



Interpersonal Conflict in Schools: How Teachers Manage Conflict in the Workplace

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Abstract:

A significant change has taken place over the past two decades in the nature of teachers' work. Where once teachers operated in relative social and professional isolation and with considerable autonomy, today teachers are expected to engage in collaborative decision making on just about every facet of the school's curriculum and operations. In addition, teachers are open to much more public scrutiny and accountability than before as the education enterprise is aligned increasingly to market-based principles and practices. As teachers engage in collaborative decisionmaking with school administrators, colleagues, and parents they are confronted with and must respond to a wide range of often conflicting perspectives, needs and interests. More and more, in their day to day work, teachers are exposed to interpersonal conflict. Many find themselves ill-prepared to deal with these new demands. How teachers manage conflict in the workplace is of considerable importance, not only to the personal professional efficacy and satisfaction of teachers, but also to the overall effectiveness of the school and its curriculum. And yet, very little is known about this aspect of the work of teachers. In this paper, two exploratory studies of teacher conflict management behaviour are reported. Implications for teacher development and training are discussed.

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