EDSP 691 Special Topics: Developing a Proactive Response to Violence

Master of Arts in Education Program
Eastern Mennonite University - Lancaster
Course Syllabus

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Course Description

Over the past decade, incidents of school and organizational violence have been on the rise. We were shocked to find children killing their schoolmates in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Pearl, Mississippi, Paducah, Kentucky, Springfield Oregon, Littleton, Colorado, and Flint, Michigan. Closer to home in the winter of 2001, a former parent used a machete to injure teachers and administrators in a York County elementary school. Tensions from home and work life have set off random violence in the workplace to the point that the federal government has designated violence as a workplace hazard which employers should prepare for. The phenomena is far reaching, beyond the bounds of inner city and high crime communities. Incidents have occurred in rural, suburban and urban areas, in poor, middle and upper-middle class communities. The only common denominator with the perpetrators is that they are angry and they choose violence to try to even the score. They want to reconcile their feelings of being rejected, bullied or put down.

In this multi-disciplinary course we will collectively probe the "why" questions from the perspectives of behavioral science, public health, organizational development and restorative justice. Why has violence become so commonplace among our youth? Why is it so difficult to predict and prevent random school/organizational violence? Why do children and adults choose violent responses when they feel rejected or disrespected at work or school? And we will probe the "how" questions. How do we take a proactive role to meet this challenge? How do we prepare employees, supervisors, students and parents for the changes in policies and practices that may need to be implemented? What are some concrete methods to avert conflict in school and organizational settings?

Course Outcomes

Students will:

1. Know, connect and integrate theories and concepts in violence prevention and intervention suitable for their school or organizational settings, including theories of emotional intelligence (S.1; AR S.3)
2. Critically examine personal assumptions and beliefs about the causes of violent behavior. (I.1; AR I.7)
3. Reflect on attitudes and policies/procedures for handling power and conflict. (C.2)
4. Investigate a transformative framework for creating peaceful settings in schools and organizations (I.5; SE.5)
5. Design an action research project which incorporates evidence of respectful approaches to conflict resolution. (SE.7; PK.7)

Required Texts


**Supplementary Reading**

Articles, websites and powerpoint presentations will be assigned and posted in Course Materials. Please check the Course Materials section of Blackboard weekly.

**Course Requirements**

*Class Participation*

It is expected that students will participate weekly on the discussion board giving your interpretation and reaction to the readings and lecture material. Assigned readings should be discussed on a timely basis, not waiting until the last weeks of class to respond to threads posted earlier. In addition to the threaded discussions in Blackboard, we will schedule some live chats during the course. Each student should participate in at least two of these live chats which will be devoted to giving and receiving feedback about your proposed final project.

Evaluation of your class participation will be based on the following criteria:

- Raising and answering questions related to the assigned readings
- Sharing ideas, insights and feelings
- Sharing personal experiences and observations
- Pointing out relevant data
- Relating and synthesizing others’ ideas in a respectful, thoughtful and nurturing way
- Providing constructive feedback on the learning climate and processes of the course
- Pointing out relationships to earlier discussions
- Helping others to develop their views and ideas

Please keep in mind that all remarks made on the discussion board and online chats are public and available to other class members unless we agree otherwise. When responding to one another on the board and in chats, please maintain a professional tone. Personal e-mail is available for private exchanges.

**Assignments**

1. Students will post a two to three page *environmental assessment* addressing the following:
   - What are the conflict-related issues that are of concern to the school or organization?
   - Identify the stakeholders and summarize the perspective of each.
   - How do you assess the school or organization’s response to these issues?
   - What are the resources currently being used or proposed to address these issues?
   - What issues can be anticipated to become problematic in the future?
   - Ideas for addressing potential conflicts in a proactive way

The Environmental Assessment will be due the sixth week of class (Oct. 28) All students should plan to participate in at least two live chat sessions to raise questions and provide constructive feedback regarding the environmental assessments.

2. Students will prepare and submit a *final project* to address an issue in your school or organization. The final project is due to the instructor the tenth week of class (Nov. 25) and it may take the form of a research paper, a written strategy, policy or procedure, a training program, or an audio-visual intervention. The final project should be based on an *action research model* where you have gathered
input from various stakeholders through interviews, survey or participant observation. The components of the project should include the following:

- Brief introduction or background information
- Needs assessment describing the problem or issue needing to be addressed
- Alternate methods of addressing the problem and a discussion of the merits of each alternative
- Data from your action research which provides input from stakeholders
- Proposal for a proactive response in the form of a policy, practice, program or other intervention that may address the issue.
- Working theories (from our readings and other relevant sources) that may contribute to the root causes of the problem or issue
- Bibliography of at least 12 scholarly references, including theory, methods and content references.

3. Students will display their final projects in Blackboard during the last two weeks of class. You will meet with other students in the virtual classroom at a time that is convenient to the group to discuss the projects. Please post your projects in Blackboard several days before the virtual classroom session.

Reasonable accommodations are provided for students with documented disabilities. If you wish to contact the Student Disabilities Support Services, call Joyce Hedrick at 1-800-368-2665 and ask for her at extension 4233. If she is not in leave a message, a number where you can be reached, and several possible times for reaching you.

**Course Evaluation**

- Class Participation: 25 %
- Environmental Assessment: 25 %
- Final Project: 50 %

**Class Format**

The educational format for this distance learning course includes a variety of learning strategies. The instructor will post lectures from time to time to supplement the assigned readings. We will make use of Blackboard’s discussion boards, and, in addition, we will meet in a live chat session to discuss final project proposals.

**Content Outline**

**Week 1:** *Introduction to the Course and to Blackboard. The Nature and Root Causes of Youth Violence, part one*


**Assigned:** Garbarino, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4. pages 1 – 115
See Course Materials for posted websites and/or articles

**Week 2:** *The Nature and Root Causes of Youth Violence, part two*

Emotional Intelligence. The role of the media in promoting and averting violence and aggression.

**Assigned:** Goleman chapters 3, 4, 5. pages 33-77
See Course Materials for article, "Do American Freedoms Protect our Children?"

**Week 3:** *Various Approaches to Understanding and Preventing Violence*

Assigned: Garbarino chapter 6, pages 149 - 177
Goleman, chapters 12, 13, 14,15 pages 194 - 260
See Course Materials for posted websites and/or articles.

Week 4: Diagnosing Conflict and Assessing Needs for Intervention Methods

Assigned: Hocker & Wilmot Conflict Assessment
Wehr Conflict Mapping
http://www.newsorlando.com/hockerwilmot.htm
http://spot.colorado.edu/~wehr/40GD1.HTM
See Course Materials for posted websites and/or articles

Week 5: Overview of Proactive Methods for Conflict Management

Assigned: Goleman, Appendices D.E.F. pages 301 - 309
Garbarino, Appendix, pages 239 - 250.
See Course Materials for posted websites and/or articles.

Week 6: Designing Systems and Programs based on Identified Needs

Assigned: Katz & Lawyer, chapters 1 – 5, pages 1 - 69
See Course Materials for posted lecture and/or articles

Week 7: Review of School-Based Violence Prevention Models

Assigned: George Lucas Educational Foundation (www.glef.org)
Blueprints for Violence Prevention http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/
Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (www.casel.org)
See Course Materials for posted lecture in powerpoint
Environmental Assessment posted by March 25.

Week 8: Systemic Peacebuilding – School/Workplace, Home and Community

Assigned: Goleman, chapter 16 pages 261 - 286.
Garbarino, chapters 7,8 pages 178 - 238
See Course Materials for posted powerpoint presentation

Week 9: Professional Development and Empowerment Theory

Assigned: See Course Materials for article, “‘Transformative Professional Development” and other posted lecture material

Week 10: Student Presentations of Violence Prevention Models,
Students present final projects, give and receive feedback

Week 11: Student Presentations of Violence Prevention Models, continued.
Reflections
Bibliography


