**Strengthening teacher training in higher education: what about school bullying management?**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to explore teacher competence in immediately intervention in school bullying (CIISB) and develop a course framework for a teacher education program to strengthen student teachers’ CIISB. On the basis of a literature review and interviews with experienced teachers, the construct of CIISB and a script for dealing with school bullying as well as a course framework were developed. Analysis of interview data and relevant literatures resulted in a construct of CIISB and a script for dealing with school bullying as follows: The construct of CIISB is “structuring management of school bullying” and is built on three steps: (a) identifying school bullying, (b) stabilizing the incident, (c) clarifying incidents and implementing learning. A course framework for enhancing student teachers’ CIISB was developed as follows: (a) Step I: Activating Motivation, (b) Step II: Course Explanation, (c) Step III: Case Method, (d) Step IV: Discussion of preventive strategies, (e) Step V: Conclusion of the Course.

*Keywords*: school bullying, student teacher, competence, handling process, immediate intervention

**Introduction**

School bullying is a prevailing problem at schools. Numerous studies have revealed that bullying can have detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of the students involved. For instance, victims are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, interpersonal isolation (Lamarche et al., 2007; Khamis, 2015), low self-esteem, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and action (Yen, 2010). Moreover, bullies often develop anti-social behaviors and may commit crimes. Thus, strategies for preventing school bullying warrant greater attention.

Teachers often regard school bullying as a severe problem (Begotti, Tirassa, & Acquadro Maran, 2017; Mauner, Harrop, & Tattersall, 2010); therefore, they believe that they should take responsibility for intervening quickly in bullying incidents (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Begotti et al., 2017; Kennedy, Russom, & Kevorkian, 2012). Previous studies also indicated that when students suffer from victimization or witness school bullying, they tend to inform teachers and expect them to provide prompt and effective intervention to deal with the problem (Unnever, & Cornell, 2004).

In this regard, in order to effectively solve the problem of school bullying, the theory of risk management (Nunamaker, Jr, Weber, & Chen, 1989) suggests that teachers should not only pay closer attention to preventing school bullying before it occurs to decrease incidents, but should also implement restorations for involved students after school bullying occurs to reduce the likelihood of it happening again. More important, teachers should possess the knowledge and competence to immediately intervene in school bullying so that they can stop incidents as soon as they occur, thereby effectively stabilizing the situation, preventing it from deteriorating further, and limiting its negative impacts. This will not only help to control bullying incidents but will also facilitate the development and implementation of the appropriate restorations for the students involved (Yoon, & Bauman, 2014).

However, to the best of our knowledge, most teacher education programs still focus on the development of teachers’ competencies in preventing school bullying before it occurs (Clarkson, & Hutchings, 2015; Nocentini, & Menesini, 2016; Olweus, 2005), such as how to identify school bullying (Chen, Sung, & Cheng, 2017; Sung, & Chen, 2018) and how to effectively enhance students’ understanding of school bullying and its prevention (Clarkson, & Hutchings, 2015; Nocentini, & Menesini, 2016; Olweus, 2005). Some teacher education programs also focus on enhancing teachers’ competencies in implementing recovery after school bullying occurs; for example, how to engage in appropriate discussions with bullies after incidents (Garandeau, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2014; Garandeau, Vartio, Poskiparta, & Salmivalli, 2016). However, to date, not only have few teacher education programs explored how to help teachers immediately intervene in school bullying when it occurs, but no study has clarified the construct of CIISB. Therefore, teachers generally lack sufficient competence and confidence to timely handle school bullying cases in classrooms (Begotti et al., 2017; Chiu, & Chang, 2012; Gorsek, & Cunningham, 2014). This will influence the effectiveness of intervention in school bullying. In this regard, clarifying the construct of CIISB and thereby developing an effective management script for promptly handling school bullying is important. Moreover, in order to ensure that teachers are equipped with CIISB before entering into education practices, it is also essential to develop an effective teacher education program to strengthen student teachers’ CIISB. In sum, these two initiatives will be the focus of this study.

Especially for the development of teacher education programs, since CIISB is a problem-solving competence emphasizing how to promptly deal with school bullying incidents when they occur, strengthening student teachers’ understanding and knowledge of the process for promptly handling school bullying is important. In this regard, the use of the case method in a teacher education program may assist student teachers in improving their CIISB. The case method approach was introduced by Christopher Langdell in 1870. It has since been extensively applied to education programs in various fields, such as legal education, business education, medical education, and teacher education (Chang, 2008). The case method is a teaching approach that uses cases as teaching tools to educate learners. By combining cases and the themes of education and facilitating students to discuss the cases together, this method can enhance learners’ skills of observation, analysis, response, and outcome evaluation, thereby promoting the development of competencies in critical thinking, reflection, problem analysis, and problem-solving (Chang, 2008; Rickard, McAvinia, & Quirke-Bolt, 2009). To sum up, if the case method is used in teacher education programs, it can assist student teachers not only in increasing their professional knowledge but also in enhancing their practical experience in educational surroundings.

To effectively implement the case method in a teacher education program, the process of implementation can be divided into three stages: before implementation, during implementation, and after implementation (Lin, 2009). Before implementing the case method, educators should fully inform learners of the advantages, values, and procedures of the case method. Educators should also fully understand the characteristics and key issues of the relevant cases that will be presented in the program so that they can prepare appropriate questions for learners and lead them in discussing the cases. During implementation of the case method, educators should instruct learners in the theories and knowledge relevant to the cases. Afterward, educators should present the cases to learners in various ways and then lead learners in observing, analyzing, and discussing the situations and problems presented in the cases, thereby assisting learners in thinking about how to face the situations and solve the problems. This method can achieve effectiveness through vicarious learning. After implementing the case method, educators should assist learners in consolidating their learning outcomes through relevant strategies, such as leading them in summarizing the learning contents or providing them assessments. To sum up, the implementation of the above three stages could consolidate the effectiveness of using the case method in teacher education programs.

It is worth noting that when adopting the case method to organize a teacher education program, the simulated cases are generally presented in a static way (e.g., presenting cases in text) for discussion, thereby exerting the teaching effectiveness (e.g., Çam & Ömer, 2017; Gravett, de Beer, Odendaal-Kroon, & Merseth, 2017). However, as technology evolves, more and more education programs incorporate technology into teaching practices to strengthen teaching effectiveness (e.g., Luo, Koszalka, Arnone, & Choi, 2018; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018). For instance, the video-vignette is one of the technologies most used in education programs, especially in recent initiatives in cultivating teachers’ competencies (Dotger, Masingila, Bearkland, & Dotger, 2015; Herbst, Aaron, & Chieu, 2013; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018). The function of a video-vignette is similar to that of a text case, which means that a video-vignette can not only increase the potential for applying theories to practices (Hatch, Shuttleworth, Jaffee, & Marri, 2016), but can also be reviewed repeatedly (Seidel, Blomberg, & Renkl, 2013) and combined with discussion to increase learning effectiveness (Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Notably, compared with text cases, using video-vignettes to present simulated cases not only is a good way to enhance learners’ engagement in courses by exerting its visual effect (Herbst et al., 2013; Sancar-Tokmak, 2013), but can also illustrate the cases more vividly (Finch, 1987; Lievens & Sackett, 2006). Furthermore, video-vignettes can more effectively simulate certain sensitive education issues such as school bullying that are not easily explored (Jeffries & Maeder, 2004; Shen, Gromova, Zakirova, & Yalalov, 2017). This will be useful to help learners explore sensitive issues in education practices, thereby conducting effective learning and reflection through simulated cases (Jeffries & Maeder, 2004).

In this regard, previous studies have confirmed that video-vignettes can not only serve as material for presenting simulated cases but can also strengthen competencies of student teachers and students (e.g., Herbst et al., 2013; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Yakubova & Hughes, 2015). To sum up, this study aims to develop a framework for a teacher education program in which video-vignettes will be adopted to educate student teachers and to present simulated cases. This may be beneficial for enhancing student teachers’ competencies in intervening promptly in school bullying.

**Methods**

**Data Collection**. This study mainly explored the construct of CIISB and developed an effective script for school bullying management through literature review and analysis of interview data. Due to the lack of literature regarding prompt school bullying management, this study identified three relevant literatures for analysis focusing on issues such as teachers’ prompt management of students’ interpersonal conflicts (i.e. Goldstein, Palumbo, Striepling, & Voutsinas, 1995; Meese, 1997; Spaulding, 2005). With regard to interview data, a total of eight secondary school teachers who have experience in immediately intervening in school bullying were recruited and interviewed (three males, five females; one room teacher, seven teacher-counselors; three from the north of Taiwan, two from central Taiwan, three from southern Taiwan; average teaching experience of six years).

This study mainly reviewed and analyzed six literatures regarding the case method in teacher education programs (i.e. Hsu & Chen, 2009; Kao, 2002; Mostert & Sudzina, 1996; Rickard et al., 2009; Wassmermann, 1994; Wong, 2012;) and four literatures related to the application of video-vignettes in the development of teachers’ competencies (i.e. Dotger et al., 2015; Hatch et al., 2016; Herbst et al., 2013; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018), thereby developing the course framework of a teacher education program for strengthening student teachers’ CIISB.

**Instruments**. Regarding the collection of interview data, a semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data. The interview outline focused on exploring the process while intervening in an actual school bullying case. For instance, we asked participants, “Have you ever intervened during a bullying incident? Could you please share these experiences?” “What competencies should teachers possess to act effectively and timely when addressing school bullying?” “What steps should be included in the process?” “What factors (e.g., different bullying types) influence the adoption of different intervention steps when handling school bullying?” “Why?”

**Data Analysis**. This study adopted the qualitative data analysis method introduced by Wolcott (2008) to explore the construct of CIISB, develop an effective script for school bullying management, and develop the framework of a teacher education program. First, the researchers repeatedly reviewed all transcripts and literatures. After developing a comprehensive understanding of the interview data and literatures, we started to encode the data, and key concepts were generated from the data. Second, we constantly compared the data with the concepts and classified the important concepts into either categories or themes. Third, the relationships among categories and themes were constructed. In this way a conceptual framework was eventually developed to provide deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

To ensure the validity of this study, we adapted the technique of reflexivity to discover the bias for the topic and participants of this study, and then took these biases seriously to prevent them from influencing the subsequent analysis of the study (Cope, 2014). We also invited the participants to confirm the analysis results and, when necessary, modified these results according to their suggestions (Merriam, 2002). In addition, we employed the practice of peer debriefing (Cooper, Brandon, & Lindberg, 1997), meaning that we invited research colleagues to discuss and provide feedback about preliminary results to enhance their credibility and validity.

**Results**

**The construct of CIISB and the valid management script.** After integrating the interview results with ideas from the literature (e.g., Goldstein, Palumbo, Striepling, & Voutsinas, 1995; Meese, 1997; Spaulding, 2005), a “script” was developed, as presented in Table 1. It represents the key CIISB construct. This construct is related to how teachers effectively implement a prompt school bullying intervention.

The first construct is labeled “Structuring the prompt management of school bullying” and consists of the following phases. In each phase, additional steps are distinguished. In Table 1, additional information is given to direct teacher behavior.

* *Identifying*. When a suspected bullying incident occurs, teachers both notice and identify the bullying incident.
* *Stabilizing the incident*. After identifying the bullying incident, teachers are capable of (a) stopping the incident, (b) removing bystanders, (c) calming down the bully and victim, and (d) when needed, separating the involved parties from other students. This phase stabilizes the chaotic scene of a bullying incident.
* *Clarifying incidents and implementing accidental learning*. After stabilizing the bullying incident, teachers clear up the bullying incident and invoke a learning process in all students (i.e., bystanders, the bully, and the victim). During this phase, teachers not only clarify the situation but also strengthen students’ appropriate attitudes and responsibilities when coping with school bullying in the future. It is essential to handle the bullying incident in such a way that the situation does not deteriorate. This phase includes the following steps: (a) clarifying the situation, (b) facilitating students’ empathies and invoking responsibilities, and (c) closing the discussion in view of future restoration activities.

**The framework of a teacher education program for enhancing student teachers’ CIISB**. After reviewing literatures related to the case method and video-based instruction (e.g., Kao, 2002; Muñiz-Rodríguez et al., 2018), this study proposed a program framework for enhancing student teachers’ CIISB. Detailed contents and procedures of this program are as follows.

*Step I: Activating Motivation*. The instructor will introduce and explain the goals, procedures, and contents of the courses, then will help the student teachers understand the definition of school bullying and the contemporary situations and implications of school bullying in Taiwan, and furthermore, will help the student teachers to verify the duties of student teachers for intervening in school bullying.

*Step II: Course Explanation*. The instructor will help the teachers understand the definitions of and actions involved in the prompt management of school bullying and introduce the ideas and concepts of CIISB to the teachers.

*Step III: Case Method*. Once the student teachers have absorbed the previous ideas and concepts, the instructor will play the video-vignette demonstrating incorrect intervention in school bullying. The instructor will guide the student teachers in observing and interpreting the case in the film and invite them to participate in a group discussion. The instructor will invite the student teachers to share their thoughts about and interpretations of the incorrect intervention behaviors depicted in the film and to share suggested actions they might take when faced with the same situation. The instructor will then play the video-vignette demonstrating how teachers intervene in school bullying promptly and appropriately, and invite the teachers to discuss its contents and identify the differences between this video-vignette and the previous one. The instructor will also connect their discussion with the contents of CIISB to increase the effectiveness of the program. During the discussion, the instructor will provide feedback to the student teachers based on the content of the discussions and will encourage learners to propose concrete strategies for immediately intervening in school bullying based on their previous experiences. This process will be beneficial for strengthening the student teachers’ abilities to intervene promptly in school bullying.

*Step IV: Discussion of preventive strategies*. In this phase, the instructor will share possible preventive strategies in dealing with school bullying to enhance the student teachers’ knowledge of the potential strategies they might employ.

*Step V: Conclusion of the Course*. In the last phase, the instructor will encourage the student teachers to draw conclusions about the program.

**Practical and theoretical significance of the study.** Risk management theory (Clarles & Kim, 1988) suggests that individuals should implement an immediate intervention when risky incidents such as school bullying occur to prevent further deterioration. However, this theory does not offer concrete steps to guide immediate intervention. In this regard, the results of the present study can be considered the first valid guide for immediate handling of school bullying. Such a guide is critical when reading the five-step decision process of helping (Latané & Darley, 1970). This process requires knowledge and mastery of concrete intervention steps.

Alongside a theoretical discussion about bullying management competence, the “script” that results from the findings of this study can guide teacher education. De Coninck, Valcke, & Vanderlinde (2018) demonstrated how such a script is a guide for setting up clinical simulations. Dotger (2010) demonstrated how clinical simulations are helpful in developing complex competencies in teachers. Consequently, the results of the present study can be used to develop such clinical simulations to enhance teachers’ CIISB, such as the framework of a teacher education program proposed in this study. This framework emphasizes not only the use of video-vignettes to present simulated cases but also combining video-vignettes with the case method for leading learners to discuss and reflect on the cases, thereby enhancing their understanding of CIISB and the process for handling school bullying. This program framework echoed the concept of “learning by doing” raised by John Dewey (Wong, 1999), which emphasized that educators should provide learners a practical problem and then promote them to face it, think about it, analyze it, solve it, and engage in self-reflection, thereby enhancing their appropriate competencies to solve problems. The case method is usually conducted through group discussion. During the process of discussion, learners not only absorb the knowledge from case analyses, but also learn possible problem-solving strategies for the cases by observing and listening to the observations of others. This can achieve the effectiveness of observational learning identified by Bandura in 1986. To sum up, this program framework may be beneficial in strengthening learners’ CIISB.

Notably, if educators can design relevant activities with which to conclude teacher education programs, such as summary, review of the program contents, and exam, learners will have an opportunity to consolidate the effects of the instruction, thereby enriching the effectiveness of the program (Kao, 2002). In this regard, this study suggested that this aim should be taken into consideration when designing such programs. Moreover, we also expected that the framework of the program developed in this study could be used as a reference for the design of relevant teacher education programs in the future.

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| **Structuring the prompt management of school bullying** |
| **Phase 1: Identifying** | 1. Noticing and identifying bullying incident
 | Teacher confirms the bullying incident is occurring by (1) never ignoring any student conflict, and (2) observing involved students’ interaction or asking bystanders. |
| **Phase 2: Stabilizing the incident** | 1. Stopping bullying incident
 | Teacher stops the incident by (1) showing concern, and (2) declaring the authority and responsibility to stop it. |
| 1. Removing bystanders
 | Teacher calms down and removes bystanders by (1) giving convincing reasons, and (2) using authority. |
| 4-1. Calm down bullies and victims | Teacher calms down bullies and victims by (1) expressing empathy, and (2) promising to handle the incident.  |
| 4-2. Separating bullies and victims from other students if necessary | Teacher appropriately separates bullies and victims from students by (1) evaluating the necessity of separation, (2) expressing empathy, (3) expressing the reasons for separation and persuading them, and (4) contacting other teachers for help. |
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| **Phase 3: Clarifying incidents and implementing accidental learning**  | 1. Clarifying the situation
 | Teacher immediately establishes a context for the discussion and gathers pertinent information regarding the bullying incident by (1) restating teacher’s perspective and responsibility regarding the incident, (2) clarifying the procedure for and goals of the discussion, (3) asking relevant questions, and (4) listening actively. |
| 1. Facilitating students’ empathies and invoking responsibilities
 | Teacher facilitates students’ empathies and responsibilities toward this incident by (1) summarizing students’ perspectives, (2) asking critical questions, (3) indicating students’ inappropriate responses if necessary, (4) identifying for them possible feelings regarding victimization, and (5) enhancing students’ understanding of school bullying. |
| 1. Closing the discussion in view of future restoration activities
 | Teacher closes the discussion in a positive way and connects it with further restoration activities by (1) discussing appropriate strategies for handling school bullying, (2) restating teacher’s expectations, and (3) informing students of the follow-up handling procedure. |

Table 1

*Script for Intervening During School Bullying*

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