

UNIT 4
CONFLICT
Primary level

Rules help to solve conflicts

4.1 Everything's okay! Really?

What problems or conflicts can we observe in our class?

4.2 This is how we do it

What solutions do we have to the problems?

4.3 A list of ideas

Which of the solutions do the majority prefer?

4.4 Our contract of rules

How do we write down common rules?

Unit 4: Key concept – “Conflict” (for primary level)

Background information for teachers: resolution of conflicts at primary school level

Daily life in primary school provides many examples of conflict situations. Most of the conflicts are based on the general attitudes of students or their inability to withstand pressure. Examples of conflict situations are:

- taking away somebody’s things;
- pushing or touching somebody accidentally;
- getting on each other’s nerves;
- not leaving other classmates in peace;
- bullying each other;
- severe forms such as mobbing or physical violence/emotional abuse.

Students at primary level use strategies of conflict resolution that are different from those used by adults. Strategies also vary depending on the age of the primary school students. The younger ones tend to apply conflict resolution strategies such as physical reactions (hitting, etc.), aggressive reactions, loud verbal arguments, getting an adult to help, leaving the scene of conflict, giving in and resigning, making it “unhappened” or making a symbolic gesture (such as a handshake, a present, etc.).

Older primary school students (aged 10 and over) tend to use different strategies of conflict resolution, such as ignoring the conflict, talking with each other, finding a common solution by looking at both perspectives, finding out who is right and who has therefore “won”, as well as negotiating until everybody involved is satisfied with the solution.

Experts distinguish between three major types of conflict resolution:

- physical conflict resolution;
- one-sided conflict resolution (making an action “unhappened”, making up through symbolic gestures or presents);
- co-operative conflict resolution (self-reflective thinking, or the ability to see two perspectives).

The lessons in this unit take these strategies for conflict resolution into account and are based on these insights into developmental psychology. They are a key element in helping the students to develop an understanding of individual as well as common problems and conflicts, and in helping them to learn the distinction between public goods and private goods. The solution to the problems will affect a wider group of people if they belong to the category of common problems or conflicts and, in the same way, the solution to an individual problem or conflict should only affect the individual and should not affect anyone else.

In primary school, conflicts like the ones described above can often arise for reasons of infrastructure (not enough space), gender (the girl–boy relationship), working together (different speeds of working, different levels, etc.) or as a result of social behaviour (not letting somebody finish speaking, etc.). When conducting these four lessons about conflict, the teacher should be aware that dealing with things that don’t go smoothly in the classroom is not something that can be covered in just one lesson. Despite the formulation and agreement of class rules or rules of communication, problems and conflicts can nevertheless re-occur. Therefore, conflict and conflict resolution, as well as an awareness of the problems that can occur in everyday school life, is something that should be addressed again and again. Only if students become active participants in the discussion of the establishment of rules will they be able to identify with them.

The aim of education for democratic citizenship is to support the development of competences in three areas. This unit has the following competence profile:

Competence in ...		
... political analysis and judgment	... the use of methods	... political decision making and action
***	***	***

Toolbox support

In this unit the following tools from the students' toolbox will be used. The teacher must decide if some or all of the students need additional preparation in order to work with these tools.

- 0 Researching in libraries
- 0 Researching on the Internet
- 0 Carrying out interviews and surveys
- 0 Interpreting images
- x Mind maps
- 0 Creating posters
- 0 Holding exhibitions
- x Planning and giving presentations
- 0 Preparing overhead transparencies or a PowerPoint presentation
- 0 Writing newspaper articles
- 0 Putting on performances
- x Holding debates

Unit 4: Conflict

Rules help to solve conflicts

Resolution of conflicts at primary school level

Lesson title	Learning objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Methods
Lesson 1: Everything's okay! Really?	The students develop an understanding of public goods and private goods by identifying and distinguishing the problems they perceive in their class.	The students collect problems (on a mind map) and classify them into the categories of common problems and individual problems.	Small pieces of paper, pencils, information about classification of the two categories of problems.	Individual work, plenary discussion.
Lesson 2: This is how we do it	The students reflect upon their mechanisms of conflict resolution and develop an understanding of different viewpoints and different personalities and behaviour.	The students offer their opinions about the problems and generate proposals for solutions.	Flipchart, pencils.	Group work.
Lesson 3: A list of ideas	The students learn how to form arguments in a debate. They practise deliberating the pros and cons in a discussion and understand the function of majority.	The students present their proposals for solutions and decide on a list of common rules in the classroom.	Flipchart, pencils.	Plenary discussion.
Lesson 4: Our contract of rules	The students develop a common understanding and learn how to identify with a commonly formulated agreement.	The students write down the common rules and sign their names to them. They discuss mechanisms for control and possible consequences.	Flipchart, pencils.	Plenary discussion.

Lesson 1

Everything's okay! Really?

What problems/conflicts can we observe in our class?

Learning objectives	The students develop an understanding of public goods and private goods by identifying and distinguishing the problems they perceive in their class.
Student tasks	The students collect problems (on a mind map) and classify them into the categories of common problems and individual problems.
Resources	Small pieces of paper, pencils, information about classification of the two categories of problems.
Methods	Individual work, plenary discussion.

Lesson description

The teacher writes the lesson title “Everything’s okay! Really?” on the blackboard. The students are given the task to think about all the things that they think are not okay in their classroom. When giving the task to the students, the teacher should point out the different areas in which problems or conflicts can arise:

- when working together with other classmates;
- between girls and boys;
- when sharing things – such as the same table or the same room;
- being friends with somebody.

The students write down all the problems or conflicts that they can think of on small slips of paper and go individually to the blackboard and pin them on.

After all the slips of paper have been stuck onto the blackboard, the students sit in a circle in front of it.

Next, the teacher should point out that there are two different kinds of problems – individual problems and common problems. He or she gives examples of each type: for example, a lot of noise in the classroom would be a common problem, but not having enough space on a table would be an individual problem. The teacher goes through the problems on the blackboard one by one and tries to get the students to sort them into the correct category. For this, the teacher has prepared two sheets with a short explanation of “common problems and conflicts” and “individual problems and conflicts”. He or she pins them on the top of the blackboard in order to create two columns.

Once the students have finished sorting out the problems and conflicts, the teacher starts a discussion about which of them can be easily solved.

Lesson 2

This is how we do it

What solutions do we have to the problems?

Learning objectives	The students reflect upon their mechanisms of conflict resolution and develop an understanding of different viewpoints and different personalities and behaviour.
Student tasks	The students offer their opinions about the problems and generate proposals for solutions.
Resources	Flipchart, pencils.
Methods	Group work.

Lesson description

The teacher presents the list of problems or conflicts from lesson 1 again. The students sit in groups of four. They choose two problems or conflicts from the list to work on in their group.

Each group works on two different problems or conflicts.

The students discuss their different ideas for solving the conflicts or problems so that the solutions only affect the intended group or person (depending on whether the problem falls into the category of a common or an individual problem).

The students write down their ideas and illustrate a poster with the two problems or conflicts and the possible ways to resolve them. They underline the solutions they prefer as a group.

Lesson 3

A list of ideas

Which of the solutions do the majority prefer?

Learning objectives	The students learn how to form arguments in a debate. They practise deliberating the pros and cons in a discussion and understand the function of majority.
Student tasks	The students present their proposals for solutions and decide on a list of common rules in the classroom.
Resources	Flipchart, pencils.
Methods	Plenary discussion.

Lesson description

The students take the posters they have produced in lesson 2 and present them in front of the class. They also indicate which solutions to the two problems or conflicts they find most appropriate. They also give reasons why.

After each presentation, the students display their posters on the wall.

In a class of 25 students, approximately six groups will present their solutions and therefore 12 problems or conflicts will be tackled. Once all the groups have presented their ideas, the students should vote on the different solutions.

Each solution is assigned a number from one to five (assuming that not more than five solutions have been found to each problem or conflict). In order to vote, the students are given cards numbered from one to five. For each problem or conflict, the students can vote by holding the card with their chosen solution number in the air. The teacher counts the numbers and records the winning solution.

Once all solutions to the problems or conflicts have been evaluated by the students, they should reflect together on the results and on the fact that the solution has been decided on by majority.

Lesson 4

Our contract of rules

How do we write down common rules?

Learning objectives	The students develop a common understanding and learn how to identify with a commonly formulated agreement.
Student tasks	The students write down the common rules and sign their names to them. They discuss mechanisms for control and possible consequences.
Resources	Flipchart, pencils.
Methods	Plenary discussion.

Lesson description

Once all students have voted on the different solutions for the listed problems or conflicts, they are given the task of writing them down and making a “contract” of rules that can be signed by everybody.

In a plenary discussion, the students talk about how they want to design this contract. Will it be in the form of a flipchart poster, or written on a piece of A4 paper, or will it be a rolled-up document with a seal? They should agree on the form they prefer, if necessary again by majority decision.

The students are free to design the contract of rules in the way they wish, as long as the following criteria are fulfilled:

- All solutions that were agreed upon are written down in the form of statements.
- All students sign the contract underneath the statements.
- The place and date of signature is written on the contract.

Once the contract has been written and signed, the students should discuss what will happen if someone breaks one of the rules. Will there be any consequences? If so, what kind? How will keeping the rules be controlled? Is this everybody’s responsibility? Or are special people responsible for this? Will this be helpful or counter-productive?

Possible step: the consequences of breaking the rules are added to the contract (as an attachment).