

THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT: TEACHERS' NARRATIVES

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Abstract. *The significant thing for teachers is to settle conflicts with students correctly and effectively without disrupting educational process and damaging the relationship. Despite teacher-student conflicts are unavoidable, and important consequences arise there from, teacher-student conflicts remain poorly studied. The present study aims to examine the strategies teachers use to resolve teacher-student conflicts. To investigate the process of conflict between a teacher and a student, a case study method was used. Respondents – teachers - were asked to recall a conflict occurring between them and a student during the school years, describe how the incident was handled, and the consequences of it. The number of respondents constituted 31 teachers. Their average age was 43, 6 years. By gender there were 2 males and 29 females; work experience was from 2 till 35 years.*

An analysis of the cases enabled to distinguish two groups of teachers' reactions to the conflicts. One of them is focus on communication with student on the issue and discovering of the reasons of his / her behaviour. Resolving conflict in a cooperative way involves teacher's endeavours to perceive accurately student's positions and motivation, recognise the legitimacy of each other's interests, and search for a solution accommodating the needs of both sides. The second group of teachers' reactions to the conflicts manifests itself by the lack of the reflection of the motives and causes of the student's inappropriate behaviour. Thus, recorded conflicts are considered as non cooperative (destructive) ones.

This study give insight into the role of teacher in relation to conflict resolution with student. Findings of the study emphasize the need for teachers to critically determine meaningful conflict resolution strategies.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, student, teacher.*

Introduction

There are at least two reasons teachers should be competent at resolving teacher-student conflict. Firstly, the resolution of conflict impact teacher-student relationship. Teachers are expected to develop high-quality relationship with students. The level of quality relationship refers to the level of involvement, closeness, affection, and openness of the communication between a teacher and a student (Kurdi & Archambault, 2017). Integrative conflict resolution with

students may be accounted for in the quality of support a child receives. Low-quality student-teacher relationship refers to negative and problematic relationship, occurring as the forms or the result of distributive conflict resolution. It is documented that positive teacher-student interactions predict academic achievement (e. g. McCornic & O'Connor, 2015). In contrary, bad relations diminish the quality of school life (e.g. Kurdi & Archambault, 2017).

Secondly, students are thought the ways to repond to conflicts by teacher's actions applied to resolve conflicts. Thus competent teacher promotes social negotiations of children by influencing the ability to respond in a socially competent manner. Teachers who resolve conflict through collaboration foster children's learning about empathy, problem solving, and sharing. In contrast, teachers who resolve conflicts throught avoiding or competition do not promote social skills of the children (e. g. Jenkins et al., 2008). Conflicts may be considered as a means to teach skill essential to social competence (Blunk et al., 2017).

When analysing conflictual situations between a teacher and a student, it is important to note that the participants of this relationship possess different positions of power regarding the resolution of conflicts. Although it is deemed that both participants of the relationship are active and equal communication partners, however, the final decision depends on the teacher as a relationship leader, who is granted the power of decision regarding the strategies of a conflict. Any relationship of an adult with the child always has educational potential (Kairiene, 2017), therefore, as far as the conflict with a student, it is expected of the teacher not only a successful conflict resolution, but also the implementation of educational objectives.

The range of the conflict varies according to behaviors people enact during a conflict. The term „conflict resolution strategy“ is used to „cluster“ information about individual moves people make to carry out their general approach. In the field literature the most frequently investigated approach is defined by Kilman and Thomas a five-strategy approach including collaboration, accommodation, forcing, avoidance and compromise. Conflict resolution strategies may take different methods (tactics, forms) - individual moves people make to carry out their general approach (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001: 130-150). Collaboration (problem solving) involves trying to understand the others's point of view and negotiating the conflict effectively to find both parties satisfying outcomes. Forcing (competing) involves destructive behaviors like attacking the other verbally, being defensive, or losing self-control. Avoiding involves denial of the conflict, equivocation, changing and avoiding topics, being noncommittal, joking, and becoming distant. Accommodation (compliance) involves putting the other party's needs over self ones.

Integrative conflict resolution relies on having parties share their perceptions and feelings with the intention of arriving at a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict. What lead to a win-win situation are empathy, critical thinking, problem solving, and the use of „I-messages“ (Yssel et al., 2001: p. 298). Among the conflict resolution strategies collaboration (integrating) and compromise are regarded as integrative as they help individuals to develop and get experienced while they are solving the interpersonal conflicts. Integrative conflict behaviour is directed at maximizing the outcomes for the conflicting parties together, whereas distributive conflict behaviour is directed at maximizing the outcomes for one party, minimizing the outcomes for the other party (or both). Forcing and accommodation are both highly distributive strategies, avoiding is neither distributive nor integrative (Van de Vliert et al., 2004). These three strategies are not to be used as a tool or opportunity for one's personal development.

According to research, handling conflict in an integrative way is quite challenging for teachers. For example, Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) have revealed that only 39 % of the teacher participants was efficient at disciplining students. Ficarra and Quinn (2014) have indicated that teachers had identified classroom management as an area for which they need additional training. Similarly, Ortega and Fuentes (2015) identifying that the quality of teaching depends on the quality of communication in the classroom have found in their study that 80 % respondents believed that these skills are not acquired during studies.

Dispite teacher-student conflicts are unevitable, and important consequences arise there from, teacher-student conflicts remain poorly studied. Moreover, in the literature cultural backgruond is labeled as one of the underlying factor influencing the ways of handling interpersonal conflicts (e.g. Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). In fact, only a few studies have been conducted on this issue in Lithuania (e.g. Čiuladienė & Kairienė, 2017; Čiuladienė & Raudeliūnaitė, 2015). The present study **aims** to examine the strategies and tactics teachers use to resolve teacher-student conflicts.

Method

Participants. The data from teachers was collected during 4 hours long seminar discussing conflict at educational setting, which was organized for teachers and prepared by one of the author of the article. The respondents consist of a total of 31 teachers. Particapants had a mean age of 43,6 years. By gender there were 2 males and 29 females; work experience was ranging from 2 to 35 years.

Procedures. The instrumentation replicated those of Horan et al. (2010) where a questionnaire format was employed. Participants were asked to recall the teacher-student conflict they experienced at school. The conflict memories form

included free space for description of conflict situation and questions to collect the following information: what was student behaviour they perceived as conflicting? What were teacher's feelings due to that behaviour? How did they react / resolve the conflict?

Data analysis. A method of involving data analysis is the content analysis (Berg, 2007). Transcriptions of the provided teacher-student conflict situations were read several times with the purpose of extracting important statements. Answers were deductively coded according to a set of three categories, which were derived from dimensions of the conflict process: perception of cause, feeling to that student's action, and actions (those of teacher and student) aiming to resolve the issue.

Each behavioural response constituted a separate unit. Then, after indepth analysis of the responses, they were organised in accordance with conflict resolution strategies. It was identified that two conflict resolution strategies were used: integrating and forcing. *Forcing* focuses on wanting to win the conflict (to force the violation) and unwilling to reconcile. Forcing assumed victory of one party at the expense of the other. *Integrating* emphasises both the resolution of the conflict and the preservation of the relationship. Integrating assumed satisfying the goals and needs of both parties in conflict. Description of the results consists of list of various methods teachers impement while conflict interaction with student.

Teacher-student conflict resolution strategies and methods

The findings of the research allowed for the distinguishing of two strategies which are applied by teachers to resolve conflicts – **integrating** and **forcing**. When applying *the integrating* strategy teachers take a decision regarding the conflict only after having clarified all the circumstances and causes of the conflict. In such a case, the consequence (result) of the conflict is positive – in the assessment of the teacher, the conflict has been resolved, the teacher has achieved his goal and has ended up satisfied with the outcome of the conflict (3, 10, 11, 17, 21, 27, 29, 30).

When applying the forcing strategy teachers take a decision regarding the conflict having not clarified all the circumstances and causes of the conflict, without trying to clarify a student's opinion regarding the conflictual situation, which has arisen, and his behaviour, the motives for his actions. In case of the application of the forcing strategy, the consequence (result) of the conflict is negative – in the assessment of the teacher, the conflict has not been resolved, the teacher has not achieved his goal and has ended up dissatisfied with the outcome of the conflict (2, 4, 5, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26, 31).

When applying **the integrating** strategy, the findings of the research allowed to distinguish the following *modi operandi* (methods) chosen by teachers: ***argumentation, sanction, the response to the needs of the child.***

The application of *the argumentation* tactics can be distinguished as an independent *modus operandi* chosen by the teacher, which is sufficient to resolve a conflict. As an example of such situation, could be a situation, when, in children's hospital school, a student categorically refused to learn, ignored her teacher, because her doctor extended her treatment at hospital and did not allowed her to go home (11). In this case, the *modus operandi*, which was chosen by the teacher – *the argumentation*, – was appropriate for the situation at issue: firstly, the teacher calmed down the child, then he explained the situation, which had emerged, the motives for a doctor's decision. When the child calmed down and listened to the arguments, he started his lesson.

In some cases, the applied *argumentation* method embraces not only the student, but also other relevant participants – parents (1, 10, 14, 28, 29). Due to the fact that teacher's decisions at issue are taken after having clarified conflict circumstances, the reasons, motives for a student's behaviour and the like, therefore, the involvement of other participants is justified. The case, when the teacher intervened and stopped a student scuffle (however, during the examination of the conflictual situation between the students, it turned out that one of the students was hit by another, however, hit back, because he had been taught like that by his father – *if anyone hurts you – do not give in and hit back* (28)), could serve as an example of the involvement of other participants into the conflict resolution when applying the method of *the argumentation*. In such a way, only by applying the integrating strategy, the teacher could clarify the reason for the behaviour of one of the students and, respectively, to take a decision – to argue, however, by engaging a person, who encouraged a child's inappropriate behaviour – his father.

The cases of the application of the integrating strategy, when *argumentation* tactic proved to be inappropriate, came to light – a desirable goal is not achieved and then a decision is taken to change a tactic and to apply another method (8, 17, 21, 22). A situation, when a conflict arose due to the fact that a student refused to wear the uniform which is obligatory at school (17), could serve as an illustrative example. Firstly, the teacher attempted to clarify the reasons for the student's unwillingness to wear, which, in the opinion of the teacher, were not convincing, therefore, she presented her *argumentus*, which were based on the agreement between the student and the school and the obligation, which has to be signed by the student, to wear the uniform. It turned out that the teacher's arguments did not make impact on the student's decision, therefore, the teacher complimented *the argumentation* tactic with a provided possible *sanction*, as a means of impact – if the student does not change her decision and does not begin wearing the uniform,

the teacher will not support her candidature for the school's Council arguing that the person, who fails to comply with the obligations, may not be elected to the structure, which represents the interests of the school and its students.

In all the examined cases of the application of *the integrating* strategy, the modus operandi of *sanction*, which was chosen by the teachers, was applied only then, when *the argumentation* tactic was not effective (21) or jointly with *the argumentation*, i. e., the application of the sanction is explained by giving arguments (8, 22). For example, when the students were writing a test, teacher noticed that a student was cheating using his phone (8). The teacher explained that the school rules provide a sanction for such behaviour – the termination of a test and the removal of the student from an auditorium. Consequently, the teacher reminded the requirement and imposed the sanction.

The modus operandi of *the integrating* strategy – *the response to the needs of the child* – is applied in those cases when teachers take into consideration individual characteristics of the child, which affect a conflictual situation, such as emotional and behavioural disorders (6), *the desire to always play a leading role, to draw attention to himself* (7), *the inability to establish and maintain relationships* (30). In one of the mentioned cases, the conflict broke out when a boy became angry and refused to play when the role of a game leader was given to another student (7). The teacher decided to organise the activity of children, which was optimal for all the students.

When **the forcing** strategy was applied, the research findings allowed to distinguish the following modi operandi (tactics), which were chosen by the teachers: *the ignoring of child's needs, requirements which do not comply with a child's development / abilities, an inadequate sanction*. When analysing the actions of teachers, who chose to apply the forcing strategy, it turned out that the applied tactics had failed to achieve objectives, therefore, the conflict was not resolved, the objectives were not achieved, whereas the teachers felt dissatisfaction with the outcome of the conflict.

The teachers, who chose to apply *the forcing* strategy without having clarified the causes and circumstances of the conflict, were marked by one common feature – the insufficient preparedness of teachers to work with children and, respectively, to resolve conflictual situations, despite the fact they had a considerable length of service as teachers. The teachers characterised their feelings and reactions towards conflictual situations in the following manner: *I scold, raise my voice, I lack patience* (the length of service of 13 years) (15), *I was angry, got nervous* (the length of service of 33 years) (18), *I felt helpless, because a small child (of preschool age) dominates all the people, harms all, whereas I can do nothing* (20), *I fight with a child (age – 5 years old), I feel helpless* (the length of service of 3 years) (23), *I feel helpless, I do not know how to impact the child (age – 2,5 years old)* (the length of service of 20 years) (24), *I*

feel helpless, I do not know what to do, I feel that I do not possess sufficient knowledge, experience (the length of service of 13 years) (5), *I am at a loss* (the length of service of 25 years) (16).

One of the applied tactics was *the ignoring of child's needs* (4, 15, 8, 20, 23, 24). In all the cases, the teachers abstained from noticing and responding towards the changes in a child's behaviour: *a student of primary forms hums during his lessons, disturbs a lesson* (4), *a 3rd form student walks, eats and talks during a lesson* (15), *a 6-year old girl did not want to dress up after her sleep* (18), *a 2.5 year-old child refused to wash his hands after returning from the yard* (24). Such an expression of a child's behaviour demonstrates that something happened to the child, he is sending certain signals of behavioural change which must be addressed after having clarified the causes of such behaviour. An example of *the ignoring of child's needs* is a case when a 5-year-old child brings to his kindergarten a toy from home, although there is a rule that it is not allowed. When the toy is taken from him by the teacher, he becomes very angry, shouts, falls on the floor (23). It is obvious that such a child's reaction to a taken toy demonstrates his need for safety, which is not satisfied by the environment of the kindergarten fully, therefore, he brings a toy from his home as a symbol of "home" (his safe environment).

The tactic of teachers' *requirements which do not comply with a child's development / abilities*, which is chosen to react towards a conflict, is linked to conflictual situations, in which children with special needs participated (5, 19). Mention must be made of the case when, while performing a task, a preschool child with special needs was picking at other children and was teasing them (19). The teacher's attitude towards the conflictual situation, which has arisen, is demonstrated by her reaction: *I fought with her in order to achieve psychological justice in respect of other children*. In this case, the teacher chose to apply, as she maintains herself – a cause and effect method – *perform at least a part of the task and come to have supper*. In this case, not only did the teacher fail to assess the child's age, individuality and special needs, but also chose to threaten with a sanction by restricting the child's physiological need for food.

One more tactic of the forcing strategy, which came to light, is *an inadequate sanction*. As it has already been mentioned, when applying the forcing strategy, the teachers did not clarify the circumstances and causes of a conflict, therefore, their actions (the chosen tactics) were also groundless. In the case of the application of *an inadequate sanction*, during the lesson, a student cut to pieces his notebook, which, according to the teacher, must be neat, without torn out leaves and with the cover (2). It is obvious that such a student's behaviour is not typical, rather, it indicates some kind of the child's shock, anger or anxiety. However, the teacher, instead of clarifying it, simply punished him by telling him to rewrite all information into a new notebook and to bring it to show to her.

One more noteworthy case is when a student spits, hits children, speaks dirty words, walks during lessons, runs around, crawls under the chairs (16). As in the above described cases, the teacher does not examine the reasons for the student's inappropriate behaviour, however, applies one after another *ineadequate sanctions* – firstly, she separated the student from other children, then she gave a task, after that she made him sit down next to herself and, finally, removed him from the classroom. Such behaviour of the teacher can be assessed in two ways. On the one hand, she imposes four sanctions on the student for his inappropriate behaviour, on the other hand, it demonstrates that the teacher does not analyse the ineffectiveness of the methods (sanctions) applied by her.

Despite the fact that the examination concerns the conflicts between teachers and students, however, in some cases, other specialists working at school are engaged in the resolution of conflicts – classroom teachers, social pedagogues, psychologists (1, 3, 4, 6, 13, 26, 31). It may be noted that not in all the cases of conflict resolution the inclusion of other specialists has a justified reason, i. e. daily situations: the student is undisciplined during the lesson – the classroom teacher is informed (1), the student is dissatisfied with his appraisal – the classroom teacher is informed (3), the student of primary forms hums during his lessons, disturbs the lesson, does not respond to the remarks – the social pedagogue is notified (4), a 7th form student walks around, throws the belongings of his class friends, talks, does not perform tasks, does not have school supplies, repeats the teacher's words, plays games on the phone, eats – the psychologist, social pedagogue, classroom teacher are notified (13), students make fun of each other – social pedagogue is informed (26).

However, there are conflictual situations when the inclusion of other specialists is justified: the student with emotional, behavioural and development disorders refused to participate in the lesson, because she does not like the subject. She is unwilling to speak, attempts to move from the communication zone – the psychologist is engaged (6). Another case, when the engagement of the specialist assisted in resolving a conflict, should be mentioned – the teacher barred the student from taking an examination, because the student *does not possess sufficient knowledge* (31). Due to the involvement of the psychologist the student was allowed to take the examination which was passed by him very well.

The decision of teachers to engage other specialists in a conflictual situation demonstrates their unpreparedness to resolve them and the ignoring of the educational function. The possibilities for assistance of other specialists, when resolving the situations of such nature, when they are not the participants or observers of a conflictual situation, are doubtful. Rather, it demonstrates the helplessness of the teachers (what has been confessed by themselves) and an attempt to encourage themselves and, which is highly likely, to intimidate the student by the external enforcement of their forces.

The findings are in line with the other studies indicating the importance of teacher's conflict resolutions skills, and revealing their insufficient level. One of the reasons for this may be that teacher preparation programs do not incorporate the subjects concerning conflict theory and practice. Teachers should be able to analyze conflict, understand power issues, and be knowledgeable about various resolution strategies. Teacher training for current teachers should include appropriate elements from curriculum models such as the CoRe model to enhance their abilities to respond to conflict and also support social competence. presented a conceptual model for incorporating conflict resolution in preservice teacher education. The CoRE model offers teachers conflict resolution skills in a four-level approach: Foundational Knowledge, Integration, Contextual, and Implementation (Yssel et al., 2001). The goal of the first level is to build a framework for understanding society and the components that lead to unrest, specifically with respect to children. The focus on the second level is to integrate the foundational knowledge within the educational realm by introducing conflict resolution training in a workshop format. The third level engage in continued mediation training involving simulation, role playing, and constructing and responding to case studies. The fourth level brings an opportunity for student teachers to assess the viability of their conflict resolution programs within the context of a school setting.

One more possible explanation to the finding of low teacher conflict resolution competency is that it may be argued that teachers are currently too focused on children's academic skill building, rather than giving classroom time to promoting social skills. It is discussed in previous studies as well. Jenkins and colleagues (2008) has highlighted teachers feel compelled to achieve academic goals with less interest in strategies to address conflict resolution. Similarly, Sakk (2013) has found in her investigation that the role of the teacher does not allow learners to express their opinion or thoughts as the teachers are focused on teaching their subject and on learners' learning (in its narrow meaning) rather than on the social development of children. However, Kuurme and Carlsson (2010) argue that a human being cannot develop into an authentic person with repressive pedagogy, when being under the will of an external authority and dealing with it constitutes the core of the experience (p. 72).

Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the strategies and tactics teachers resolve teacher-student conflicts. Using content analysis, two strategy were identified such as integrating and forcing. Teacher tactics used to resolve the conflict in collaborative way included: argumentation, sanction, the response to the needs of the child. When the forcing strategy was applied the following tactics

were chosen: the ignoring of child's needs, requirements which do not comply with a child's development/abilities, an inadequate sanction. The tendency of teacher to involve to his/her conflict with students another person such as classroom teacher, social pedagogue, psychologist is also revealed in the study.

The study confirmed that the integrating strategy is the desirable strategy due to its positive characteristics both of the process and the outcomes, and vice versa, the forcing strategy due to its 'unsatisfied results is the undesirable one. In the cases teacher gets stuck in a destructive way of conflict resolution, it would be helpful for teachers to get an individual support, e.g., have the opportunity to talk about the negative experiences they have with some of their students, get tutorial on how to change the conflict resolution strategy.

Findings of the study emphasize the need for teachers to critically determine meaningful conflict resolution strategies. The course and the consequences (result) of a conflict are determined by a conflict resolution strategy which are chosen by teacher. It is important for them to realize that every conflict has its teachable moment; it provides possibility to promote social competence. Teacher need more information on constructive conflict resolution approach.

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