

The Role of Emotions in Conflict Between  
Elementary Educators and Parents

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Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN CONFLICT  
BETWEEN ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

Brian Godfrey

Dr. Brian L. Heuett, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis was designed to further the understanding of the role that emotions play in conflict. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have studied emotions in conflict and have established the five core concerns of appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role. They believe that addressing these core concerns will foster positive emotions. These positive emotions are believed to lead to more successful outcomes in conflict. Using this framework, six elementary school teachers were interviewed to gather data for this study. The role of emotions in conflict between elementary educators and parents was investigated. These core concerns in relation to emotions in conflict have never been tested in this type of workplace setting. The data collected from the interviews showed that more successful conflict outcomes are reached when Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns are addressed.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Interpersonal relationships are a fundamental part of the human experience. Throughout a typical day, it is common for an individual to have numerous interactions with other people. Each interaction that an individual experiences is unique and serves a specific purpose. However, these interactions are similar in that they contribute to the building and shaping of interpersonal relationships.

Whether it be a parent lecturing a child, best friends sharing personal experiences, or co-workers discussing business matters, interpersonal relationships are deeply imbedded in day-to-day interactions. In order to better understand and improve interpersonal relationships, a wide range of approaches have provided valuable insight. The approach employed in this study is conflict management. Before discussing the specifics of conflict management, it is important to understand the nature of conflict.

#### *Conflict*

Regardless of the control that individuals have over their circumstances, conflict is an unavoidable part of every-day life. Simply put, conflict is caused by problems during typical human interaction (Klein & Hill, 1979). Because human interaction is such an integral part of life, it is impossible to not experience some degree of conflict on a regular basis.

Conflict by its very nature is pervasive, covering numerous settings and situations (Putnam, 1986; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Researchers have studied conflict in organizations (Putnam & Wilson, 1982), small groups (Falk, 1982; Folger & Poole, 1984; Wall, Galanes, & Love, 1987; Wall & Nolan, 1987; Witteman, 1991), families (Aldous, 1971), marriages (Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Redmon, 1983; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986), and interpersonal relationships

(Fillee, 1975; Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Sillars, 1908a, 1980b; Witteman, 1988). All of these settings involve unique perspectives and challenges.

While conflict situations vary, one common denominator is the need to find satisfactory resolutions. When conflict is managed to produce satisfactory results, the damage to the relationship is typically minimal. In fact, resolving conflict can sometimes be instrumental in strengthening relationships. While many people associate the mere thought of conflict with negative connotations, conflict can provide opportunities to resolve concerns and strengthen relationships.

### *Styles and Approaches*

In efforts to improve the way that conflict is managed, a wide variety of methods have been established. Conflict management theory has started out with predominately traditional models which have evolved over time (Wehrenfennig, 2008). Various styles and approaches have been established to increase the understanding of conflict. These styles and approaches have also provided instruction on how to manage conflict. These methods will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this study.

While using appropriate styles to manage conflict logically makes sense, people still find themselves with undesirable outcomes in personal and professional relationships. Divorce has become a common result of unresolved marital conflicts. At the workplace, professional relationships are strained by misunderstandings. In large part, the fact remains that most people prefer to avoid or hide from conflict.

### *Emotions*

More recent research has found that emotions are a common reason for avoiding conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). To be in conflict is to be emotionally engaged (Jones, 2000).

Because emotions and conflict are interdependent, it is believed that people avoid conflict in attempt to escape its accompanying emotions. Researchers Bodtke & Jameson (2001) believe that in order to manage conflict more effectively, people must follow the lead of recent literature and focus on the role of emotions in conflict.

Researchers Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that through understanding emotions in conflict, more satisfactory outcomes can be achieved. Rather than avoiding negative emotions and conflict altogether, a more direct approach should be taken. This method centers on the five core concerns of appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role. These core concerns are believed to be at the center of what every individual values. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that when these core concerns are addressed and met, positive emotions will be fostered and then utilized in a constructive way. Therefore, positive emotions can lead to more satisfactory outcome in conflict.

Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns were used in this thesis to provide a greater understanding of the role that emotions have in conflict. The amount of research using this framework in a real-world setting is sparse. Furthermore, Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that because of emotions, conflicts often spiral out of control. This can negatively affect the quality of both professional and personal relationships. While the styles and approaches to conflict are valuable, it is difficult to logically employ these styles when the emotional nature of conflict is ignored.

This study investigated conflicts between teachers and parents in a workplace environment. Six elementary-school teachers were interviewed. The interviews focused on the degree to which core concerns are addressed in conflict between teachers and parents. This study investigated the influence that each individual core concern has on conflict resolution.

The next chapter of this thesis provides a more detailed literature review regarding conflict management styles, approaches, and emotions. Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns are also discussed in greater detail. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to interview, transcribe, and analyze information from the six interviews. Chapter 4 reports the results and findings relating to the research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the meaning of the results, limitations of this study, and opportunities for future research.

## Chapter 2

## Literature Review

Interpersonal relationships are a fundamental part of the human experience. Throughout a typical day, it is common for an individual to have numerous interactions with other people. Each interaction that an individual experiences is unique and serves a specific purpose. However, these interactions are similar in that they contribute to the building and shaping of interpersonal relationships.

Whether it be a parent lecturing a child, best friends sharing personal experiences, or workers discussing business matters, interpersonal relationships are deeply imbedded into day-to-day interactions. In order to better understand and improve interpersonal relationships, a wide range of approaches have provided valuable insight. The approach employed in this study is conflict management. Before discussing the specifics of conflict management, it is important to understand the nature of conflict.

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Conflict by its very nature is pervasive, covering numerous settings and situations (Putnam, 1986; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Researchers have studied conflict in organizations (Putnam & Wilson, 1982), small groups (Falk, 1982; Folger & Poole, 1984; Wall, Galanes, & Love, 1987; Wall & Nolan, 1987; Witteman, 1991), families (Aldous, 1971), marriages (Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Redmon, 1983; Witteman & Fitzpatrick, 1986), and interpersonal relationships (Filley, 1975; Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Sillars, 1980a, 1980b; Witteman, 1988).

All of these settings involve unique perspectives and challenges. While conflict situations vary, one common denominator is the need to find satisfactory resolutions. When conflict is managed effectively to produce satisfactory results, the damage to the relationship is typically

minimal. For example, facing minor problems early on can prevent the development of more serious problems in the future. Furthermore, resolving conflict can sometimes be instrumental in strengthening relationships. While many people associate the mere thought of conflict with negative connotations, conflict can provide opportunities to resolve concerns and strengthen relationships.

### *Styles*

A wide range of different models have been developed for conflict handling styles. In previous research, these styles have been placed into three separate categories (Leung & Kim, 2007). The first category is known as dual-concern models, which contains the five styles of avoiding, obliging, integrating, compromising, and dominating. The next category contains models consisting of avoiding/obliging, integrating/compromising, and dominating. Lastly, miscellaneous styles have been organized into a third category.

The category of dual-concern models is given its title because it is formed by two dimensions. The first dimension is based on concern for one's own needs. The second dimension is centered on concern for the other party's needs (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Hall, 1969; Thomas, 1976; Kilmann & Thomas, 1977; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim, 1983). Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) version of dual-concern models has been the most popular.

In spite of support for the dual-concern model, other research has supported the model with three conflict strategies (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Comstock & Strzyzewski, 1990). These three conflict strategies are generally referred to as avoiding/obliging, integrating/compromising, and dominating. There are differences in opinion on which model is

most effective (Leung & Kim 2007). While the dual-concern model is often perceived to be superior, some may argue that the model with three conflict strategies is more effective.

Lastly, the miscellaneous category of conflict management includes five styles from Fitzpatrick and Winke (1979), Sternberg and Soriano's (1984) seven styles, and Roloff's (1976) 21 styles. It is perceived that the miscellaneous category is more all-inclusive than traditional models. Research has criticized the dual-concern model because it ignores behaviors such as manipulation, non-negotiation, deception, threat, emotional appeal, and personal rejection (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979; Kipnis, 1976). These behaviors were considered to be fundamental elements of virtually any conflict, and failure to include them has been viewed as a weakness.

The wide variety of different conflict management models has created the need for a more simplified method. In efforts to include all of the styles which were represented by the models in each of the three categories, a comprehensive scheme of interpersonal conflict handling styles has been developed by Leung & Kim (2007). They observed eight conflict handling styles in the development of a new model. The conflict handling styles were gathered from the dual-core concern models of five styles, models with three styles, and models of miscellaneous styles. One of the purposes of this new model is to generate a more effective conflict management tool by utilizing the strengths from a plethora of sources.

The first style of avoiding/smoothing is described by Leung & Kim (2007) as "dodging topics that may admit the existence of conflict and playing down the severity of the conflict" (p. 175). People using these styles are often in self-denial that a conflict even exists. They generally prefer to stay away from the very idea of engaging in conflict management rather than attempting to resolve the issue. The tactics of diversion and manipulation are typical for this category.

Obliging is described by Leung & Kim (2007) as "sacrificing one's own concerns to satisfy that of the other party" (p. 175). This particular style differs from avoiding/smoothing in that the person involved admits that a conflict does exist. While being honest and open about the existing conflict, they accommodate the other party's concerns (Thomas, 1976). An individual's own concerns are not brought up or considered important enough to be acknowledged. Though they contain differences, the methods of avoiding/smoothing and obliging have been organized into a sub-category of unassertive styles.

Integrating is described by Leung & Kim (2007) as "collaborative problem solving to find a win-win solution" (p. 175). In this method, both sides involved in a conflict work together honestly and openly to reach an agreement that allows each of them to get what they want. While avoiding and obliging are not practiced on either side, everyone works together to creatively find a solution that meets both parties' needs. As described by Thomas (1976), integrating allows for mutually beneficial solutions to be found. While this style typically requires the most effort from each party, it also has the greatest potential to satisfy both parties when properly implemented.

Cooperation and openness are the driving forces in both compromising and integrating. The main difference in compromise is that bargaining takes place in which each party has to sacrifice and settle. Research has found that compromising is moderately assertive and highly cooperative (Ruble & Thomas, 1976). The methods of integrating and compromising have been organized into a sub-category of cooperative styles. For example, integrating and compromising require both parties to proactively work together towards reaching an agreement. Cooperation is vital in both of these styles.

Leung & Kim (2007) describe dominating as "verbal domineering to gain acquiescence" (p. 175). Typical behaviors of one using this style would be raising one's voice, repetitiously

hammering out one's concerns, not allowing the other person to speak, and refusing to listen. A person using this style generally will fail to cooperate in agreements that don't fully meet his or her needs or concerns.

Another forceful approach to conflict is coercing. Leung & Kim (2007) explain that in this style of conflict one "punishes noncompliance through relationally damaging behaviors" (p. 175). Studies have shown that the typical means used to accomplish this are silence (Behzadi, 1994), undermining self-esteem (Sternberg & Soriano, 1984), personal rejection (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979), negative alter casting (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967), crying, and acting depressed or indifferent (Leung & Kim 2007). Both coercing and domination have been organized into the sub-category of aggressive styles.

Leung & Kim (2007) describe the conflict management style of deceiving as "misleading the other party for covert compliance-gaining" (p. 175). People employing this method use sly, mischievous stratagems to gain compliance. Often times, this is accomplished without the other party knowing that a conflict even existed. In other words, the other party is giving into the needs of the deceiver subconsciously.

In the comprehensive scheme of interpersonal conflict, the last style is ingratiating. Leung & Kim (2007) have described ingratiating as "showing affection for reciprocal compliance in the conflict issue" (p. 175). In using the style of ingratiating, a person involved in a conflict will use sweet, charming, helpful, and pleasant affections (Fitzpatrick & Winke, 1979). Once this is done, this person will expect cooperation in return when they later raise the conflict issue. Ingratiating and deception are both organized into the sub-category of wily styles.

In a particular research study, Leung & Kim (2007) found that a positive correlation existed for using the styles of integrating and compromising. More specifically, the research has

found that integrating was the most preferred conflict management style. Following integration, the next preferred conflict management styles were found to be compromising and obliging. On the contrary, it was found that there was a negative correlation for using deception as a style. Ultimately, the findings of this research indicated that this list of eight styles was more comprehensive than previous instruments.

The identifying and defining of various conflict styles as described previously has provided valuable insight. By making correlations and discovering what styles people prefer, a greater understanding has been gained in regards to the very nature of conflict management. While a great deal of research has been conducted in understanding conflict management styles, different approaches in managing conflict have also been investigated.

### *Approaches*

Conflict management has been commonly looked at through the lens of negotiation. Fisher and Ury's (1991) win-win and win-lose constitute some of the most well known negotiation terms and are commonly used in conducting research. Additionally, these negotiating techniques can be focused on personal preferences and are applicable to international business negotiations (Ulijin & Lincke, 2004). Implementing the perspective of negotiation has added insight into different ways of managing conflict more effectively.

A win-win approach in negotiation is comparable to the integrative style in conflict management. In a win-win strategy the key objective is to find creative agreements that satisfy both groups (Ulijin & Lincke, 2004). Similar to the integrative style, the win-win approach to conflict management is one that requires high levels of cooperation from both parties. Using this method is more than just getting to an agreement. When conflicts arise, the spirit of win-win

must be employed in order to make high-quality decisions that members fully commit themselves to applying.

On the other hand a win-lose approach to negotiation is more comparable to the conflict management styles of compromise and aggressiveness. Ultimately, the win-lose strategy means pursuing one's own outcomes while forcing the other group into submission (Ulijin & Lincke, 2004). The level of cooperation in this approach is considerably lower than that of win-win. Instead, competition is typically the guiding influence.

It is important to note that while win-win appears to be the obvious preferred approach, different approaches are suitable for different situations. Tjosvold (2002) has shown that the theory of win-win and win-lose conflict can be culturally tuned to help diverse peoples develop a relationship. Additionally, this can help them use their disagreements to create innovative solutions. In some instances, employing a win-win method to conflict management may not be practical. This could be caused by the other party or by the very nature of the conflict. If conflict management is taking place with another party that seeks to take advantage of good intentions, a win-lose approach might be a better option. If a conflict is based on limited resources that cannot be altered, a win-lose approach may be the only method for achieving any kind of resolution.

Face negotiation theory is another aspect of negotiations that has been studied (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). The underlying idea behind face-negotiation theory is that face is employed as the link of situational and cultural variables with conflict styles. Ting-Toomey (1988) argues that individuals manage conflict in different ways. The reason for this stems from different levels of face concern, cultural backgrounds, and situational factors. As a result, relationships of self construal, organizational position and conflict styles are

established. Therefore, if face concerns are an important link, they should give a better prediction of conflict styles than other variables commonly considered.

This theory has been used in gaining a better understanding of conflict management. Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) focused on three types of face concern. Initially, the primary focus was on self-face. This has been viewed as concern for one's own image. The second type of face concern was other-face. This has been viewed as concern for another's image. Lastly, mutual concern has been studied. This has been viewed as concern for the images of both parties as well as the overall image of the relationship. Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) found that self-face is associated positively with dominating conflict styles. This means that when individuals participating in a conflict are primarily concerned with their own image, they will most likely employ a dominating conflict style. Because they are focusing less on their concerns for others and more on themselves, the behaviors of raising one's voice, not allowing the other person speak, and refusing to listen are typical. Although these are typically undesirable behaviors to the other party, this is of little or no concern to individuals of self-face concern.

Furthermore, research has found that other-face concern is associated positively with integrating, obliging, and compromising styles (Oetzel, Meares, Myers, Lara, 2003). Therefore, when individuals engaging in conflict are primarily concerned for others, they are more likely to employ the conflict management styles of integrating, obliging, and compromising. Because there is a sincere concern for the other party's image, these cooperative styles become the norm. People employing an integrative style for managing conflict are able to do so in large part because of their ability to see the other person's situation and be concerned about their image. While compromising is typically seen as a more competitive style of conflict management, it is still seen as a cooperative approach. Consequently, it was found that the ability to have concern

for the image of the other party is associated with this method. The conflict management style of obliging by its very nature is that of sacrificing the needs of self for the concerns of others (Leung & Kim 2007). Naturally, individuals using this style of obliging were positively associated with other-face concern.

This research has been successful in helping people see and implement conflict from a fresh perspective. Ultimately, research has found that face concerns are indeed predictive of conflict management styles (Oetzel et al., 2003). For conflict management, the importance of directly measuring and observing face concerns has been demonstrated. These findings have shown how to more effectively utilize the tool of face-negotiation theory to approach conflict more effectively.

In addition to the research conducted on the negotiations and styles of conflict, other approaches to studying conflict have been employed. Walton & McKersie (1965) have studied conflict from a situations-centered approach. A commonly held belief is that integrative tactics are instrumental in paving the way for outcomes that are most satisfactory to both partners (Walton & McKersie, 1965). Through this creative strategy, solutions are found that allow both partners to give up virtually nothing and gain what is desired. While this approach to conflict management is viewed with extreme favorability, there are other factors that play a significant role in how a conflict is managed. Such factors can form various situations, which in turn alter the nature of a conflict. One significant factor altering the choices of conflict management tactics is psychological biases. These psychological biases have an impact not only on how an individual handles a conflict, but also how their partner approaches the same conflict. In other words, the conflict management style which one person attempts to use may very well be different from what their partner is willing to use.

One of the most significant psychological factors that can impact an individual's approach to a conflict is personality. In approaching a conflict, a person with an easygoing personality is likely to behave differently than a person who, by nature, is more stern and strict. While the easygoing person may be likely to engage in a cooperative approach such as integrating or compromising, a more stern or strict person would lean towards an uncompromising approach to the same conflict. Consequently, the personality of those involved in a disagreement can dramatically change the situation. This in turn impacts the very nature of the conflict.

Social motivations are another psychological factor that can lead to situations that alter the approach to conflict. According to research, social motivations have a direct effect on an individual's choice of conflict management tactics (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004b). Looking through this lens, a conflict management situation involving individuals who happen to be close friends would differ significantly from a conflict management situation involving individuals who know little about one another. Furthermore, a conflict involving individuals who consider each other to be enemies would take on its own identity. What is said and done throughout a conflict can be altered in large part because of what social implications the partners may foresee. Because of social motivation, these different situations can alter the conflict management tactics being used.

The impact of gender has also been studied as it relates to conflict management tactics. Research has shown that male negotiators are typically more likely to use pressure or forceful tactics, while women are more likely to be open and accommodating (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). While these results do not state that all males and females behave this way, there is enough of a

connection to make an association. Ultimately, the research findings show that gender impacts conflict management tactics.

Another situation impacting conflict management procedures and outcomes is experiences. Research has found tactics preferred by experienced negotiators are often procedural laden (Friedman, 2000). Furthermore, this research indicated that an individual who has a great deal of experience in conflict management would proceed differently than an individual with limited or no experience. A person experienced in conflict management would not only have a wider range of tactics to choose from, but would also have knowledge and instinct of which styles seem to work best relative to them and the other party.

Some other notable situations known to impact conflict management styles are incompleteness of information, uncertainty of negotiation outcomes, and number of negotiating issues (Cheung, Chow, & Yiu, 2009). Understanding the impact of these situations provides useful tools to better employ the principles of conflict management. If an individual realizes that incompleteness of information can affect his or her conflict management style, he or she will be more likely to make the necessary adjustments. Similarly, if an individual realizes that the uncertainty of negotiation outcomes alters his or her conflict management style, they will be more likely to make adjustments accordingly.

Greater understanding of conflict has been achieved through the study of conflict from different approaches. Various negotiation styles have been provided to give a more in-depth understanding of conflict management (Fisher & Ury, 1991). The functionality of the face negotiation theory has been solidified (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Additionally, understanding the relationship between negotiators' tactics and different situations

has provided valuable insight (Cheung, Chow, & Yiu, 2009). Through all of these approaches, the understanding of conflict management has been enhanced.

### *Emotions*

The vast amount of research on various conflict management styles and approaches has paved the way for more targeted research studies on the role of emotions in conflict. While the amount of research on conflict management styles and approaches is abundant, research on the role of emotions is sparse (Barsade, 2002; Kelley & Barsade, 2001). Previous research has called for greater emphasis on the role of emotional experience and expression in the work place, as well as its impact on organizational outcomes (Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Over the years, greater emphasis has been placed on the correlations between emotions and conflict management as well as how emotions impact the conflict management process. These correlations and their respective contributions will be discussed in greater detail.

An understanding of what emotions are and how they relate to conflict management has been observed. Researchers Bodtker & Jameson (2001) have defined emotional expression as the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that we intentionally and unintentionally communicate. Most emotional expression is utilized through nonverbal communication. Some of the most common ways in which emotion is expressed nonverbally is through facial expressions, vocal qualities, and body posture.

While emotions can also be expressed verbally, limitations have been found in studying emotions from this paradigm. Research has found the study of emotions from a verbal communication framework as less reliable and less common (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997).

Additionally, a limitation is found in the under-developed emotional vocabularies (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). Just as general communication is more typically conveyed nonverbally, so it is with emotions.

Emotions have also been defined from a physiological and cognitive point of view. Research indicates that the physiological component of emotion is a bodily experience (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). This is the way emotion makes us feel, and this is what makes emotional experience so real. Studied from a physiological perspective, emotions have an automatically occurring effect on how one feels.

From a cognitive point of view, there is more focus on the important role that the mind plays on emotional experience. Research has brought forth appraisal theories of emotion that suggest we come to experience a specific emotion as a result of assessing or giving value to our situation in a specific way (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Mandler, 1975; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). The common thread in this aspect of emotion is relevance. Each situation involving emotion is heavily dependent on relevance. Under this premise, a person will experience particular emotions based on their relevance to particular situations.

Building off of this fundamental framework defining emotions from different perspectives, the close relationship between emotions and conflict has been explored. Research has shown that emotions and conflict are inseparably connected, and to be in conflict is to be emotionally engaged (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). Ironically, the events that trigger conflict are the very same events that trigger emotions. For example, if person's point of view is not respected this can bring on relationship issues. At the same time, the emotions of annoyance and frustration trigger this problem. The implication is made that it is merely impossible to deal with conflict without addressing the emotions that inevitably accompany conflict. Understanding the

interconnectedness of conflict and emotions illustrates the importance of studying conflict from an emotional perspective.

Previous research on emotion in conflict has primarily focused on the intrapersonal effects of emotions. Ultimately, this research has shown the influence that a negotiator's emotional condition has on personal behavior (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Baron, 1990; Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Forgas, 1998; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996). Furthermore, research has shown that when negotiators experience positive emotions, they are more cooperative in conflict management. Because of the positive emotions that people experience themselves, they are more willing to work towards a desirable outcome. Naturally, individuals experiencing negative emotions from an intrapersonal standpoint are more likely to be competitive. These negative emotions are a contributing factor to an uncooperative environment in which people are less willing to work together towards a desirable outcome for both parties.

Although this research has provided valuable insight into the impact of emotions on conflict, there is little research addressing this relationship from an interpersonal point of view. More recent research has argued that negotiation is a social phenomenon, and that the emotions of negotiators not only influence themselves, but also their counterparts (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). While it is valuable to understand the impact of emotions from an intrapersonal perspective during conflict, the impact that emotions have from an interpersonal perspective should not be ignored.

Therefore, research focused on studying emotions from this perspective has shown how one's own emotions affect those around them (Barry, Fulmer, & Van Kleef, 2004; Morris & Keltner, 2000; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004b). This knowledge, as it relates to

interpersonal communication with others, can be beneficial in improving the ways that conflict is managed.

The most common correlations found interpersonally from previous research relate to positive and negative emotions. Further connecting emotions to conflict management, research has indicated the impact that positive and negative emotions have on conflict. Lazarus (1991) viewed positive and negative emotions as separate elements rather than opposite poles of the same dimension. Ultimately, positive and negative emotions have different and distinct effects before and during a conflict.

Before a conflict even begins, positive emotions are known to set a facilitative tone for resolving conflict effectively. Liking and familiarity has been shown to produce positive emotions. These positive emotions have been related to flexibility and strategic choice for those involved in conflict (Druckman & Broome, 1991). This research shows that emotions can affect the conflict management process before it even begins. Having a familiar and positive relationship will lead to a favorable setting in the conflict resolution process. Furthermore, helping the other person to see the relationship from this point of view prior to the conflict can utilize these positive emotions. These emotions in turn can further contribute to a setting conducive to effective problem solving. The result of these positive emotions leads to flexibility and strategic choice. This ultimately can prepare both partners to work together in finding a suitable resolution.

While positive emotions can play a significant role in setting up an effective conflict management setting, negative emotions before a conflict have been shown to create an unfavorable environment. Studies have demonstrated the negative impact of anger on preexisting attitudes of individuals towards their opponents (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Baron,

1990). When anger is the dominant emotion in conflict between individuals, the attitude towards each party and the conflict itself suffers. This attitude is actually in place before the conflict even begins. Unfortunately, the result of this is typically a hostile setting in which little or no progress can be made in resolving the conflict. Understanding this information can help individuals be aware of the effects of anger. This awareness can lead to individuals working proactively in preventing a conflict from escalating before it's too late.

On the other hand, research has also found that positive emotions in the work team facilitate the open discussion of differences (Ayoko, Hartel, & Cullen, 2002; Hobman, 2003; Kay, Shapiro, & Weingart, 2001; Pruitt & Syna, 1989). Because positive emotions have been viewed as constant throughout the interaction, constructive conflict management can take place. It is in this environment that both teams remain open to a wide variety of possible resolutions. As long as positive emotions remain constant, those involved in conflict are more likely to creatively find a resolution that is best for everyone.

Positive emotions can also lead to cooperation. The general understanding that a cooperative approach to conflict management is more effective than a competitive approach is well known. However, Carnevale and Isen (1986), and Forgas (1998), have been able to go further by showing how cooperation can be attained. Their studies found that a positive mood led to a more cooperative and less competitive behavior in negotiation than either a neutral or a negative mood. From an interpersonal standpoint, these results indicate that a competitive, win-lose approach between parties can be avoided by employing positive emotions.

In contrast to positive emotions, a wide range of negative emotions during conflict have been linked to unfavorable outcomes. While anger has been identified as having a negative effect leading into conflict, research has also found that anger plays a significant role in the formation

of conflict (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997). When feelings of anger are high during conflict, the motivation for both parties to stay focused in finding a desirable conclusion is mitigated. Results also indicated that conflicts with high levels of anger between individuals achieved fewer joint gains.

Research has shown the impact of anger on merger and acquisition negotiations (Daly, 1991). This analysis indicated that anger hinders effective decision-making. Part of the reason this can occur is that anger can lead to changes in goal-orientation. These changes emphasize punishment or retaliation. As a negotiation takes place, anger can cause disruption of what would otherwise be a cooperative environment. When this happens, the purpose of the negotiation can shift from working to find a desirable outcome to finding ways to punish the other party. Instead of cooperating with one another, retaliating to keep the other party unsatisfied becomes a priority.

In addition to studies showing the correlation between anger and effective decision making, research has also shown the role of anger in rejections of ultimatum offers. Pillutla and Murnighan (1996) conducted an experiment in which they found that anger provided a more accurate explanation of rejection than perceptions that the offers were unfair. In other words, it was found that the reason for negotiation offers being rejected typically has less to do with the terms of the actual offer. The results of this study show that to some extent, emotions in conflict management are more closely linked to a resolution than the terms of the actual conflict.

Studies have also been carried out showing the correlation between fear and conflict management. In this particular context, fear has been described as apprehension related to troubling or hurting the other party (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Research has found

fear to be associated with an increase of attention to danger, ponderings about worst outcomes, and a desire to run away (Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). Consequently, this emotion commonly causes those engaging in conflict to be closed off. Pondering about the worst outcomes often causes individuals to withhold information to be protective. The desire to run away brought on by fear commonly leads to an avoiding style of conflict.

Fear has also been linked to causing other negative emotions. Researchers Jones & Bodtker (2001) have argued that a person may feel fear in a conflict situation if he or she anticipates a potential loss. This feeling of fear can be heightened when the potential loss is something that cannot be repaired or replaced. Gintis (2004) noted that failing to achieve a personal goal may lead to feelings of disappointment, frustration, or anger. From anticipating potential loss to foreseeing the emotions associated with failure, fear plays a key role in conflict management. When experiencing fear, individuals are more likely to focus on them and less likely to utilize effective problem-solving skills.

Annoyance has been found to be another negative emotion in dealing with conflict. Annoyance has been studied from a perspective of conflict processes and escalation (Pruitt, Parker, and Mikolic, 1997). A strong correlation has been found between annoyance and conflict escalation. More specifically, it was found that that physical escalation was associated with blame and feelings of frustration and anger. On the other hand, verbal escalation was associated with negative perceptions of the annoyer's character. As the emotion of annoyance was present, conflict was shown to escalate and bring about more negative feelings towards the other party and the conflict itself.

The positive and negative impact of emotions both before and during conflict is evident in these studies. Emotion has also been studied from the paradigm of emotional intelligence

(Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). This has been viewed as beneficial because studying emotional intelligence captures a range of the abilities that includes perceiving emotion, facilitating thought with emotion, understanding emotion, and regulating emotion. It is through this method that the relationship between conflict and emotions has been examined in a more targeted approach.

At its core, emotional intelligence consists of four dimensions. Research has given meaning and description to each dimension respectively (Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Zerbe, 2000; Law, Wong, Song, 2004; Mayer et al., 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The first dimension involves the ability to accurately perceive and express emotion within oneself. More specifically, this is the capacity to consciously recognize one's own emotions and effectively express them. Secondly, emotional intelligence consists of the ability to recognize and appraise the emotion in others. Taking notice and evaluating the emotions of others can provide insight into a situation that would otherwise be undiscovered. The last dimension has been described as the ability to regulate emotion within oneself. This allows for greater control in conflict management situations. These four dimensions are all geared toward facilitating constructive interactions and enhancing performance.

One of the greatest difficulties in approaching and managing conflict is for parties to understand one another's interests. Without this awareness, parties would be unable to explore areas of mutual interest which would benefit everyone involved. Research has found this to be an obstacle in large part because people are often reluctant to disclose their respective interests to each other. (Naquin & Paulson, 2003; Thompson, Peterson, & Brodt, 1996). Failure to disclose interests by one or both parties hinders the ability to reach a resolution.

This obstacle in conflict can be overcome by individuals exhibiting high emotional intelligence. Those possessing this skill are able to understand the emotions of others. These individuals are in turn able to find out whether the negotiation partner is satisfied and whether their interests are being met. The result of this open approach to conflict has been described in research as a joint objective value (Naquin & Paulson, 2003). By understanding subtle communication cues relating to one another's emotions, individuals engaging in conflict are able to establish common interests.

The emotional intelligence dimension of regulating one's emotions has also been observed as important in the negotiation process. Research has found that uncontrolled emotions within an individual can lead to an impasse during conflict (Colon & Hunt, 2002). When this happens, focus is typically taken away from reaching an agreement as negotiators shift away from practicing conflict management techniques. When one party involved in conflict fails to control his or her emotions, this often causes the other party to lose control of emotions also. At this point, it is likely that the conflict will spiral out of control. Therefore, the ability to regulate one's emotions is seen as imperative.

Ultimately, emotional intelligence is a valuable asset in conflict management. Those possessing a high degree of emotional intelligence are more able to manage the often-difficult negotiation process. Studies have shown that individuals with high emotional intelligence leave the negotiation with a more positive experience (Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002). Furthermore, research shows that such individuals are likely to meet their objective interests and develop good relationships with negotiating partners (Baron, 1990). The research conducted on emotional intelligence further alludes to the significance of emotions and the role that they play in conflict management.

While this information is valuable, the overall amount of research on how to use emotions in conflict is still sparse. Although previous research confirms that emotions impact conflict, the way that these very emotions develop is given little attention. Emphasis is placed more on what emotions do to a conflict rather than how an individual can proactively generate emotions during conflict.

### *Fisher and Shapiro*

In spite of these limitations, progress has been made. Research has described the importance in taking the time to explore others' interests on an emotional level (Fisher & Ury, 1991). Individuals who do this have a higher level of emotional intelligence and will in-turn have more rewarding results in negotiations. Just as taking time and effort is essential to conflict management in general, so it is with utilizing emotions.

With an increased focus on others' interests emotionally, there has also been a shift in the way that emotions are viewed. Instead of seeing emotions as something that negotiators are victim to, Shapiro (2004) has brought forth new insights into the research of emotions. He has explained that negotiators can reap great benefits in using emotions during conflict. These benefits consist of a better understanding of the information communicated through emotions and the ability to enlist positive emotions into interactions.

### *Five Core Concerns*

Specific direction has been provided for making the effort to utilize emotions in conflict. In their book *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate*, scholars Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have presented a new framework for dealing effectively with emotion in negotiations. They believe that emotions are just as unavoidable as conflict itself. Because it is impossible for one to stop having emotions, there is a need for stimulating helpful emotions throughout the

negotiation process. Rather than trying to focus on each individual emotion that may come up in conflict situations, they put forth a different approach for using emotions. This new framework advises individuals engaging in conflict to focus their efforts on five core concerns: appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role. When efforts are focused on these core concerns, the emotions in conflict can in-turn work to a negotiator's advantage. These five core concerns are discussed.

### *Appreciation*

Appreciation stems from the desire of everyone to feel understood, heard and valued. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) explain that when a person feels appreciated, they are more likely to work together openly and less likely to act hostile and close up. Taking the time to show understanding of the other party's point of view can help facilitate positive emotions and limit negative emotions.

Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have described three steps needed to show effective appreciation. The first step involves understanding the other party's perspective. One cannot show appreciation in something he or she does not understand. Once the other party's perspective is understood, the next step is to find merit in that perspective. This is not the same as agreeing with the other's perspective, but rather is a way of finding value in his or her point of view. Perhaps most important is the final step of communicating understanding through words and actions. Communicating appreciation for the other party's point of view can bring out positive emotions that help the conflict move forward in a constructive manner.

The impact that appreciation has on relationships has been studied as well. Previous research has explored interactions among newlywed couples and observed appreciation behaviors including active listening and positive affect models (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, &

Swanson, 1998). Implementing the theme of appreciation, divorce and stability were predicted with 83% accuracy and satisfaction with 80% accuracy. These results further illustrate the importance of appreciation in interpersonal relationships.

### *Affiliation*

Affiliation is listed as another core concern for using emotion in negotiations. Fisher and Shapiro, (2006) have explained that working together becomes easier and more productive with enhanced affiliation. The purpose of building affiliation with negotiating partners is to make a common bond. This bond helps facilitate a spirit of cooperation as partners work to find acceptable resolutions to disagreements.

Areas of focus for building affiliation have been divided into the two categories of structural connections and personal connections. Structural connections are made from links with someone else based on membership in a common group. On the other hand, personal connections are based on more private areas of interest. Family, friends, and hobbies would be appropriate examples for personal connections.

The strategy of not overlooking opportunities to build affiliation is essential. Negotiators are encouraged to find opportunities to make both structural and personal connections. Asking questions has been mentioned as one of the most effective ways in making these connections. An individual may discover emotional ties by asking questions about the other's family and personal interests. If negotiators are able to identify and take advantage of opportunities to build affiliation, it is believed that positive emotions will follow and the overall relationship will be enhanced.

The importance of affiliation has been established through other studies as well. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that threats to the need to belong have profound

consequences for one's emotions. They explained that threats to one's social connections signal danger to one's survival. Consequently, strong negative emotions correlate with broken bonds. On the other hand, stable bonds produce positive emotions and opium-like chemicals in the brain.

Naturally, emotions resulting from a sense of affiliation, or lack thereof, lead to corresponding behaviors. Research has shown that negative emotions resulting from a lack of affiliation causes participants to respond in an antisocial manner (Gere & MacDonald, 2010). This type of behavior is more likely to drive people away than to create opportunities for establishing a connection. Therefore, this core concern should not be ignored in conflict interactions.

### *Autonomy*

For the most part, everyone wants to have control and freedom. Everyone values his or her own appropriate degree of autonomy. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have explained that when another person impinges on autonomy, negative emotions follow. Whether or not the impingement was on accident is believed to make no difference. On the other hand, when autonomy is respected, people typically feel more involved. The main emphasis of this core concern is on expanding one's own autonomy and not impinging on the autonomy of others.

In regards to expanding one's own autonomy, previous research illustrates the significant role that autonomy plays from an intrapersonal perspective. Learned helplessness theory (Abramson, Seligman, & Taasdale, 1978) has identified the negative emotions that result when people feel a lack of personal control in their lives. A perceived lack of control over significant events in one's life has been linked to clinical depression. In conflict management situations, Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have recommended a creative approach to expanding autonomy.

Negotiators are encouraged to suggest brainstorming options before deciding on a solution. This way, their autonomy expands as they are more active in the conflict management process.

The effects of impinging on the autonomy of others have also been assessed. Hackley (2006) observed that when someone makes a take-it-or-leave-it demand or tells you how to behave, they are limiting your freedom to decide and proceed as you see fit. Individuals possessing this attitude in conflict are likely to cause feelings of resentment in the other party. Instead, negotiators are encouraged to consult the other party before coming up with a final decision. By involving and consulting the other party in the conflict management process, an appeal to their autonomy is made and positive emotions are likely to follow.

### *Status*

One common challenge linked to status is that people generally feel inferior in their interactions with others. Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) perspective on status is that because every person has multiple areas of high status, there is no need to compete with others. Through personal preparation and effort, each individual can identify their own areas of high status. This preparation can give negotiators more confidence in what they have to offer in managing conflict.

While the importance of discovering and displaying one's own status is warranted, it is also important to understand the effect that status has on negotiating partners. Research has put forth some of the negative emotions to be aware of when the perceived status of others is low (Feather & Nairn, 2005). It is common for people who are disadvantaged and in an inferior position to privately feel envious toward others who enjoy positions of advantage. When these people perceive their own disadvantaged position to be undeserved, feelings of anger are typical.

Emotions are inseparably linked to status in negotiation situations. In order to effectively use emotions in managing conflict, one's own status must be realized and communicated. At the same time, failure to recognize someone else's status appropriately can trigger negative emotions (Hackley 2006). Therefore, the need to be aware of one's own status and the status of others is evident.

### *Role*

A number of roles result from the various personal and professional activities that an individual is consistently involved in. For example, a coworker, boss, parent, spouse, and friend are just a few of these roles. The satisfaction associated with each specific role varies based on the person and the situation. Studies have shown the positive impact when individuals find themselves in fulfilling roles. Closely related to role, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has described flow as a state in which individuals are so engaged in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. Because the experience itself is so enjoyable, people are intrinsically motivated and will engage in the activity just for the sake of doing it. It is in this condition that the costs and requirements of the activity have little or no negative impact.

These findings have also been observed from a conflict management perspective. In this setting, individuals find themselves playing different roles. Hackley (2006) explained that strong negative emotions can build up when our roles don't suit us well or when these roles are in conflict. Just as a fulfilling role can motivate people to high levels of engagement, the opposite is true as well. Negotiators often play an undesirable role in response to actions of the other party. In conflict, some common roles played would be victim, aggressor, listener, arguer, and problem solver.

Through creative thinking and hard work, roles can be altered to be more fulfilling. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) explained that an individual is free to shape activities within their role. While there is always a job to do in negotiation, how that job is done depends mostly on the individual. Instead of assuming that their role is predetermined and rigid, negotiators can reshape their roles to empower them and cultivate joint work. Just as it is with other aspects of life, a fulfilling role in negotiations can positively alter emotions and make interactions more enjoyable.

### *Rationale*

One of the most interesting aspects of conflict is found in the very nature of relationships. Generally speaking, people are involved in multiple relationships on both personal and professional levels. Because each individual and relationship is unique, it is typical for differences to arise. These differences commonly lead to conflict. Therefore, conflict is a regular part of life.

While viewing conflict from this perspective can be fascinating, it is also troubling to consider the way that many people approach conflict. Unfortunately, people often instinctively associate the mere thought of conflict with negative connotations. To such individuals, conflict is an awkward, uncomfortable, and even painful process. Because of this attitude, conflict is not always handled in the most effective manner.

Scholars Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that failing to address the emotions in conflict is one reason for this perspective. Many individuals try to avoid conflict because they want to avoid anticipated negative emotions. While many styles exist for handling conflict, emotions such as anger or fear can cloud a person's better judgment. Therefore, it is believed that by

understanding and addressing the emotional side of conflict, individuals can have more success in managing conflict.

It is also important to note that conflict provides opportunities for relationships to be strengthened. The presence of conflict in relationships is inevitable from time to time. Individuals draw closer to one another by approaching and managing conflict effectively. Understanding the emotional side of conflict can be instrumental in improving the way that conflict is handled. Therefore, the study of emotions as they relate to conflict is relevant and extremely important.

While the body of research on emotions in conflict is growing, scholars have insisted that the need for more research focused on emotions from an interpersonal perspective still exists. (Der Foo, Elfenbein, Hoon Tan, & Chuan Aik, 2004). Previous studies on the subject have examined emotion primarily from an intrapersonal perspective. By observing the interactions that teachers have with parents, more knowledge can be obtained on the role that emotions play in conflict.

Research has also called for greater emphasis on the role of emotional experience and expression in the work place (Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Rather than conducting more research in a university setting among students, this study focuses on a real-life work environment. Observing real interactions in a natural setting can allow for a more in-depth study of corresponding emotions in conflict.

Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns are the main area of focus in this study. In their research, they have emphasized the importance of addressing the concern instead of the emotion. Rather than focusing on specific emotions and their impact on conflict, emphasis is placed on how an individual generates and utilizes emotions during conflict.

Based on the literature, the following study investigates the role of emotions in the conflict management interactions of elementary school teachers. This vocation allows for thorough investigation into conflict that elementary school teachers face on a daily basis. This study focused on teacher/parent interactions.

Teachers are involved in multiple conflict interactions and play a variety of roles each day. Most of their relationships develop over a sustained period of time. This particular setting will allow for specific and relevant information on the role of emotion in conflict interactions to be gathered. Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns have never been tested in such a unique setting. Therefore, the following hypotheses have been grounded into the literature:

H1: Teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of appreciation is addressed rather than when it is ignored.

H2: Teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of affiliation is addressed rather than when it is ignored.

H3: Teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of autonomy is addressed rather than when it is ignored.

H4: Teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of status is addressed rather than when it is ignored.

H5: Teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of role is addressed rather than when it is ignored.

## Chapter 3

## Methods

*Participants*

In fulfilling the purpose of this study to investigate the role of emotions in conflict, six participants were used. As previously mentioned, there is a need for greater emphasis studying the role of emotional experience and expression in the work place (Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Using teachers in this study has helped fulfill this need.

Furthermore, the nature of work in which an elementary-school teacher engages in is conducive to the purpose of this study. While other vocations may be prone to less interpersonal communication, elementary school teachers are interacting with others on a regular basis. With a high level of interaction with children and their respective parents, dealing with conflict is a routine part of their job. Additionally, parents can become extremely emotional when engaging in conflict with teachers about their children. Such a setting is ideal for studying the role of emotions in conflict.

The participants were chosen from the lower grade levels of 1st through 4th grade. Using participants who teach these grades was beneficial because parent involvement with teachers is typically higher with younger children. While there is parent involvement and interaction with teachers in older grades, students in younger grades should typically lead to higher levels of parent interaction and involvement with teachers.

Deep analysis of the information provided from these participants allowed for thorough investigation into the influence of Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns. The participants consisted of three males and three females. This allowed for a balanced exploration

into the point of view from both genders. The years of experience among the teachers varied. This was done intentionally in order to gather results from different levels of practice.

Participants were recruited from a Western elementary school. In correlation with the recruiting efforts of this study, a \$20 gift card to a local restaurant was offered for completing the interview. This gift card was given to each individual upon completion of the interview. This gift card fulfilled two purposes. First, it motivated teachers to participate. This gift card provided a degree of compensation to the teachers for their time. Secondly, the gesture of goodwill shown through the gift card encouraged the participants to put forth their best efforts in the interviewing process. It is believed that this was instrumental in gathering more abundant and better information.

The participants were approached during their preparation time so as to not disrupt the teachers while teaching class. The teachers were informed that the purpose of the study was to investigate interactions between teachers and parents. Participants were also informed that their participation in the study would take around 45 minutes. Upon agreement to participate in the study, a convenient time was requested and scheduled by the participants.

#### *Data collection*

Interviews were employed for answering the research questions in this study. As Charmaz (2006) explained about interviewing, "If you attend to respondents' language, you can bridge their experience with your research questions. Then you can learn about their meanings rather than make assumptions about what they mean" (p. 35). Using interviews in this study was an effective instrument because it allowed for the research questions to be answered with concrete experiences and examples. This approach was imperative to discovering the influence that emotions have on conflict.

When discussing interviewing, Charmaz (2006) stated, “The combination of how you construct the questions and conduct the interview shapes how well you achieve a balance between making the interview open-ended and focusing on significant statements” (p. 26). This instruction was implemented in this study. During the interviews, the questions for each core concern started out general, and led to more specific questions. Researchers Colwell, Hiscock, & Memon (2002) believe that the steps of an interview should begin with the most open forms of questioning and more specific questioning as circumstances require. Therefore, the interview questions in this study followed this pattern. As experiences relating to core concerns were disclosed by the participants, specific and appropriate follow-up questions relevant to this thesis were asked.

The interviews implemented and followed the pattern established by Fisher and Shapiro (2006). Rather than focusing on individual emotions and how they may or may not influence a conflict, they believe that it is easier and more effective to focus on core concerns first. Therefore, the interview questions first focused on the general core concern. Next, the questions focused on specific experiences and emotions. Lastly, the interview questions focused on the influence that the emotions had on the outcome of conflict interactions. Following this method was instrumental in answering the previously-stated hypotheses.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. By recording the interviews, the optimal amount of information was gathered from the participants in the shortest amount of time. Furthermore, using a digital recorder was instrumental in accurately obtaining the information needed to answer the research questions. Before the interviews began, the participants gave permission for the digital recorder to be used. The participants were also informed that the recordings would be deleted upon completion of the study.

Before beginning the actual interview, additional information about the nature of the study was given to the participants. Participants were told that the study focuses on the role of emotions in resolving concerns during teacher/parent interactions. The participants were again reminded that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes, and that they may ask any questions they would like before, during, and after the interview. They were informed that their participation is voluntary and anonymous, and that their names will not be used in the study. In reporting the data collected in this study, fictitious names were used. Participants were also informed that the results could be emailed to them at an email address provided by them. Contact information was given to the participants should they have any follow-up questions or concerns.

After this information was conveyed, demographic information was collected. The three main items that were reported and used in this study were the gender, grade of teaching, and years of teaching experience. The participants were also asked to report their age. This information provided insight into the information that was gathered during the interview. Connections were found in the participants' answers between interview questions and their respective demographic information.

During the interview, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions that focused on Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns of appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role. These questions drew on personal experiences that teachers had from interacting with parents to resolve concerns. The interview questions focused on each core concern independently.

Furthermore, it is important to note that each participant in this study was asked the same exact questions. The questions were consistent in the order and manor in which they were asked. These questions were not skewed to satisfy the hypotheses.

In answering the research questions, the interview focused on the outcomes of teacher/parent conflict. The degree to which Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns were addressed in different situations was investigated. The interview questions focused on (1) the influence of appreciation expressed, (2) the influence of building affiliation, (3) the influence of acknowledging autonomy, (4) the influence of recognizing status, and (5) the influence of playing a fulfilling role.

### *Data Analysis*

Each interview was transcribed in its entirety. Once the interviews were transcribed, the process of analysis consisted of several steps. First, each interview was listened to one time to restore the general knowledge and information gained from the initial interview. Next, the interviews were read from the transcribed pages line-by-line. During this process, significant information answering the research questions was highlighted. Once this was accomplished, the interviews were read one more time in order to verify that no pertinent information was missed.

Specific emphasis was placed on analyzing answers that describe the influence of Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns on conflict outcomes. These answers came in two forms. First, the personal experiences of teachers provided examples of the degree to which core concerns were met. Secondly, the participants expressed general beliefs and opinions on the influence that they believe core concerns have had on conflict outcomes. As this information was analyzed, a wide range of themes emerged to answer the hypotheses.

## Chapter 4

### Results

In order to accomplish the purposes of this study, elementary teachers were interviewed about their experiences, emotions, and conflict outcomes relating to appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that addressing these core concerns is more realistic and effective than trying to focus on each individual emotion that may come up during conflict. This study provided application to Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns. Using this layout, each of the five hypotheses in this study was addressed.

#### *Appreciation*

The first hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of appreciation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how the emotions linked to appreciation influences conflict outcomes. This portion of the interview focused on specific interactions when teachers felt appreciation was expressed or ignored by parents, what emotions this led to, and finally the influence that these emotions had on conflict.

The interview questions included: When working with parents to resolve concerns, what specific experiences have led you to feel appreciated? What are some of the main emotions that you have experienced during these types of interactions? What influence have these emotions had on the resolution of conflicts? This same format of questioning was also used to investigate circumstances when appreciation was not acknowledged. Follow up questions were occasionally asked in order to provide greater clarity and additional insight.

With regards to experiences in resolving concerns, the primary themes of participation and verbal expression emerged. The emotions relating to these experiences were categorized into positive and negative emotions. When analyzing the influence of these emotions, the themes of motivation, difficulty level, and positive outcome emerged.

### *Participation*

In their experiences working with parents to resolve concerns, all of the elementary-school teachers reported that participation was linked to appreciation. When the parents were involved and participated in the activities put forth by the teachers, this was seen as a way of conveying support and appreciation. When asked what experiences with parents had led to a feeling of appreciation, Matthew, a fifth-year teacher of third-grade, had the following to say:

At the beginning of the year you always have some parents that are going to volunteer. They want to show appreciation in a way right from the get-go. You kind of get this feeling that you know this parent has an appreciation for the school process, teaching process, and the need for help. Participation is always a big part. The ones who stick with it show that they continue to appreciate you, and it is not just a gesture.

In Matthew's teaching experiences, parents have conveyed a message of appreciation by volunteering to help. This message of appreciation is further conveyed when parents keep their commitments to participate.

Most of the teachers mentioned that a primary way in which parents participate is through school parties. Ashley, a sixth-year teacher of first-grade, explained that getting help at school parties has meant a lot to her. When asked about experiences when appreciation was expressed by parents, she told of a parent who helped out with a Valentine's Day party in the classroom. Ashley said:

She went above and beyond, and it was amazing. I felt appreciated by her, because obviously if she didn't appreciate me, she probably wouldn't have volunteered to do the party first of all, and then come in and give her time and all of that.

For Ashley, there was a strong connection between appreciation and voluntarily helping. She also has a number of parent volunteers who came in on a regular basis to help out in the classroom. Ashley said that "they are supporting me in the classroom when they come in and give me their time." By helping in school parties, the parents have been able to convey their appreciation to Ashley.

Glenn, a second year fourth-grade teacher, also mentioned the role of participation in showing appreciation. He felt that in some of the parties that his class planned, "parents have kind of taken over." Glenn further explained that with some parents "you know that they want to get involved, and so that's a kind of appreciation." When parents would take over parties, Glenn reported that this type of participation by the parents has made him feel appreciated.

In addition to participating in classroom activities, the participants also reported that appreciation was conveyed when parents would actively participate in supporting their decisions. When asked how parents show their appreciation, John, a fourth grade teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, said, "If there's a conflict then they will talk to their child at home. I'll feel like they follow through with resolving it." Sherry, a first-year teacher teaching first-grade, shared a similar response to this question and said that "after we have had some kind of a conflict, they come back, and I get follow up or feedback on it." From these responses, it is evident that when parents proactively participate in addressing and following up on problems, appreciation is expressed.

On the other hand, the participants associated a lack of participation with a lack of appreciation. In regards, to this, Matthew shared the following experience:

Well, you know a great example is when you pour your heart into teaching your students and parents will take their children out for what I would consider to be poor reasons such as vacationing, they just let junior stay home, whatever.

When parents have failed to encourage their children to participate, this has caused Matthew to feel underappreciated. Mindy, a 2nd-grade teacher with 20 years of teaching experience has also reported that this type of behavior from parents left her feeling unappreciated. When parents were constantly pulling out students for a variety of reasons, Mindy explained that this left her thinking to herself, "you don't think school's important." Consequently, the failure of parents to encourage their children's participation in school has left these teachers feeling unappreciated. Most of the participants reported this as being an issue to some degree

Participants generally reported a lack of appreciation when parents have not participated in resolving concerns. John shared an experience when he felt that the parents didn't put forth the effort to understand his viewpoint. He explained that "The student gave their side to the parents, so the parents didn't really get both sides. They got my side and then the student got home and they got his side, but they didn't follow through to find out what really happened." John said that this was "an example when I didn't feel appreciated." When trying to resolve a concern, Sherry had a similar experience that she described as follows:

I had a student who was stashing their work, hiding it, and not getting it done. So I sent home a note to the parents. They came in to talk to me and told me it was a teacher problem. They basically told me this was a teacher problem and they didn't want their kid's education to suffer because of my inexperience.

Both of these examples illustrate a lack of participation and support on the parent's end which left the teachers feeling underappreciated. Glenn expressed his perspective when appreciation is not addressed as a feeling that the parent didn't care. He explained, "I'm trying to solve this, and they don't want to work and give a little bit." In working with parents in attempt to resolve concerns, participation was identified as a prominent theme.

#### *Verbal Expression*

In addition to participation, another commonly mentioned theme was verbal expression. When asked what brought on appreciation when working with parents to resolve concerns, teachers reported that a simple vocal expression of gratitude went a long way. John said that he felt appreciated when "parents just let me know that they value me." Mindy also shared some common expressions of appreciation from parents.

I'm thinking of the appreciation at Christmas when they write you notes and give you gifts saying they appreciate what you've done. Also when I send home the midyear report and they write comments saying they appreciate how much growth their child has had.

From the reports of the teachers in this study, it is believed that when parents take the time to acknowledge the work that teachers are doing on behalf of their children, their core concern of appreciation is addressed. This method of showing appreciation was mentioned by most of the teacher in this study.

#### *Positive and Negative Emotions*

When appreciation was addressed and ignored, a wide variety of positive and negative emotions followed. The teachers in this study were asked to describe what some of the main emotions that they experienced from the previously-mentioned interactions. When their

appreciation was addressed, the teachers reported a wide variety of positive emotions. Ashley reported feeling "happy", and "supported." John said that he felt "happiness" and "confidence." Sherry explained, "It feels good to be appreciated, it kind of validates that what you are doing is worth it and that they acknowledge what you are doing is important." Matthew described his emotions as "a warm feeling of satisfaction that you are doing what you need to do." Glenn explained that he felt less stress when appreciation was addressed because knowing that parents understand a problem makes him feel "like the load is off." Motivation was another emotion that appreciation commonly led to. Mindy explained:

It makes me want to be more helpful and more understanding and feel valued and want to work with them rather than the ones who don't think their children have done anything wrong and are perfect. So I feel more like, yes I want to help that child and work with them. I would feel motivated to work on that.

When the teachers recognized that parents were appreciating them, all of the participants experienced positive emotions such as relief, joy, and motivation.

On the other hand, when appreciation was not expressed, the teachers experienced negative emotions. Frustration was experienced by all of the teachers to some degree. Ashley described her emotions as follows:

I feel very frustrated and underappreciated when they refuse to help me help their child. I have definitely felt anger during conflict, but of course I can't show it or I try not to. I get frustrated to the point of tears sometimes, when I think "you aren't willing to help your own child succeed."

John explained that he experiences a feeling of "frustration, disappointment, and even depressed a little bit." Frustration was the most commonly felt emotion when appreciation was not expressed.

Furthermore, the teachers in this study listed several other negative emotions. Sherry said that she felt "offended and unappreciated". Matthew summed up his emotions as "discouragement, resentment, and irritation." Glenn reported that "It can bring on some awkwardness, and it would be harder to work with the student." While the answers varied slightly, teachers experiencing a lack of appreciation unanimously reported negative emotions.

### *Motivation*

When asked about the influence that these emotions had on the conflict resolutions, motivation was consistently reported by the teachers. When appreciation was expressed by parents, Sherry said "I think it makes you more aware of what you are doing. You try harder. It is a win-win situation". When asked about the emotions of appreciation, Sherry said:

Now I don't feel like I can talk to the parents as freely, and so we might have another conflict or miscommunication somewhere, because of the reaction they gave me it makes me less likely to want to call them over some other kind of a problem.

When appreciation was not addressed, Sherry usually loses the desire to even engage in conflict. When asked about the influence of emotions from appreciation being expressed, Mindy had a similar point of view saying, "Well I think it really does motivate you to try and work things out and have a good relationship." The teachers indicated that appreciation can lead to a greater desire to resolve the conflict and maintain a good relationship.

*Difficulty Level*

In regards to the influence on the overall conflict, many participants also mentioned that when appreciation is addressed, the conflict is easier to resolve. When asked about the influence on conflict from appreciation being addressed, Matthew said:

It is easier to reach a resolution because you have already made this connection. Going back to appreciation, you appreciate that they respect you and there is mutual respect from the get-go. It is much easier to reach a resolution to the problem.

On the other hand, a different outcome was reported when appreciation was not expressed. Matthew said, "The emotions make it more difficult to reach a reasonable outcome." When asked to elaborate he said:

If I go in to a conflict with those emotions right there ready to come out, it's not going to be a good resolution, often times. There are even times when you would even cut off your nose to spite your face when you are feeling those emotions. I feel like you've got to get away from those before you address the conflict, because they do have a negative impact on the conflict.

Clearly, the difficulty level in resolving conflict was negatively affected when appreciation was not addressed.

*Positive Outcome*

The participants unanimously agreed that when appreciation is addressed, this has a positive influence on the conflict outcome. Glenn responded to this question saying, "It would have to make it have a better ending I guess. With some positive interaction like that you're going to have a more positive outcome." Likewise Ashley said, "The positive emotions definitely have a positive outcome on the conflict interactions."

The first hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of appreciation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse offered by the teachers in this study supports this hypothesis.

### *Affiliation*

The second hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of affiliation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how the emotions linked to affiliation influences conflict outcomes. This portion of the interview focused on specific interactions when teachers felt a sense of affiliation with parents, what emotions this led to, and finally the influence that these emotions had on conflict.

The interview questions included: In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, what makes you feel a sense of affiliation? What are some of the main emotions that you have experienced during these types of interactions? What influence have these emotions had on the resolution of conflicts? This same format of questioning was also used to investigate circumstances when affiliation was lacking. Follow-up questions were occasionally asked in order to provide greater clarity and additional insight.

In regards to experiences in resolving concerns, the primary themes of working together and communication emerged. The emotions relating to these experiences were categorized into positive and negative emotions. When analyzing the influence of these emotions, the themes of positive outcomes and negative outcomes emerged.

*Working Together*

When asked about the experiences that teachers had with parents in regards to affiliation, "working together" emerged as a prominent theme. The teachers generally felt the greatest degree of affiliation when the parents had established unity by being involved. When asked about experiences relating to affiliation, Ashley said:

The parents that volunteer, I would say I feel affiliated the most with, because we work together. They come in and help, actually not just at home with homework and things, but in the classroom. We're partners in here. They are helping me and seeing exactly what's going on.

Because of the degree to which certain parents are involved and working with Ashley, a strong sense of affiliation has been established.

Glenn has noticed that affiliation is present when he is aware of the parent's point of view, and when the parent is aware of his point of view. He said, "It's going both ways, either way. What they think they can do as a parent. Just discussing it that way, so that we are in it together, trying to work on it together." By utilizing this approach to resolving problems, teachers have felt that affiliation was established right from the beginning.

Furthermore, teachers also reported that when parents worked with them to follow up on problems, affiliation was strengthened. Sherry said:

When they come back to me and follow up on something we have discussed and worked on. When they call and say, "How is this working? Have you noticed a change?" I have a student whose mom was concerned about the reading level. We discussed things they could do to help improve his reading. We talked again, and she followed up and said "have you tried this? How did it work? Is there any progress being made?"

Sherry felt that when the parent was persistent in working with her, there was a higher degree of affiliation. Rather than leaving the resolution to the teacher, this parent helped the teacher as the problem was being worked on. All of the teachers in this study felt that affiliation was established when parents approached the conflict and followed through with a spirit of working together.

### *Communication*

When the teachers were asked about experiences leading to limited or no affiliation with parents, a lack of communication was the most prominent theme that emerged. This came on mostly when teachers were trying to resolve an issue and they did not receive adequate involvement through communication. When asked about what causes him to feel a lack of affiliation with parents, Glenn said:

I would say no communication, or a lack of communication. Trying to get things worked out with them and they don't have a lot of communication. Or kind of like they want me to handle it by myself. They don't want to be involved with it.

From Glenn's experiences, he has made a connection that a lack of communication leads to a lack of affiliation. John also reported the importance of communication in building affiliation. In response to the question of what causes a lack of affiliation, John said:

It is a lack of communication and a lack of interaction. I've got parents who never come in and the only time I hear from them is if I actually call them. They don't have email.

The only time I really call them is if I have a problem with their student, and at that time it is not a positive experience really. I would say a lack of communication.

Because certain parents do not make any type of effort to communicate, John has noticed that he feels little or no affiliation with them.

Ashley also mentioned that she has had less affiliation with certain parents because of their unwillingness to communicate. In describing one particular parent she said, "I have always just talked to her and she doesn't communicate anything back. I don't feel any feeling of affiliation with her whatsoever." Most of the teachers identified that a lack of communication led to lower levels of affiliation. All of the teachers reported that the presence or absence of affiliation has led to both positive and negative emotions.

#### *Positive and Negative Emotions*

When affiliation was established with parents, teachers reported having positive emotions. When asked about the emotions felt when parents established affiliation with him, Matthew responded, "It's very positive. You just feel like you are making progress, and it is just positive feelings towards them or the situation." Glenn said that he experienced a feeling of appreciation because parents "want to come and try to help out." The teachers indicated that they respond well to affiliation being established.

Furthermore, many of the participants reported that they felt relieved when there was affiliation with parents. When trying to help out one of her students, Sherry explained how important it was that the student's parent was concerned and wanting to help. She said that this brought on "A sense of relief that we are working as a team, and that it is not all on me." When asked what emotions she experienced when parents establish affiliation with her, Ashley said, "I feel like I'm not alone and I'm supported, so I am relieved that I don't have to do this by myself. The parents are going to help me, and we are going to do this together." Though some of the specific emotion varied, all of the teachers reported positive emotions when affiliation was established with parents.

When affiliation was not established with parents, all the teachers said that they experienced negative emotions. Most of the teachers reported feeling the emotion of frustration. Mindy said that she felt "Upset, frustrated, and a little discouraged because you are trying to help and they have got this road block that you can't get beyond." From Mindy's perspective, she was doing everything in her power to help, but without affiliation with the parents, she felt a series of negative emotions.

Sherry also experienced frustration and identified the importance of a teacher and parent being on the same page. She said "I'm a little frustrated because I think it does need to be a team thing. As a parent, as well as an educator, I think that it is a parent's job to help the teacher." It is Sherry's expectation that parents get involved and work with teachers to resolve concerns. When this expectation is not met, this results in a feeling of frustration.

The teachers perceived these negative emotions as being difficult to control and keep from influencing the situation. Ashley said that when affiliation is not established with parents it can make her frustrated and angry "even though you try not to be, you can't help it." John said that this can cause you to lose confidence in the situation. Matthew reported that he feels "fear and distaste. It just leaves a bad taste in your mouth every time you are around someone like that." When affiliation was not present in working with parents to resolve concerns, all of the teachers experienced negative emotions.

### *Positive Outcomes*

The teachers in the study reported that when affiliation is established, the outcomes in resolving concerns will generally be more positive. Although the answers varied, each participant confidently explained that conflicts are more likely to have satisfactory resolutions because of affiliation. Sherry said, "I think that it is just going to get better. When everyone is

involved, especially when the student knows that the teacher and the parent are concerned and are part of a team, it is just win-win." Sherry explained that the positive emotions generated from affiliation have an automatic positive effect on the conflict.

The responses from the teachers indicated a firm belief that interactions would go more smoothly when affiliation was present. The influence of positive emotions was reported to have a very real influence on the actual conflict outcome. Matthew said:

In general your odds of having a positive outcome are much higher when you have that affiliation. Just in my experience with dealing with parents if things are going well and you're feeling pleased about it you are going to go into it with a much more positive attitude. They can feel that from you. If you are being negative they'll know it. They sense it. They don't want to work with you if you are putting out those negative feelings. By having the positive feelings, they obviously are going to be more drawn into the picture. They are not going to want to pull away from it.

When resolving concerns, Matthew believes that not only do positive emotions influence him, but they also influence the parents. These emotions are contagious and influence the atmosphere in which the problem is being addressed.

#### *Negative Outcomes*

Most of the participants reported a negative influence on conflict outcomes when the core concern of affiliation was absent. Sherry explained, "I don't know if there can always be a resolution if there is no affiliation. The possibility of a resolution is lower." Ashley shared similar insights saying, "I feel like the behavior just continues. It never changes." Matthew acknowledged that his emotions from a lack of affiliation have led him to a lack of desire to find

a positive resolution. Most of the teachers shared this point of view. Ultimately, when affiliation is absent and negative emotions are present, the conflict outcome suffers.

The second hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of affiliation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse offered by the teachers in this study supports this hypothesis.

### *Autonomy*

The third hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of autonomy is addressed than when it is ignored. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how the emotions linked to autonomy influences conflict outcomes. This portion of the interview focused on interactions in which parents acknowledged the autonomy of teachers, what emotions this led to, and finally the influence that these emotions had on conflict.

The interview questions included: In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, what makes you feel that your autonomy is respected? What are some of the main emotions that you have experienced during these types of interactions? What influence have these emotions had on the resolution of conflicts? This same format of questioning was also used to investigate circumstances when autonomy was lacking. Follow-up questions were occasionally asked in order to provide greater clarity and additional insight.

In regards to experiences in resolving concerns, the primary theme of respecting decisions emerged. The emotions relating to these experiences were categorized into positive and negative emotions. When analyzing the influence of these emotions, the themes of limited resolutions and positive outcomes emerged.

*Respecting Decisions*

When asked about the role of autonomy in working with parents to resolve concerns, each one of the teachers in this study mentioned the importance of respecting their decisions. When Matthew was asked what makes him feel that parents respect his autonomy in resolving concerns with parents, he said, "When they defer to your opinion on how to help their child. They don't try to interject too much. They defer to what you have to say. That shows you have authority, autonomy, and control." Matthew explained that his autonomy has been respected when parents value his point of view on how to help their children.

Mindy also brought up the importance of respecting decisions. When asked when she felt her autonomy being respected by parents, Mindy said:

If they will listen to me and agree with what I have said or at least support me in what I am doing, sometimes they will say "well what do you recommend that we do?" those kinds of things make me feel like they value my opinion, and that I do have the knowledge and experience to make these decisions.

Mindy reported that when parents agree with her decisions and ask for advice on decisions, she feels her autonomy being respected. As a result, she feels that her opinion is valued.

When asked about when autonomy is ignored by parents, Ashley shared a specific experience that she had. She had made a decision to refer one of her students to speech services. To Ashley, there was a clear need for this. However, the parents disagreed with her decision. As no progress was made for this particular student, she shared her frustration saying:

As a teacher I feel like I can make the call, but if I don't have their support, there's nothing I can do. I can't force them, and they have to sign that she is going to receive services, and they won't.

Because the parents in this particular situation disagreed with Ashley's decision, she was left feeling powerless. She explained that "I feel like I have the autonomy to say she needs to receive speech services." However, she realized that the parents were ignoring this.

In regards to decisions on how to teach his class, Mathew reported that his autonomy has been impinged upon when parents complain that their children aren't being challenged enough. He explained that parents will commonly say:

Oh you know junior needs to be challenged more in this way, or that way. Would you please put other work together for them? Please do this, please do that, because my child needs more.

Indirectly, parents are rejecting his decisions on how much work to assign students. Matthew feels that when parents follow this line of questioning, they are questioning his autonomy.

All of the teachers in this study reported that their autonomy was impinged upon or acknowledged by the ways in which parents responded to their decisions. Ultimately, the respect that parents have towards the decisions teachers make leads to autonomy being respected or ignored. When teachers notice that parents don't respect their decisions, they feel that their autonomy is being ignored. On the other hand, when teachers notice that their decisions are respected by parents, they feel that their autonomy is being acknowledged.

#### *Positive and Negative Emotions*

The teachers in this study were asked to describe the emotions that they felt when their autonomy was acknowledged and ignored. Each teacher identified a series of positive and negative emotions. All of the teachers unanimously agreed that when their autonomy was acknowledged, this produced positive emotions. When asked about when his autonomy was respected Glenn said that the emotions he felt were "positive."

John reported feeling "confident and "happy." Matthew also reported feeling confident, as well as a sense of "pride." Sherry and Ashley both mentioned that they felt a sense of relief. Sherry also said, "It makes me feel that I am appreciated." Mindy explained that she felt trusted. She said:

It makes me feel like they respect me as a teacher. You figure that these kids are with me more than they are home awake. They have entrusted their kids to me, so I feel a big responsibility, and they are trusting their kids with me. They trust my decisions and what would be best for them while they are with me.

When Mindy's autonomy was recognized, it led her to feel respected and trusted by parents. She recognizes the importance of her responsibility and values the trust that parents have in her.

On the other hand, a series of negative emotions were felt by teachers when their autonomy was rejected. One of the most common emotions experienced by the teachers in this study was frustration. Sherry elaborated on this frustration saying, "My whole point is to help their kid, and if they aren't going to help them, it's kind of like shooting yourself in the foot." In addition to frustration, John reported feeling "a little bit stressed and impatient." Ashley mentioned that she gets an "unoptimistic" and "unsupported" feeling.

#### *Limited Resolutions*

When asked about autonomy being ignored and the influence of these emotions, most of the teachers in this study reported that the resolution was limited. Mindy explained:

Well the problem is I feel like I have to resolve this just at school. I can't involve the parents because they don't agree with what I am doing. So then you don't even involve the parents. You just need to take care of it the best you can at school. They are not going to be supportive and you are on your own.

In this particular situation, Mindy expressed a feeling of helplessness and being on her own. Because the parents were not acknowledging her autonomy and respecting her decisions, she reported that the resolution in this conflict was limited.

Matthew also described limitations to conflict resolutions. He explained that when his autonomy is rejected, this causes him to lose motivation. He said:

You are very motivated to reach a solution but you are not motivated to go beyond the solution, because you are anxious to get past the negative emotions as quickly as possible. You know you're receiving those negative emotions. You are motivated to do anything you can to get rid of those things. But as soon as you have gotten rid of them, you don't want to reengage on those problems, because of the fear that it might come up again. You do what you need to do to get past it and then you want to leave it alone.

Matthew indicated that his negative emotions can be a motivating factor to resolve conflict. However, this is described as a sense of urgency to escape the situation. In such circumstances, satisfactory outcomes for both parties are limited. As Matthew explained, further interactions are avoided because of fear.

#### *Positive Outcomes*

When Matthew explained the influence of the pride he felt when his autonomy was respected, he said, "It is probably more often positive because you don't want to have weaknesses when you go into situations. It's probably more often a positive outcome." Matthew believes that when his autonomy is respected, the pride that he feels generally leads to a more positive conflict outcome.

Ashley shared an experience in which the mother of one of her students supported her decisions in how to solve a problem. This particular student would get distracted by her

backpack. Ashley decided to set the backpack aside during the day. When the mother was addressed, she responded with respect and even joked about the problem with Ashley. This interaction brought on positive emotions. Ashley described the influence that these emotions had on the conflict saying:

I am not angry anymore at the situation. I can be happy and laugh about it.

Because of the mom, everybody is now on the same page. There is no frustration, no negative feelings. Because I am positive the parent is being positive, and then the student responds better.

In this example, the positive emotions generated from autonomy being respected led to a more satisfactory outcome. From Ashley's comments, it appears that the positive emotions were contagious and instrumental in facilitating a more positive outcome. The rest of the teachers in this study reported that when their autonomy has been acknowledged, the positive emotions that they experience have led to more positive outcomes.

The third hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of autonomy is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse offered by the teachers in this study supports this hypothesis.

#### *Status*

The fourth hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of status is addressed rather than when it is ignored. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how the emotions linked to status influence conflict outcomes. This portion of

the interview focused on specific interactions when the status of teachers was recognized, what emotions this led to, and finally the influence that these emotions had on conflict.

The interview questions included: In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, what makes you feel that your status is recognized? What are some of the main emotions that you have experienced during these types of interactions? What influence have these emotions had on the resolution of conflicts? This same format of questioning was also used to investigate circumstances when status was not recognized. Follow-up questions were occasionally asked in order to provide greater clarity and additional insight.

In regards to experiences in resolving concerns, the primary themes of asking questions and respect emerged. The emotions relating to these experiences were categorized into positive and negative emotions. When analyzing the influence of these emotions, the themes of difficulty level and positive outcomes emerged.

#### *Asking Questions*

When asked about experiences in which their status was recognized, the most commonly reported indicator was that of asking questions. The majority of the teachers in this study found that their autonomy was respected when parents would ask questions. When Mindy was asked when she felt her status as a teacher was respected, she explained:

When parents ask me questions, or ask for advice on different things. How can I help? What can I do at home to help them? If students have a low spelling score, what can I do to help them? Asking how they can help their child or what they can do to help them improve.

Mindy believes that when parents ask questions, they are communicating far more than the messages in the questions themselves. Instead, Mindy perceives this as a way for parents to

communicate that they recognize her status. When parents ask Mindy questions, they are addressing her as an expert worthy of advice.

Ashley also felt that her status was being recognized when parents would ask her questions. She said:

When parents come to me with questions, I know that they value my opinion and they think that I am qualified to handle things. They want my professional opinion on how to handle a certain situation, and I feel like they are validating me.

Ashley believes that when parents ask questions about issues, they are acknowledging her status as a professional educator.

### *Respect*

Another commonly occurring theme found in the experiences of teachers regarding status was respect. Many of the experiences shared by the teachers in this study related to the respect that parents showed when addressing them. Matthew shared a simple, yet profound example:

If parents are addressing you as Mr. and in the presence of their child, they are referring to you as Mr. as opposed to you, you, you. That's a very distinct difference when someone is dealing with you. When they come in and they are not addressing you properly, you know they are not acknowledging your status.

When Matthew is addressed respectfully by parents, he feels that they are acknowledging his status. However, when parents are being disrespectful in how they address him, he feels that his status is being ignored.

Glenn also reported feeling a lack of respect leading to his status not being acknowledged by parents. One common demand made by parents is a need for more supervision on social

issues. Glenn explained, "Parents say you need to do more of this, keep them under control. It would be that negative feeling of my status not being recognized. They see me as a babysitter." Sherry also felt that she was not respected by parents when she mentioned that parents would give her a hard time about it being her first year as a teacher. This has left her feeling that her status as a qualified teacher was not acknowledged.

### *Positive and Negative Emotions*

When the teachers in this study felt that their status was not recognized, they reported experiencing a series of negative emotions. Matthew mentioned feeling a little bit of distrust. He said, "You feel like you need to tread very carefully." Similar to when the other core concerns were not addressed, the primary emotion reported by the majority of the teachers was frustration.

Sherry described her feelings as, "Offended, angry, and frustrated because I felt like I was highly qualified because my life experience and work experience have put me in the position where I am at." Mindy commented, "They won't listen to you even though you are the one who is supposed to be qualified. You are frustrated because there is no way of resolving this." When the teachers in this study felt that their status and qualifications as professionals was ignored, these negative emotions naturally followed.

When the teachers in this study felt that their status was recognized, they experienced a series of positive emotions. Mindy explained that she felt an overwhelming sense of unity:

I feel a mutual respect, a feeling of "we're doing this together." It is a partnership. I feel like they are really caring about their children's education and so do I. I feel like they know their child because they are a parent and I know about the education and we can work together to help the children in the best way.

When parents recognize Mindy's status as a teacher, she feels that she can truly work with parents to resolve concerns. This mutual understanding and respect for one another helps her to focus on the solutions.

Matthew described feeling satisfaction saying, "It makes you feel good. You are glad that they acknowledge your status. That's why we go to school to do the things we do." Ashley explained that she feels, "validated." The overlying emotion that Sherry experiences is pride. While the exact emotions varied, all of the emotions brought on by their status being recognized were identified by the teachers as positive.

### *Difficulty Level*

The majority of the teachers in this study reported that when their status was not recognized, the resulting negative emotions made it more difficult to resolve the conflict. Matthew said, "It is difficult to have a meeting of the minds when you are feeling that way." Matthew went on to explain why this happens:

Whatever the conflicts are, it is going to be difficult to reach a resolution. I am big on objectivity, and you lose objectivity when you have those emotions. Losing objectivity makes it harder to get a positive result from that conflict.

Matthew believes that his ability to be objective is impeded by the negative emotions caused from his status not being recognized. His perspective is altered, which then has a poor influence on the conflict outcome.

Sherry also elaborated on the reason why she believes managing conflict is more difficult when her status is not recognized. She explained, "It kind of puts a kink in it. It makes it harder to resolve because it is hard to get past the hurt and the anger." For Sherry, these feelings of anger and hurt caused an obstruction, thus making the conflict more difficult to resolve.

Ashley reported having a different perspective on this subject. She explained that when her status is ignored by parents, it actually motivates her to try harder. Because of this, she said, "I don't know if overall it would have a negative or positive effect because it could go either way." Instead of negative emotions hindering the conflict outcome, Ashley believes that the negative event of having her status ignored works as a motivating factor. While Ashley held a different point of view, all of the other teachers reported that the influence of emotions from status being ignored led to more negative conflict outcomes.

#### *Positive Outcomes*

All of the teachers in this study reported that when their status was recognized, the positive emotions they experienced had led to more positive outcomes. Ashley explained, "I would say it always turns out positive. Even if the actual outcome as far as a change didn't occur, I still would say that the outcome was more positive." When she feels positive emotions from her status being recognized, Ashley believes that this will always influence the outcome of the conflict in a positive way.

Sherry also agrees that these positive emotions would "make a better outcome." Matthew said, "You feel like you can work things out with the parent, and they are not going to be attacking you necessarily." Matthew explained that when his status is acknowledged, he feels confident that he can work things out. He believes this feeling generally leads to a more positive outcome.

The fourth hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of status is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse offered by the teachers in this study supports this hypothesis.

*Role*

The fifth hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of role is addressed rather than when it is ignored. Interview questions were designed to gather information about how the emotions linked to roles influence conflict outcomes. This portion of the interview focused different roles that teachers played in conflict, what emotions this led to, and finally the influence that these emotions had on conflict.

The interview questions included: In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, what are some of the most fulfilling roles that you have played? What are some of the main emotions that you have experienced during these types of interactions? What influence have these emotions had on the resolution of conflicts? This same format of questioning was also used to investigate circumstances when teachers found themselves playing unfulfilling roles. Follow-up questions were occasionally asked in order to provide greater clarity and additional insight.

In regards to experiences in resolving concerns, the primary themes of problem solver and listener emerged. The emotions relating to these experiences were categorized into positive and negative emotions. When analyzing the influence of these emotions, the themes of no resolution and positive outcomes emerged.

*Problem Solver*

The most common role that the teachers in this study identified as being fulfilling is that of problem solver. One of the major reasons that this was identified as a fulfilling role is that teachers enjoy the feeling of making a difference and making progress in conflict situations.

Mindy mentioned that as teachers, "we are always trying to solve problems." Mindy elaborated on the value of solving problems:

I'd say probably the problems solver is the most fulfilling because the others you can do all them, but how are you going to fix the problem. Let's not just listen to someone talk and talk. Or I talk and talk and sometimes no one listens. You find a way to solve the problem. But some peoples' problems just go on and on and they keep saying the same thing over and over again. Let's fix it. Let's resolve it.

Mindy expressed that problem solving is the most fulfilling role for her in large part because it produces results. Other roles are seen as unfulfilling because they don't generally lead to results. However, to Mindy, Problem solving is a form of accomplishment.

When asked about the role that John thought was most fulfilling, he mentioned problem solver because to him, this was a helping role. By solving problems, he felt that he was fixing things for the benefit of everyone. In working with a parent to resolve a concern, he is able to provide assistance to the parent as well as any other parties affected by the situation. For these reasons, problem solver was the most commonly identified fulfilling role.

#### *Listener*

The role of listener came up often as both a fulfilling and an unfulfilling role. The most common reason that the role of listener was identified as an unfulfilling role was mainly due to one-sided communication. Matthew described this in greater detail:

They always talk about how listening is so important, which it is, but you have to come to a mutual solution. When they are just talking at you that's when it is completely unfulfilling. You are just something that is there to receive the message of anger or whatever their issue is. They are not ready to listen back. That is completely unfulfilling.

I have had plenty of parents who sometimes you even think it is because they are having a bad day. The day they decided to use you to vent upon. When that happens, all you can do is sit back and be the listener.

To Matthew, playing the role of listener can be extremely unfulfilling. The one-sided feeling of not having an opportunity to express one's point of view can be very difficult.

While others shared in this point of view, the role of listener was also identified in some cases as fulfilling. Ashley said, "I feel fulfilled to be a listener at times because sometimes that is what I need is more information." Sherry also shared this perspective saying, "You have to be a listener and find out what are their concerns, what is their take, and are we on the same page?" Ultimately the role of listener was seen as a potentially unfulfilling role and fulfilling role. The teachers believed that the type of problem and mood of the other party determined whether or not the role of listener was fulfilling.

#### *Positive and Negative Emotions*

When the teachers were asked about some of the emotions they experienced when playing a fulfilling role, they all responded with a series of positive emotions. Some of the emotions mentioned were gratitude, self worth, satisfied, relieved, and pleasant. However, the most common emotion mentioned by the majority of the teachers was motivation. When describing his motivation, John explained:

It makes me want to work harder to resolve it. I had a situation where a girl was having problems with other students and the parent came and talked to me about it. I felt good about the roles I was playing with them and so I worked harder to go out and figure out and dig down to find the reason.

In this particular situation, John found himself playing a role that was fulfilling to him. As a result of good feelings, he was motivated to work harder to solve the problem.

When Sherry was asked what emotions she experienced from playing a fulfilling role she replied, "It makes me want to step in and do more. It motivates me to do more." Ashley commented that her feeling of relief leads her to thinking, "OK, now we can move on." Ashley felt that her relief allows her to press forward. The majority of the teachers reported motivation as a resulting emotion when they have found themselves playing fulfilling roles.

When asked about the emotions felt when playing an unfulfilling role, the teachers reported a series of negative emotions. Most of the teachers replied that they experienced a feeling of being sad and frustrated. Additionally, Sherry identified her emotions as "hurt, anger, and resentment." John reported feeling "anxiety and nervousness." In regards to his emotions when playing an unfulfilling role Matthew explained that sometimes he felt "impatience and discomfort." While the teachers reported feeling a wide range of emotions when they found themselves playing unfulfilling roles, all of these roles were described as being negative.

### *No Resolution*

When the teachers asked about the influence of the emotions felt from playing an unfulfilling role, the general consensus was a negative influence on the conflict. Furthermore, most of the teachers believed that any resolution at all was in jeopardy. For example, Ashley responded, "Even if I try harder, it doesn't mean it is going to change." Sharing a similar perspective, Glenn described conflict outcomes as "clashing and unresolved." Glenn further explained, "You feel negative because you wouldn't be able to figure things out as well as you should be able to from the frustration. You are kind of blocked from trying to figure out a solution." Sherry explained that because of these negative emotions from playing an unfulfilling

role, the conflict "takes a lot longer to resolve, if it gets resolved." Matthew simply reported, "You are not going to get to a resolution, usually." Because of the negative emotions surrounding conflict in this setting, the possibility of an outcome is perceived to be unlikely.

#### *Positive Outcome*

On the other hand, when asked about the influence of emotions caused by playing a fulfilling role, all of the teachers agreed that this would typically contribute to a positive outcome. Ashley explained, "When I come out feeling fulfilled in the role I played, I feel like there is generally a positive outcome." Glenn also described the effect as "positive." He said, "You just need to have those good feelings, those positive emotions will directly affect your outcome." Mindy explained, "If you feel good about the role you are playing, you will feel better about the results." Clearly, the teachers in this study reported that the emotions felt from playing a fulfilling role leads to more positive conflict outcomes.

The fifth hypothesis examined in this study states that teachers will perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of role is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse offered by the teachers in this study supports this hypothesis.

## Chapter 5

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the role that emotions play in conflict interactions in the workplace. As already mentioned, previous research has called for greater emphasis on the role of emotional experience and expression in the work place (Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Therefore, this study was designed to investigate the role of emotions in conflict between elementary educators and parents. The information gathered and analyzed in this study illustrated the implication of Fisher and Shapiro's five core concerns. When Ashley recognized that parents were affiliated with her, a series of strong and positive emotions followed.

Consistent with Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) beliefs, it was found that addressing the core concern triggers positive emotions. The teachers in this study collectively reported that the positive emotions triggered by their core concerns being addressed led to more successful conflict outcomes.

The first hypothesis in this study was centered on the core concern of appreciation. This hypothesis stated that teachers would perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of appreciation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse gathered in this study supports this hypothesis.

Some of the implications of these results can be found in understanding the very nature of appreciation. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have explained that appreciation is shown through a series of steps. The first step is to understand the other party's perspective. One cannot show appreciation in something they do not understand. Once the other party's perspective is

understood, the next step is to find merit in that perspective. Perhaps most important is the final step of communicating understanding through words and actions.

The real-life application of showing appreciation is found in the discourse from the teachers in this study. The theme of participation was closely linked to the first step of understanding the other party's perspective. Several of the teachers mentioned that they feel appreciated when parents come into the classroom to help out and when they followed up with resolving concerns. By doing this, the parents have shown that they understand the teacher's perspective, and find merit in it.

Many of the teachers in this study reported that they feel appreciated when parents verbally expressed gratitude for what they do. When parents have done this, they have literally communicated their understanding and merit for what teachers do. To the teachers in this study, the simple act of a saying, "thank you" conveyed a message of mutual respect and understanding.

Just as Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that when people are properly appreciated they feel better, so too did the teachers in this study. The positive emotions experienced by the teachers led to increased motivation, easier conflict resolutions, and more positive conflict outcomes. These themes merely illustrate the reasons that the emotions triggered from addressed appreciation lead to more successful conflict outcomes.

Some of the teachers in this study reported that the positive emotions from being appreciated motivated them to work towards a successful conflict outcome. While there can be many obstacles in resolving conflict, motivation can certainly be instrumental in overcoming these obstacles. It would be reasonable to infer that if an individual has higher motivation, he or she would be more likely to work through obstacles and find a more satisfactory outcome for everyone involved.

Many of the teachers in this study reported that when they feel appreciated, the positive emotions felt make it easier to find a successful resolution. As discussed earlier, Fisher and Shapiro (2006) described the first step of appreciation as understanding the other party's perspective. Therefore, it is believed that when parents properly convey appreciation, teachers feel understood. Naturally, the emotions leading to feeling understood have led the teachers to more easily manage conflict with success.

Ultimately, the teachers in this study reported that the positive emotions from being appreciated led to more successful conflict outcomes. This is an important finding because it confirms Fisher and Shapiro's core concern of appreciation. The importance of appreciation in managing conflict has been illustrated in this study. Additionally, this contributes to the overall understanding of the role that emotions play in conflict.

The second hypothesis in this study was centered on the core concern of affiliation. This hypothesis stated that teachers would perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of affiliation is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse gathered in this study supports this hypothesis.

Further meaning of these results is found in the very nature of affiliation. Fisher and Shapiro (2006) have explained that working together becomes easier and more productive with enhanced affiliation. The purpose of building affiliation with negotiating partners is to establish a common bond. This bond helps facilitate a spirit of cooperation as partners work to find acceptable resolutions to disagreements.

Consistent with Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) point of view, the teachers in this study reported that they feel most affiliated with parents in resolving concerns when they are working together as partners. When this takes place, the teachers reported feeling a series of positive

emotions. The conclusion was made that these positive emotions generally lead to positive conflict outcomes.

While the notion that teachers feel affiliated when parents are working with them to resolve concerns is valuable, it is important to dig deeper and consider how this is accomplished and what this implies. In other words, what leads to parents working with teachers rather than against them? The answer to this lies in the theme of communication, which the majority of the teachers in this study identified. Further study illustrates the link between communication and making connections.

Fisher and Shapiro (2006) divided two areas of focus for building affiliation into the two categories of structural connections and personal connections. Structural connections are made from links with someone else based on membership in a common group. On the other hand, personal connections are based off of private areas of interest. Family, friends, and hobbies would be appropriate examples for personal connections.

In order to build affiliation, one must make structural and personal connections. In order to make these connections, communication must take place. Unless both parties are willing to learn of each other and their circumstances through communication, the likelihood of personal or structural connections is very low. Therefore, the likelihood of affiliation would also be extremely low. The teachers in this study reported that when parents communicate with them about problems and solutions to problems, there is a strong sense of affiliation. It was also reported that when parents failed to communicate with the teachers in this study, the teachers did not feel closely affiliated with the parents.

From these implications, it is believed that through communication and working together, teachers feel more affiliated with parents. This is important because this level of affiliation leads

to a series of positive emotions when affiliation is present. This then leads to more successful conflict outcomes.

The third hypothesis in this study was centered on the core concern of autonomy. This hypothesis stated that teachers would perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of autonomy is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse gathered in this study supports this hypothesis.

The implication and meaning of the results relating to autonomy are found in the theme of limited resolutions. Most of the teachers described this as the end result when their autonomy was impinged upon. Previous research on autonomy identifies the significant role that autonomy plays from an intrapersonal perspective. Learned helplessness theory (Abramson, Seligman, & Taasdale, 1978) explains that negative emotions will result when an individual feels a lack of personal control in their lives. When the teachers in this study felt that their autonomy was not acknowledged, most of them described a feeling of limited control over the resolution.

Fisher and Shapiro (2006) believe that when autonomy is respected, people typically feel more involved. As the discourse in this study indicates, this leads to a feeling that the resolutions to conflict are not limited. The positive emotions in such circumstances serve as a catalyst to more successful outcomes in conflict. Thus, the importance of this concept is evident.

The fourth hypothesis in this study was centered on the core concern of status. This hypothesis stated that teachers would perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict with parents when the core concern of status is addressed rather than when it is ignored. The discourse gathered in this study supports this hypothesis.

Understanding the implications of these results is found in further exploring the meaning of status. Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) perspective on status is that people generally feel inferior

in their interactions with others. They believe that because every person has multiple areas of high status, there is no need to compete with others. The teachers in this study valued the moments when parents recognized their status, because this kept them from feeling inferior. By having their status recognized and confirmed, the teachers in this study reported a positive influence on the conflict.

Unfortunately, the teachers reported having other experiences in which their status was ignored. When this happened, most of the teachers reported that this made it more difficult to resolve the conflict, and that the outcome was less likely to be positive. For example, Glenn described one of his experiences saying, "Parents say you need to do more of this, keep them under control. It would be that negative feeling of my status not being recognized. They see me as a babysitter." Sherry also felt that she was not respected by parents when she mentioned that parents would give her a hard time about it being her first year as a teacher.

The implication behind the effects of status being ignored is again linked to feeling inferior. Glenn mentioned that he feels his status is ignored when he is asked to do things below his qualifications. This makes him feel that the teachers see him as a babysitter. Even though he is a certified teacher, a feeling of inferiority is clearly evident in these examples.

While the teachers reported that when their status was recognized this led to positive emotions, when their status was ignored this led to negative emotions. The teachers in this study reported that these positive emotions lead to more simple conflict interactions and more positive conflict outcomes. Therefore, the need to be aware of emotions as they relate to status is evident.

The last hypothesis in this study was centered on the core concern of role. This hypothesis stated that teachers would perceive more successful outcomes in managing conflict

with parents when the core concern of role is addressed than when it is ignored. The discourse gathered in this study supports this hypothesis.

Deeper meaning into this result is found in understanding the very nature of fulfilling roles. Hackley (2006) explained that strong negative emotions can build up when our roles don't suit us well or when these roles are in conflict. Just as a fulfilling role can motivate people to high levels of engagement, the opposite is true as well. People in conflict often play an undesirable role in response to actions of the other party.

It is important to note that while many of the teachers in this study found it fulfilling to play the role of listener, other teachers felt that they were powerless to communicate their point of view. Matthew explained:

When they are just talking at you that's when it is completely unfulfilling. You are just something that is there to receive the message of anger or whatever their issue is. They are not ready to listen back. That is completely unfulfilling. I have had plenty of parents who sometimes you even think it is because they are having a bad day. The day they decided to use you to vent upon. When that happens, all you can do is sit back and be the listener.

This finding implies that the role one plays in managing conflict is not the most important issue. Instead, how the teachers felt about their roles in different situations contributed more to the conflict outcome. When a person identifies their role as fulfilling, this leads to positive emotions. These positive emotions generally lead to a more successful conflict outcome.

An unexpected finding from conducting this study was in the different viewpoints expressed by the male and female teachers. The most notable differences were found in the way that negative emotions were perceived. This difference was found in most of Fisher and

Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns. The male teachers in this study reported that negative emotions typically have a negative influence on conflict outcomes. However, for the most part the male participants were adamant in explaining that negative emotions don't always negatively affect conflict outcomes. Instead, the male teachers explained that in some cases, they could keep negative emotions from harming the conflict outcome.

For example, when asked about the influence of negative emotions when core concern of affiliation being ignored, Glenn explained:

The negative emotions correlate negative to the end of the conflict, but I do my best to try to block it out. Negative emotions very likely and probably most of the time have a negative impact on the result, but that's what I don't want. I try and not let the negative emotions impact the end result.

John also commented on the influence of negative emotions:

I mean even though I feel frustrated and maybe not happy, I am still working to find a resolution to the problem. The emotions might affect it a little bit because it might affect the things I say or the way I say them. That way, they might read into my emotions.

While both John and Glenn reported that these negative emotions generally have a negative influence on conflict outcomes, they also emphasize their belief that through their own efforts, the outcome of the conflict can still be positive.

It is believed that this emerged from the data due to gender differences in approaching conflict. People commonly view females as generally being more emotional than males. For the most part, the males in this study had more separation from these negative emotions, thus allowing them to maintain an objective view of the conflict. The females in this study made no mention of keeping negative emotions from harming conflict outcomes. Instead, they reported

that negative emotions will have a negative influence on conflict outcomes. It is important to note that in regards to positive emotions, both the male and female teachers in this study reported a more direct influence of emotions on conflict outcomes.

Another unexpected finding from this research was that motivation was commonly reported as both a general emotion and as a theme in conflict outcomes. While it was expected that a wide range of emotions would be reported, the consistency in which motivation was reported stood out in the data. It was also not expected that motivation would emerge as a theme in the reported outcomes of appreciation being expressed.

It is believed that this emerged from the data due to the very nature of emotions as they relate to conflict. The teachers in this study reported that negative emotions typically led to less positive outcomes in conflict. Some of the teachers even acknowledged that they were prone to avoid certain conflicts because they wanted to avoid these negative emotions. Essentially, these teachers had lost their motivation to engage in conflict.

While this implication can be made in regards to negative emotions, a similar implication can be made in regards to positive emotions. When the teachers in this study felt appreciated, they reported experiencing a series of positive emotions. When the teachers were asked about the influence of these positive emotions, the theme of motivation emerged. The reason that motivation emerged as a theme was that positive emotions motivated the teachers to persevere and find a satisfactory resolution. The teachers in this study believe that when they experience a feeling of motivation, they were more willing to be proactive and dig deeper to resolve concerns.

*Limitations*

While this research study produced rich data and clearly supported the hypotheses, there were a few limitations. The demographics used in this study could be considered a major limitation. The teachers used in this study were all from the same western elementary school. Furthermore, the teachers in this study were all of Caucasian race. The overall shared characteristics may have caused a limitation in offering discourse from different backgrounds.

The number of participants used is also a notable limitation. While discourse from the six interviews was sufficient to support the hypotheses, it is believed that conducting a study involving more participants would strengthen the results.

Another limitation to this study was in the interview questions used. While a great deal of effort made to make these questions direct and clear, it was difficult for some of the teachers to understand a few of the questions. One of the most common areas of confusion was in understanding the difference between autonomy and status.

Furthermore, some of the teachers had a difficult time identifying specific conflicts with parents. As a result, these teachers occasionally reported more general experiences that were less closely linked to conflict. While this was not a consistent problem for any of the teachers in this study, the occurrence of this from time to time may have limited the amount of relevant data gathered.

Another limitation of this study is that all of the teachers were recruited and selected from lower grades. The participants in this study taught between 1st and 4th grade. These grades were used because it was believed that there would be more parent involvement for teachers of lower grade-levels. While this assumption has not proven to be false, it is believed that employing more variety in the grade-levels of the teachers may have provided more comprehensive data.

*Future Research*

In conducting future research, it is recommended that teachers from several different communities and many different elementary schools be interviewed. While the influence of emotions in this study was clearly evident, the results would be further validated if consistent conclusions were made in different settings.

Furthermore, it is recommended that in similar studies, teachers be recruited and interviewed from a more wide range of grade-levels. It is expected that while parents of higher grade-levels would most likely have some of the same types of concerns with teachers, there would also be different conflicts to resolve. These different types of conflicts would provide opportunities for further insight into the role of emotions. It is also recommended that more participants be used in a future study. By gathering data from a larger number of teachers, it is believed that an increased amount of relevant data would serve to strengthen the conclusion.

It is also recommended that in future research, other relationships are studied using Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns. There are numerous opportunities in the educational setting. In addition to their relationships with parents, elementary school teachers are also in constant communication with students, coworkers, and administrators. Additionally, teachers and administrators in secondary and higher education are interacting with others on a regular basis. Therefore, interviewing individuals in these settings would provide rich data.

Outside of the education setting, the framework used in this study would also be valuable if applied to the corporate sector. Virtually every organization requires constant communication among co-workers, supervisors, and clients. Investigation into these relationships in the corporate sector would provide valuable insight into the role of emotions as they relate to Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) five core concerns.

*Final Thoughts*

This thesis was designed to further the understanding of the role that emotions play in conflict. Fisher and Shapiro's (2006) core concerns of appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role were used as a framework in conducting this study. The relationship between teachers and parents was investigated. The role of emotions in resolving conflict was studied in various situations. The reported experiences, emotions, and outcomes in conflict supported the hypotheses in this study. Ultimately, it was found that when the core concerns established by Fisher and Shapiro (2006) were addressed, this led to more successful conflict outcomes.

Conflict is an unavoidable part of human relationships. During many interactions, negative emotions in conflict can spiral out of control and have a destructive influence on relationships. However, by acknowledging the core concerns of appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status, and role, conflicts can be successfully resolved and relationships can be strengthened.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

- Please state the grade that you teach, the number of years you have been a teacher, and your age.
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt appreciated?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt unappreciated?
- What specific interactions come to mind leading to this lack of appreciation?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt a sense of affiliation and unity?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt a lack of affiliation and unity?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt that your autonomy has been respected?
- What are some specific interactions that have made you feel this respect for your autonomy?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?

- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt that your autonomy has been ignored?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt that your status has been recognized?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, when have you felt that your status has been ignored?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve conflict, what are some of the most fulfilling roles that you have played?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?
- In your experience interacting with parents to resolve concerns, what are some of the most unfulfilling roles that you have played?
- What are some of the main emotions that you experienced during these interactions?
- What influence did these emotions have on the resolution of the conflict?

Appendix B



Institutional Review Board  
Department of Psychology  
351 W. University Blvd., GC 308  
Cedar City, UT 84720

(435) 865-8569  
Institutional Review Board  
Psychology Department

**To:** Brian Godfrey (PI)  
Brian Heuett, Ph.D. (Supervisor)  
**From:** Britton Mace, Chair of the University IRB  
**Date:** March 28, 2011  
**RE:** IRB consideration of the study: The Role of Emotions in Conflict Between Elementary Educators and Parents.

Your proposal has been assessed, and it was decided that it met the criteria for an expedited review. I am pleased to inform you that your proposal has been approved. Please note the continuing review and expiration dates. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Please notify me immediately should any unexpected risks to the participants become evident. Best of luck with your study.

(To be filled in by the IRB)

Britton L. Mace March 28, 2011  
Full Approval Date

PROTOCOL CONTINUING REVIEW DATE: March 28, 2012  
IRB APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: March 28, 2012

If data collection is not completed by the expiration date, the researcher must seek IRB approval for a continuation.

