature have failed. With this decision, Ohio and the nation have lost the leading CRE state institution in the country.

Established by the Ohio legislature in 1989, the commission provided dispute resolution programs and services throughout the state, working with schools, courts, communities, and state and local government. Since the early 1990s, the commission and the Ohio Department of Education

worked together to furnish the financial and administrative support necessary to promote conflict resolution education in primary and secondary public schools. Each school year, the commission and ODE awarded competitive grants to Ohio's K–12 public schools to design, implement, and evaluate conflict resolution programs. Since 1994, more than seven hundred conflict resolution grants have been awarded. In addition to the grant awards, the commission and ODE make available training, technical assistance, and age-appropriate lesson plans and resource materials to grantee schools. Teachers, staff, and administrators are trained in how to integrate conflict resolution as a life skill into existing curricula and how to facilitate positive change within school communities by aligning mission statements, disciplinary procedures, and team building efforts with conflict resolution concepts and theories. Today more than fourteen hundred public schools in more than 380 of Ohio's 612 school districts report having a conflict resolution program in place. The commission led the way in the development of the Higher Education Institute, to bring higher education faculty together to find ways to work CRE into preservice curricula.

Jennifer Batton has been the fire, insight, and energy behind this awesome initiative. As her many admirers will concur, Jennifer is committed to thoughtful programming, institutionalization, and evaluation of conflict resolution education. For almost a decade, she has made the Ohio Commission for Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management the most innovative and respected agency in CRE. A friend recently sent me a wonderful quote from Thomas Edison: "If we all did the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves." It's hard to imagine anyone doing more than Jennifer Batton has done for CRE, and hard to imagine anyone in witness who has not been astounded by her accomplishments. Hopefully, Jennifer will have the chance to continue to inspire CRE educators and professionals, among them the contributors to this volume.

There is no doubt that the name of the game is research-proven practices. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, funding for conflict education and social and emotional learning comes largely from Safe and Drug Free schools money, which requires funding only for programs or practices that have been proven effective through quality evaluation research. Thus it is imperative that there be outlets for publishing research in this area. There are far too few.

It is also important that emphasis be given to research that addresses the unanswered questions about CRE. The pieces selected for this issue speak to critical but underresearched areas of conflict resolution education.

Nancy Burrell, Cindy Zirbel, and Mike Allen present a sophisticated meta-analysis of peer mediation research. Peer mediation has long been the most common and most recognized form of conflict resolution education. Unfortunately, in recent years it has been challenged as ineffective, largely because of the conclusions printed in the recent surgeon general's report on youth violence prevention (*Youth Violence*, 2001). The report quotes Gottfredson's (1997) conclusion that peer mediation programs are ineffective and may even be counterproductive. This blanket conclusion has been used to argue against funding for these programs. Careful reading of the Preface to the surgeon general's report finds a clarification that "effectiveness" in this analysis means reduction or prevention of serious physical aggression and assault. Thus peer mediation programs, which were never designed to prevent serious physical violence but were intended to teach constructive life skills with disciplinary benefit to schools, were painted with far too broad a brush. Many researchers have known and argued that peer mediation programs are quite effective in a variety of ways. This meta-analysis helps us appreciate the body of research on this important conflict resolution education form.

A common critique of CRE and social and emotional learning (SEL) efforts is that they may teach skills but have little impact on more fundamental orientations to social interaction. To put it simply, they might teach students how to behave appropriately but do little to encourage them to want to behave appropriately. Warren Heydenberk, Roberta Heydenberk, and Sharon Perkins Bailey have made a great contribution to the literature in the five-year study of the impact of conflict education on children's moral reasoning. They lay a compelling framework for the importance of moral reasoning as a cornerstone of social and emotional competence. They detail the research that links moral reasoning with a host of positive outcomes. Their study of the effects of a comprehensive conflict resolution program, Project Peace, was conducted in urban and suburban schools in the Philadelphia area and proves that CRE does increase moral reasoning.

Some of us who have worked in the field for more than a decade are witnessing the second generation of students initially educated in CRE coming into colleges and universities. It is always amazing that time has passed this quickly, and exciting to contemplate the long-term impact of these programs. As the field matures, there comes a corresponding interest in examining how K-college educational initiatives can be better coordinated to maximize capacity and learning processes. Pamela Lane-Garon and Tim Richardson report on Mediator Mentors, a project involving university

students trained in CRE mentoring elementary school students. They tell of the specific experience of the Herndon-Barstow elementary school in California. The CRE program resulted in improved cognitive and affective perspective taking by peer mediators and an improved school climate.

One challenge in researching CRE is finding measures that are context-relevant and age-appropriate for students. Too often researchers are trying to use instruments developed for adult populations to assess children. William Kimsey and Rex Fuller decided that, given the reliance on conflict styles as an “outcome of interest,” it behooved them to develop a message-based conflict styles measure that was tailored for use in K–12 populations. Their article reports on the development and validation of that measure.

This September, the European Center for Violence Prevention will host an international conference on conflict resolution education. This timely event reminds us that there's a big world out there and a number of critical CRE initiatives that we need to know about. It is in this spirit that I was particularly pleased to have Lisa Shochat's piece on the *Nashe Maalo* project of Search for Common Ground in Macedonia. This project is compelling and unique for several reasons. First, it concerns conflict education programming outside of schools. In general, we are too reliant on traditional K–12 educational institutions as the delivery mechanism for conflict education. The *Nashe Maalo* project reminds us that there are a plethora of media available for learning in a diverse set of life contexts. Second, this project concerns conflict education in a conflict-ridden society where interethnic conflict and its negative manifestations have reached alarming proportions, with devastating social costs. Perhaps because the social condition is so dire, the research reports of positive impact carry more weight. It's nice when something works, but wonderful if it works when it's most needed.

It is equally important to realize that there are diverse populations in the United States, as well as around the world, in need of conflict education. Yet this is most definitely not a one-size-fits all endeavor. Too often, we see efforts that assume similarity in views of conflict and conflict management instead of asking whether that assumption is warranted. Michelle Scott argues that, as a field, we need to spend more energy on understanding assumptions about conflict in diverse populations. Her qualitative study of intragroup conflict behavior among African American inner-city youth reveal a unique orientation these students have about conflict. She suggests several insights from the research that can be used in the design and delivery of conflict education programs targeted for these students.

Rebecca Sanford and I contribute the last article to this issue. We report on one of the sites in the National Curriculum Integration Project, designed to deliver conflict education through ongoing curricula (language arts, math, science) in middle schools. The research was primarily interested in how conflict education affected the development of caring communities in the classroom. Happily, the research revealed that CRE has a significant and lasting impact on students' perceptions of a physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe learning environment.

Once again, this issue presents a segment of Research Matters. In this case, the research reported briefly by Jennifer Batton concerns cost-benefit analysis conducted by Ray Hart of Kent State University. In the ADR field, we know that cost effectiveness has been an important outcome for administrators. Does mediation cost less than court? School administrators concerned about the bottom line will find Hart's comparative analyses of formal disciplinary action versus mediation and CRE informative. The CRE approaches not only yield the positive personal and social benefits discussed in the rest of this issue but also cost far less than more punitive disciplinary structures.

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References

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