

Case Studies

In small groups, choose three case studies and answer the following questions:

1. How do you interpret the situation?
2. What should be done?
3. What would you do if you were in the teacher's position?
4. In your groups, agree on a position.
5. Give a rationale for your solutions.

Case study #1 • Quiet and Loud

Ms. M was an experienced teacher and was generally successful at getting every student to participate. One semester seemed particularly difficult as her grammar class had mostly quiet students and a few very vocal students. She made sure to call on every student so that each one could have a chance to practice orally, but this meant that sometimes she had to ask other students to remain quiet. The quiet students tended to have a better grasp of the grammatical concepts than the other students but were more reticent to speak. One day after class, one of the vocal students, Priit came to her office and said that he wanted to be moved to another class as he was better than everyone else and none of the quiet students could speak or knew any English. The teacher explained to him that actually most of the quiet students had a better command of English grammar than he did and that they were simply not as talkative as he was. She denied the student's request to move to another class. About an hour later, a quiet student, Maarika, came to Ms. M's office and requested to move to another class because some of the students were too aggressive in the grammar class. Maarika went on to make the argument that the students should not be in the same ESL classes as loud students never allowed quiet students to speak and were arrogant.

Case study #2 • Moonlighting

A colleague of yours, Mr. X, has been moonlighting in parallel to his fulltime job for years. For a year and a half or so she has been complaining about not coping with the workload, increasing stress and even depression. You have heard from his students that he has often come to classes not having prepared, hands back the corrected tests and homework very late, and sometimes forgets to do this at all. Mr. X comes to you and says he has received a great offer – to give even more lessons at a private company for what he considers to be very good money.

Case study #3 • Sick day

Considered an excellent teacher, Mr. H had been teaching literacy and ESL at the local language school in a large urban area for several years. As a single parent, teaching daily from 9 o'clock until 12 o'clock allowed him to have his daughter, Anya, in preschool in the mornings and to spend his afternoons with her. His colleagues as well as the office staff knew and liked Anya as he often brought her into the office in the afternoon when he needed to complete work for the next day's classes. One morning at 8:45, Mr. H and Anya arrived in the ESL office. Mr. H explained that Anya had a cold and was running a low fever. Because he could not find a babysitter and Anya's preschool would not allow her to attend if she had a fever, he asked if the office staff could let her stay with them while he taught his classes. Mr. H proceeded to leave Anya to sit and draw in the back corner out of the way. He promised to look in on her between classes.

Case study #4 • Problems at home

Ms. R has been teaching at the same elementary school for some time and feels confident that her teaching methods are effective for learning English grammar and writing. She puts a lot of emphasis on home exercises and gives her students a lot of responsibility in the learning process. Sven is a shy student in her class who never brings his homework. After several weeks of the semester, Sven approaches Ms. R before class at her desk. He tells her a secret that he has to take care of his two three-year-old brothers in the evening because his parents work late. He has to cook for his brothers, make sure they are safe, clean up, and put them to bed. He also must take care of his siblings in the morning. He is too tired and doesn't have enough time or energy to do his schoolwork when his parents return home at 11:00 p.m. at night. Ms. R decides to punish and ridicule Sven in front of the whole class for not having done the exercises and not managing with his duties at home.

Case study #5 • Tardy colleague

Shortly after the semester began, Ms. G, the head of the English department, received two separate student complaints about her colleague, Mr. C's arriving late to class and not being prepared. Ms. G was troubled by these complaints because she had heard several make similar comments on Ms. C's evaluations the semester before. In addition, Ms. G worried about the standard of teaching at school, especially since she and other colleagues put many hours of work into carefully preparing their lessons and materials. Ms. G decided to investigate and began asking Ms. C's students and other teachers if Ms. C arrived to class on time, if she was well-prepared, if she returned papers promptly, and so on. Ms. G's probing questions made students and faculty uncomfortable.

Case study #6 • The lazy student

Marju, an advanced English learner, hoped to complete her high school studies and begin her undergraduate degree the next semester. Students at Marju's high school needed to successfully complete English classes with high marks in order to be admitted to university. Marju was doing fairly well in her classes except for Ms. O's writing class. It was obvious to Ms. O that Marju's overall English ability was better than that of most of the other students in the class. In addition, Marju wrote well as evidenced by her performance on the in-class compositions and exams. She, however, was frequently absent, having missed more than one third of the classes, and had submitted only 1 of the 6 required out-of-class essays. The last day of class when students were to submit their portfolios, Marju handed in hers with five essays and a rewrite of the one that she had handed in earlier in the semester. Marju's portfolio was better than the other students' and Ms. O was confident that Marju had done the work herself. Ms. O felt that Marju deserved to graduate and could handle university classes, yet she felt uncomfortable giving Marju a good grade in the class.

Case studies are loosely based on examples from Hafernik, J. J., Messerschmitt, D. S., & Vandrick, S. (2002). *Ethical Issues for ESL Faculty: Social Justice in Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and stories from the field.