

# HOW TO MANAGE PEDAGOGICAL CONFLICTS: TIPS EVERY PRE-SERVICE TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

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## Abstract

Teachers of the English language have always been concerned with the ideas of productive and successful communication. However, teaching your students life skills such as empathy and pedagogical conflict resolution is just as important as teaching the nuts and bolts of the English language. In this paper, there is presented a new and original approach to handling current pedagogical conflicts in the English language classroom. Why is it so hard for people to agree? The mutual resentment may arise from the lack of knowledge and understanding of our common history, from unwillingness to understand each other, etc. Conflicts are inherent in any interpersonal relationship; its management is integral in every person's life and his/her performance. No doubt, all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the probability of its further escalation.

The authors of this study presume that pedagogical conflict management should involve acquisition of skills relating to conflict resolution, conflict communication skills, self-awareness about conflict types, strategies and tools of dealing with controversial situations pre-service teachers might encounter in real school life. A copyright two-step tutorial is suggested as an effective tool to teach students to deal with pedagogical conflicts and successfully resolve them in class. Firstly, it is hypothesized that preparatory theoretical course on the nature of conflicts will significantly stimulate and encourage pre-service teachers to learn more about the types, strategies and tools of dealing with controversial pedagogical situations they might come across in the classroom. The authors fairly claim that case-study method may help them learn and consolidate the probable algorithm of demeanor when faced with a pedagogical conflict situation. Moreover, it surely debunks the frequent misconception that conflict is similar to fighting. Secondly, the teaching tips included into the tutorial will enable pre-service teachers to manage pedagogical conflict situations during their compulsory teaching practice with a further compilation, analysis and feedback of the disputable situations they might experience.

**Key words:** algorithm of demeanor, behavioral strategies, case-study method, English language classroom, pedagogical conflict situations, pre-service teachers.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is a common point of view that conflict is the condition, in which people's concerns appear to be incompatible. If to follow the Bible, people have lost a common, understandable language as in punishment for excessive pride; this is the root of evil and the cause of all strife. A conflict may arise from misunderstanding or unwillingness to understand each other due to various reasons. When two people interact, there are chances of divided opinions. A conflict situation is the one where two or more values, prospects and opinions are contradictory in nature, have not yet aligned or agreed upon yet. It is widely believed that conflict is necessary for stimulating people to be creative and effective as truth is sprout in discussion (Socrates). However, dealing with clash situations and being ignorant of the possible ways to avoid them may have adverse effects on the relationships of people.

In this study, the authors reconsider the concept 'conflict' and present their vision on how to manage conflicts in the pedagogical process. Step-by-step teaching strategies with a view to increasing students' awareness and knowledge on the matter of pedagogical conflict management and its resolution are offered.

One of the research goals for the authors was to elaborate a series of case study training exercises for pre-service teachers to introduce them to the strategies and tools of dealing with controversial pedagogical situations in school life. To manage pedagogical conflict effectively, it is hypothesized that a specially designed two-step tutorial (a sandwich course) may be beneficial while it suggests a "platform" for pre-service teachers to acquire skills on conflict resolution. A case-study method is selected as a main tool of teaching pre-service teachers the algorithm of conduct while dealing with a pedagogical conflict situation during their compulsory teaching practice at school.

University teachers and students might get interested in all the tips described in detail in this paper, every pre-service teacher should know.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Theoretical and methodological foundations**

Conflict can be defined in many ways and can be considered as an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. It is also associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interests between two opposing groups. Some foreign and Russian scholars tried to explain the concept of "conflict" in the following way. According to Mark [1], conflict is "the appearance of difference, difference of opinions, of interests". Rahim and Psenicka [2] define conflict as "the struggle between incompatible or struggling needs, wishes, ideas, interests or people. Conflict arises when individuals or groups encounter goals that both parties cannot obtain satisfactorily." According to Antsupov and Shipilov [3], conflict is "a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups, with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its view or objectives over others."

The possibility of conflict arising is, however, always present, since distinctions between people create feelings of doubt and uncertainty of status, which could be a trigger mechanism to conflict. This concept has been widely investigated by the sociologists who have dealt with contact problems between ethnic groups; they define conflict as contentions involving real or apparent fears, interests, and values, in which the goals of the opposing group must be opposed, or at least neutralized, to protect one's own interests (prestige, employment, political power, etc.) [4]. This type of conflict often appears as a conflict of values, in which various behavioral norms collide, since occasionally only one norm is regarded to be valid.

Along with sociologists, political scientists claim that language conflict can cause political conflict. Language conflicts can be brought about by changes in an expanding social system when there is contact between different language groups [5]. The term 'conflict' remains ambiguous, at least when it refers generally to social conflict which can arise in a multilingual situation. Horowitz [6], Oksaar [7] point out the ambiguity of the term 'language conflict' as either conflict between languages within an individual or as conflict by means of language(s), including processes external to the individual.

A number of approaches and strategies for conflicts handling between people have been proposed. Rahim [8] constructs independent scales to measure the five styles of conflict management and provided evidence of their reliability and validity. Dmitriev [9] advances the argument based upon the notion that conflict management varies with the informal norms that govern interpersonal networks. This problem has been thoroughly examined by the Russian scholars as well. To more clearly understand the essence of the conflict, the scholars Dmitriev, Kudryavtsev V., and Kudryavtsev S. [10] point out two concepts – "the subject of the conflict" and "the object of the conflict", where the former is objectively existing or conceivable (imaginary) problem, which serves as a cause of discord between the parties.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the so called communicative conflict that arises in the process of communication. "Communicative conflict is the result of a special type of communication, it is a special state of a communicative act, it is the result of a special speech behavior" [11].

The authors of this study share the opinion of Shkatova [12] proclaiming that tolerance, or integrative strategy of conflict resolution which involves the revision or correction of the goals and claims of the conflicting, can be a helpful tool to avoid conflict situations.

### **2.2 Materials and study instruments**

#### *2.2.1 Students' background*

Number, age and gender characteristics: 72 students, 18-20 years old, mixed who made up two groups.

Students' status: Bachelor students.

#### *2.2.2 Research Site*

The research was conducted at Kazan Federal University (Russia).

### 2.2.3 Studied materials

The study materials include several case study pedagogical situations with a subsequent analysis viewed from different angles.

### 2.2.4 Research goal and method

The main goal in this study is to prove that the preparatory theoretical course and the case study method can significantly increase students' awareness and knowledge on the matter of pedagogical conflict management and its resolution.

## 3 RESULTS

In accordance with the set goal, a two-step tutorial was suggested as an effective tool to teach Bachelor students to deal with pedagogical conflicts and efficiently resolve them in the English language classroom. The first step consisted in delivering a short preparatory theoretical course "The Basics of Conflict Management" for freshmen with a view to their better understanding the delicate teacher-pupil, pupil-pupil, pupil-administration and other kinds of relationships within the educational process. The course covered the following topics:

1. Conflict. Definition. Basic characteristics.
2. Conflict situations in the pedagogical process.
3. Conflict structure.
4. Conflict stages.
5. Conflict solution.

During the educational process students analyzed an appreciable number of resources to get prepared for workshops. For example, they identified the probable variations of pedagogical conflict situations among the following groups and their models of interaction:

#### *Samples*

##### Pupil - Pupil

- communicates freely with their peers
- is attached to the elementary generally accepted norms and rules of relationship with peers (including moral)
- develops the transmission of images by means of nonverbal, intonation and language expressiveness
- self-expresses through joint creative activity
- learns to interact in a team: sacrifices personal desires for common goals
- learns to negotiate, constructively resolves pedagogical conflict situations

##### Teacher - Pupil

- recognizes the value of the pupil's personality
- recognizes the uniqueness-individuality of the pupil's personality: identifies and develops general and special abilities of the pupil
- selects the content, forms and methods of education and trains adequately to the age and individual opportunities
- prioritizes the personal development, when education and training serve to be a means of personal development of each pupil
- orients to the socialization-awareness and development of modern cultural values, knowledge, forms of household, economic, social, spiritual life; adapts to the existing rules and norms of life in society
- positively interacts with a pupil
- actualizes the pupil's tendency to his/her personal growth
- activates research and creative interests of the pupil
- creates conditions for improvement of moral actions, independently detects and states cognitive problems
- orients pedagogical interaction on self-realization of the pupil's disclosure and development of the natural opportunities, inclinations, abilities, needs.

The preferable mode for such a course was a workshop with a limited number of participants who were offered to accomplish various exercises:

#### *Samples*

Workshop #1. Topic: Conflict. Definition. Basic characteristics.

Task: Read the following statements and discuss to what extent you agree with them.

1. Conflict is a common, inevitable part of life. It exists because people do not always get along or agree. Conflict is a normal part of everyone's life, conflict resolution, or the ability to resolve conflicts effectively, is a crucial skill for everyone to have.
2. Conflict can also be damaging.

Teaching strategy:

Students are to split into groups, brainstorm the above ideas using the clustering method as the best critical thinking method that can fully reveal the essence of the problem. Clustering is a strategy based on the construction of a cluster - a graphical organizer used to represent nonlinear thoughts of students. The effectiveness of the strategy is due to the fact that the process of reasoning includes visual memory of students. In addition, when identifying the relationships between the concepts, their in-depth analysis is carried out.

Steps of the implementation:

1. Choose a statement and write it on the board or in a notebook.
2. Fix all the words, concepts and associations, without analyzing the possible relationships between them.
3. Establish relationships between concepts. It is important to identify as many of these relationships as possible.
4. Discuss the results of building a cluster in a group or pair.

Benefits of the strategy:

- contributes to a full summary
- allows to visualize, comprehend the course of reasoning on the topic [13], e.g. Based on the words that have been highlighted, compose the cluster. Please, write only on the right side of picture 1 (Figure 1):

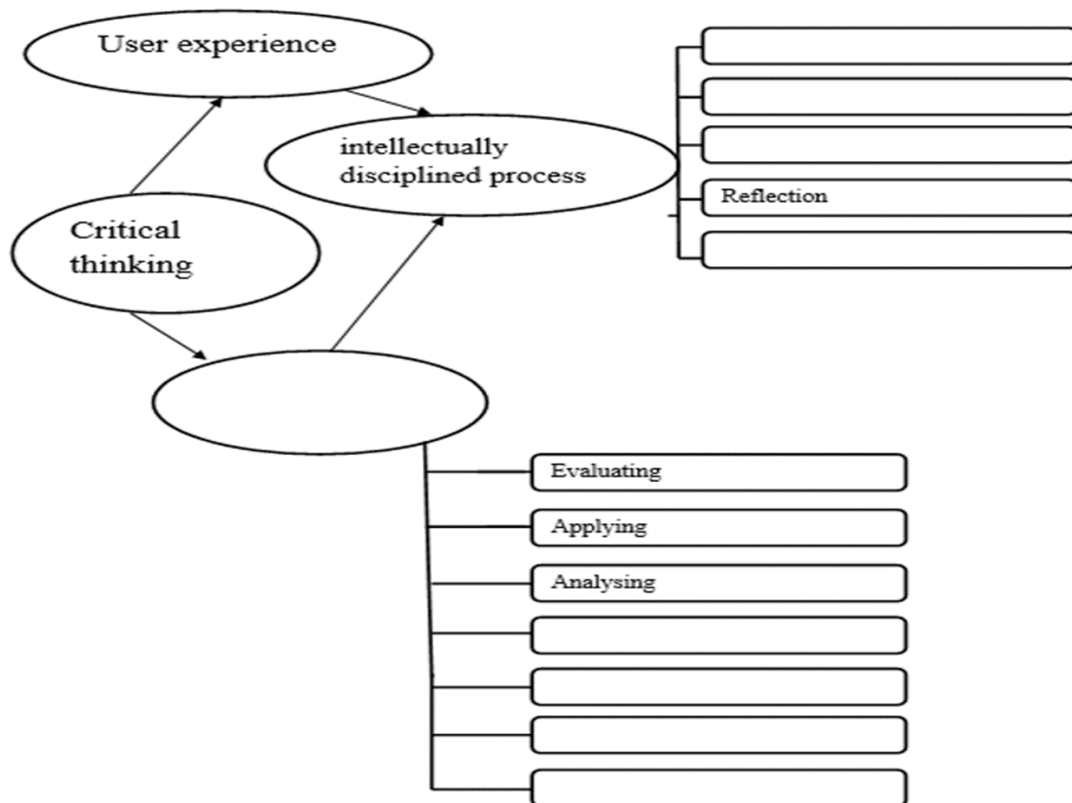


Figure 1. Picture 1.

Workshop #2. Topic: How to handle conflict in life?

Task: Read the following strategies of dealing with a conflict situation and select three or four strategies that are relevant to you. Explain your choice.

- Separate yourself from the situation. Step away to give yourself time to cool down.
- Learn to breathe.
- Walk away.

- Talk yourself down.
- Take a step back.
- Look beneath the surface.
- Use imagery.
- Stretch your muscles.

Teaching strategy:

KWL - know/ want to know/ learned - method is used to study the topic by filling out a table. The strategy is the principle of cognition: first, all known information on the topic is revealed, then goals for further work are set, and finally the traversed path is summarized.

Steps of the implementation:

1. Work on the question. What do you know about this topic? Fill in the first column of the table.
2. Think over the information, questions in the 'Want to know' column.
3. Read the information, write the answers to the given questions in the last column. In the process students may have additional questions, which also need to be jotted down in the second column.
4. Discussion of the results in pairs or groups.

Benefits of the strategy:

- stimulates intellectual activity of the student, motivates to study the topic deeply,
- forms skills of independent work with the information,
- develops the ability to present information concisely [14], e.g. Task 1: Think on your own and fill in the first column of the table below. You can use as many rows as you need. Then think about the outstanding questions and write them in the second column. Discuss the questions in pairs and write down the new information you learned in the third column (Table 1).

Table 1. Task 1.

Know	Want to know	Learned

Further research was organized to reveal students' attitude towards conflict situations in the pedagogical process. Initially, they were offered a self-assessment quiz to help students identify the approach they tend to use when managing conflict and the areas for further development to help them build their conflict management skills. Self-assessment quiz for Bachelor students is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Self-assessment quiz for students.

Behavior or response	Response scale		
	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Do you intervene quickly in conflict situations?			
Do you openly bully in your team?			
Do you know the cause of the problem before stepping in?			
In situations of conflict, do you: act as a mediator? ask for suggestions from group-mates in how to move forward? find it easy to remain objective? speak to everyone involved individually?			
Do you know how well your group-mates get on with each other?			
Do you know when a group member is causing stress to others?			
Do you keep out of gossip?			
Do you have consistently good relationships with other students?			
Do you see all students as equally important?			
Do you aim to gain the trust of your group-mates?			
Do you actively seek out the views of others?			

Do you keep your word?			
Can you say sorry when you have made a mistake?			
Are you open and honest about your mistakes and do you learn from them?			
Are you 'available' to listen to the views of others?			
Are you constantly looking for opportunities for improvement?			
Do you openly challenge unacceptable behavior?			
Do you use feedback constructively?			
Are you frequently calm during your studies?			
Do you protect the anonymity of complainants?			

The obtained data proved Bachelor students' ignorance in conflict management and fostered further work on teaching them to manage pedagogical conflicts in the classroom. The case-study method was preferred because it allowed students' examining the certain pedagogical conflict situation with its details and the learning environment, a particular pupil or a group of pupils happened to be involved in. According to Vinevskaya [15], the use of the case study method benefits the revealing of the internal reserves of the students, helps the future graduates assess their abilities and capabilities, correctly determine their place in life and discover ways to implement a full-fledged professional career solving conflict situations skillfully.

### Sample

Case-study # 1 Claire, Francine, and Alan.

On her way to school, Claire often bullies two younger students named Francine and Alan. She chases them, pulls their hair, and sometimes takes their recess treats. She also makes them steal things from other students' desks and give them to her. One day when she gets to school, Claire pushes Alan to the ground because he and Francine do not have any treats to give her. She tells them that she will really hurt them if they do not bring her treats the next day. Some other students are nearby and see this. How are the different people in this case study feeling?

Claire \_\_\_\_\_

Francine and Alan \_\_\_\_\_

The other students \_\_\_\_\_

How can the situation be resolved? [16].

Pre-service teachers suggested several strategies and tools to deal with this situation:

For Claire: consult a psychologist together with the parents (the trigger may be hidden in some childhood insults), uncover hidden talents and involve her into developmental activities, teach compassion etc.

For Francine and Alan: inform parents, the administration of school, try to be more confident, separate yourself from the situation, do not hold yourself, try to find the reason of such aggression etc.

For other students: remember that to be indifferent is worse than crime itself, inform the administration/police/medical services, try to stop the aggressor, calm him/her down and persuade or clarify the situation etc.

Some other case-study situations were explicitly analyzed and discussed with the pre-service teachers, however, the obtained answers cannot serve to be the model ones as every person chooses his/her own way to handle conflicts that directly depend on the man's age, profession, literacy, adequacy of perception of the conflict; openness and effectiveness of communication etc. Of course, although all efforts should be made to resolve conflict informally at an early stage, there will be many instances where formal disciplinary action should be taken [17].

The second step of the tutorial was aimed at implementing theoretical knowledge into practice during the students' compulsory practice in schools. Initially, all formal arrangements were stipulated such as the prerequisites concerning the practice report, the number of analyzed conflict case study situations, compiling a mini glossary on the topic 'Conflict'.

On the first days at school, students got acquainted with the class, teaching staff, and the curriculum. The allotted teacher explained the rules of behavior with the pupils of different ages and recommended some ways to focus schoolchildren's attention on peacemaking in EFL class and beyond:

- Teach pupils the skills they need to work in partners or groups, including the importance of communicating needs, setting goals, and what to do if something goes wrong.
- Motivate pupils to role-play situations that require compassion, socialization, and problem-solving.

- Help pupils see how their actions influence others (positively and negatively), by including these observations in their everyday conversation, preferably via the English language. Phrases such as, 'I feel confused when you...', 'I feel happy when we...', or 'We work best together when...', help pupils make this connection.
- Teach pupils tools and strategies for resolving classroom conflicts before issues come up. This way, they are prepared to take an active role in resolving their own problems.
- Keep in mind that conflicts often arise from a combination of fear, anxiety, threat or frustration. Help pupils learn to recognize emotional triggers and manage them in healthy ways, such as with mindful activities, movement, or reflection.

All these helped pre-service teachers plan their actions and relevant conduct when faced with a disputable situation during their compulsory school practice. Here are some examples of pedagogical conflict situations (case-study situations) from pre-service teachers' reflection papers:

### *Samples*

#### Case-study # 1

2 grade class. Pupils make crafts-origami for a school holiday. N fails to fold the paper appropriately, crumples it and throws it to the side in front of all, refusing to continue his task. How can the situation be resolved?

#### Case-study # 2

3 grade class. Pupils prepare a creative project for an English lesson, where they need to act out in front of the class in groups of four. One group is preparing a staging resembling a theatrical competition. N attends a choreographic club and tries to guide her classmates by ordering them to do what she wants. A conflict breaks out in the group. How can the situation be resolved?

#### Case-study # 3

N is 15 years old. She has a very complex temper and is brought up by her mother. The girl suffers from strabismus. As a result, she has problems in the classroom. The whole class laughs at her. She totally has withdrawn into herself.

Case study method proved itself positive having met all the requirements of modern educational technologies. Its use in the process of training pre-service teachers allowed them to form the necessary competencies for the teacher, taught them to build professional and personal perspective trajectories of their professional activity while dealing with pedagogical conflict situations.

Pre-service teachers managed to compile a mini glossary on conflict management during their compulsory school practice:

#### *Sample (created by a student)*

'Fairy tale therapy' is one of the methods of correction, the use of which is based on the use of invented stories and fairy tales. The pupil writing or reading a ready-made fairy tale finds in its plot the solution of his/her difficulties etc. Fairy tale is the most universal method that allows you to influence in complex. The fairy tale corresponds to the children's system of perception. For a child (specifically 7-9 years) it is not just fiction, fantasy, it is a special reality of the world of his feelings and images. It is in the form of a fairy-tale when the child encounters such complex phenomena as life and death, love and hate, anger and compassion, betrayal and deceit.

In general, the pre-service teachers compiled a mini glossary of 45 terms as a result of their compulsory practice at school.

Pre-service teachers noted the beneficial effect of a two-step tutorial that reduced the significant number of conflict situations in their school life and they became knowledgeable in the ways to handle them with minimum stress. Moreover, students came up with the alternative approaches to reduce and occasionally avoid pedagogical conflict situations: fairy tales used by the pre-service teachers helped pupils to cope with stress; acting them out, especially conflict situations, contributed to the solution of the controversial issues that sometimes seem insoluble in life.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

Professional activity of the pre-service and current teachers include their professional competence, which is the ability to organize activities with other subjects of the educational process (students, their parents, colleagues, administration) in accordance with the goals and objectives of the modern concept of education, the values of the world, domestic, regional and national culture.

To teach a teacher to successfully interact with all pupils in the modern educational space is the main goal of using the case method in pedagogy. There are different ways to treat this trend. The authors of

this study believe that the further development of the pedagogical cases and their active use in practice allow to increase the level of professionalism of a teacher, and thus, orient the creative search in the understanding of the spiritual world of a pupil.

Dealing with conflict requires patience and wisdom. You need to give in time if a class is not ready to discuss the issue yet. Also, if you observe that a class is not fully satisfied with your conflict resolution strategy, agree on another time for further discussion, some people need time to forgive or make peace.

Finally, conflicts of interest are unavoidable many times because of the rather complex and interconnected nature of modern business and society. Hence, teachers ought to know the specific strategies, tools and types of dealing with controversial questions and determine what constitutes conflict of interest and what can be acceptable behavior.

Further research is needed to enhance our understanding of the interrelationships of conflict-management strategies. An important area of future research concerns carefully designing and evaluating the effects of intervention on conflict and conflict management strategies on individual and group outcomes. Field experiments are particularly useful in evaluating the effects of improving conflict management strategies on individual and group outcomes. There is also need for scenario-based studies and experiment studies that control some of the extraneous variables to better understand the effects of conflict and conflict styles reported in the present study.

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