LOOKING FOR TROUBLE:

CAN EDUCATORS FACILITATE LEARNERS' SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING CONFLICTS BETWEEN PEERS?

MAKING USE OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS IN AN EARLY YEARS SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This small-scale qualitative study concerned an analysis of educator responses to conflicts occurring in a cohort of 3 to 5 year olds in one particular setting. The design of the learning environment at the setting was informed by a social constructivist perspective and mediation strategies were routinely used to assist children in managing their own disputes. The study was designed to establish whether there was evidence to show that educator responses to conflicts between peers facilitated the learner's social development. Over a period of a week, all conflicts between peers were recorded together with any educator responses. The recordings were transcribed and analysed for evidence of learning opportunities in the social domain.

The results showed that mediation strategies were employed routinely by educators in supporting learners involved in conflict events. There was evidence that the strategies used were beneficial to learners in that they enabled them to practise skills conducive to social development. The conclusions drawn were that mediation strategies are compatible with the principles of empowerment and inclusion of learners. Further research over a longer period could help establish whether such benefits are evidenced over time as well as in the moment and help promote mediation strategies as a valuable tool for the educator.

Key words

Social constructivist, social competence, mediation strategies, cessation strategies, naturalistic intervention strategies, teachable moments, conflict, zone of proximal development

CHAPTER ONE   Introduction

Research Context

The study concerned the teaching of social development in early childhood education. It is well documented that the achievement of social and emotional competence has wide ranging positive consequences (Chorpita and Barlow 1998; Weare and Gray 2003; Denham, Bassett and Zinsser 2012). Indeed, according to Weare and Gray (2003), 'Emotional and social competences have been shown to be more influential than cognitive abilities for personal, career and scholastic success' (p.34).

It is incumbent upon educators to provide an environment which optimises learning. Creating an environment where children's feelings are acknowledged and accommodated in an atmosphere of safety and emotional security is the right of every child as reflected in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012 (DfE): 'Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them' (p.13). This statement represents more than benevolence in that it recognises that cognitive and emotional processes are 'fundamentally inseparable' (Weare and Gray 2003 p.34). Therefore, the educator who seeks to do justice to the worthy aspirations enshrined in statute and optimise learning must be concerned to ensure that opportunities to promote social and emotional development are exploited.

It is also incumbent upon educators to provide a learning environment which optimises inclusion. Poor social skills may result in children being rejected by their peers, thereby limiting their access to learning opportunities in the social domain. Matthews (1996) reported that 'children who are rejected by their peers exhibit more aggressive behavior (sic), try to exert control during an interaction and are more disagreeable' (p.94). It follows that such children might well be frequently involved in conflicts, thereby running the risk of further or entrenched alienation in a cycle of

thwarted attempts to engage with peers (Katz and McClellan 1997; McCay and Keyes 2002). In a child-centred environment i.e. an environment where child agency is optimised, the challenge of achieving inclusion may be made harder where peer rejection occurs and children are thereby denied access to positive social interactions, a major teaching and learning resource in the constructivist classroom.

Social competence is strongly connected with emotional wellbeing. Peer rejection can result in feelings of alienation, social isolation and low self-esteem (Choi and Kim 2003). The acquisition of social competence does not develop in isolation but requires support from educators when learners' skills are insufficient to manage social challenges (Kemple and Hartle 1997). One of the greatest challenges for educators is how to help children to develop social and emotional competence. It is acknowledged in the literature that social competence is an important factor for academic success, inclusion and emotional wellbeing. However, there has been little research into *how* early childhood educators can facilitate social competence (Mashford-Scott and Church 2011; Denham et al. 2012).

The major tenet upon which this study is based is that incidents of conflict between peers comprise a potent mix of elements which offer significant learning opportunities in the social and emotional domains. The immediacy and proximity of experiencing a conflict situation optimises the likelihood of emotional and cognitive engagement by protagonists. Conflict offers opportunities for the exercise of self-regulation of emotions and interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Of course, children (and adults) find conflict situations challenging, not least because of the complexity of simultaneous skills exercise which may be necessitated in dynamic circumstances and where emotions may be heightened. In my view the skilled educator can support parties in conflict to promote skills development, taking into account issues of power imbalance, emotional investment, language skills and the social and the emotional facility of each protagonist.

Personal context

In my professional life, I have had considerable experience of working with people involved in interpersonal conflict. Initially I worked as a lawyer specialising in family law, advocating on behalf of individual clients involved in private law disputes such as divorce and residence and contact issues regarding children. I became disenchanted with the adversarial nature of litigation which I believed often failed to address the underlying issues of the dispute adequately, but simply imposed a judgment. I became increasingly interested in alternative ways of managing conflict. I trained as a lawyer mediator whereby I worked with both parties in dispute, facilitating communication and enabling them to manage issues themselves as far as possible. The principle at the heart of mediation practice is that the parties themselves own the process. The mediator enables them to work towards resolving disputes independently rather than relying upon a third party to impose a judgment or solution. It is focused upon processes rather than outcomes. In short the mediator optimises the parties' communication skills, providing support where necessary. One of the advantages of this approach is that the parties are able to learn from their experiences and as a result gain more understanding and insight, improving their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

My experience as a mediator has had an impact on my practice as a teacher and as a researcher. As a teacher, I have been able to make use of mediation strategies when working with children which formerly, I had used with adults. As a researcher, I have been influenced by my experiences of how challenging it is for many adults to communicate effectively and constructively with one another. Irrespective of their academic or professional status I found many adults required support with fundamental inter-personal skills. Crucially however, the majority were receptive to support and mediation was almost always helpful in helping the parties resolve some or all of the issues in dispute. With support and guidance most people improved their communication skills both in discrete sessions and over time. I became interested in how social development might be facilitated from the early years when such skills are

in their nascent state. Weare and Gray (2003) confirm that, 'Children benefit from learning emotional and social competence from a very young age and need to be taught in the kinds of environments that promote emotional and social competence from the start (p.52). As an educator in an early years' setting I was in a position to begin that process. My idea for the study stemmed from a desire to explore how successful our efforts to promote such competencies might be.

The Aim of the Study

Consideration of personal social and emotional development (PSED) as a prime area of the Early Years Foundation Stage permeates every aspect of pedagogical practice. Beyond the Early Years Foundation Stage there is no statutory requirement to teach PSED. Discrete non-statutory programmes are frequently used to address this area of learning. One such programme is Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) which aims to provide educators with 'an explicit, structured whole-curriculum framework for developing all children's social, emotional and behavioural skills' (DFES 2005 p. 5). The inference is that discrete teaching of PSED is the most effective. I was interested in the manner in which educators interact with learners in naturalistic ways and the impact this has on their learning. All social interactions provide a model to learners of how to operate in the social domain and as people recognised as authorities, adults' interactions with children occupy a position of particular influence (Crawford 2005). The aim of the study was to examine one aspect of such interaction; how educators responded to instances of social and emotional discord – conflict between peers. In the setting we aim to teach children social skills in a naturalistic manner, in other words in our everyday routine, as well as discretely as a whole class. I wanted to conduct an evaluation of that approach and establish whether we actually used strategies designed to facilitate social development and if so, whether there was evidence that the strategies used do indeed facilitate such development.

The Research Questions

The study was designed around these three questions:

How did educators respond to conflicts between peers?

Was there evidence of educators' attempts to support social development of learners?

Was there evidence that educators' responses facilitated the social development of learners at the setting?

Terminology

Definitions of terms used in the study are addressed as they occur in the body of the text. However, in order to provide clarity, I have explained the adoption of particular terms which appear throughout:

I chose to use the terms 'educators' rather than 'adults' or 'teachers' and 'learners' rather than 'children' or 'pupils'. These terms were adopted because of their neutrality. There is no indication of power relationships implicit in the terms and they imply an absence of hierarchy. These characteristics appealed to me. Indeed, in a constructivist classroom anyone might be seen as an educator, a learner or both. The terms were intended to be applied as verbs more than nouns.

Although the focus of the study concerned teaching strategies, those strategies must be understood, and evaluated in the context of social and emotional development theory. There are numerous definitions of social and emotional competence and the term itself describes phenomena with various alternative terminologies such as 'emotional intelligence' or 'emotional literacy'. Weare and Grey (2003), suggest that the term 'competence' is particularly suitable for educationalists since it implies, 'knowledge, attitudes and behavioural components' (p14), in contrast to disciplines concerned with pathology or therapy for example. Therefore, the terms 'social

competence' and 'emotional competence' were used throughout to define the area of interest in the study.

Organisation of the Study

In Chapter two, the literature is reviewed in respect of philosophical bases to education, theoretical models of learning and teaching and approaches to conflict and conflict resolution. The dominant teaching strategies evidenced in managing conflicts between peers, namely cessation and mediation are explored and located within their philosophical and theoretical models, instructivist and social constructivist, respectively. The concept of experiential learning is compatible with the use of mediation strategies. Many educationalists, philosophers and psychologists have identified direct experience as crucial to learning. Dewey (1859 -1952), Piaget (1896 - 1980) and Vygotsky (1896 -1934), three of the greatest influences on education in the twentieth century all emphasised the need for learners to experience first-hand, the object of enquiry. The phenomenon of experiential learning in education is explored and within that, the concept of the 'teachable moment' is highlighted and examined. Whereas experiential learning focuses upon the learner, 'teachable moments' shift the focus towards the educator. It is this specific aspect which was the subject of the research question, 'Was there evidence of educators' attempts to support social development of learners?' In other words did educators avail themselves of the teaching opportunities afforded by the conflict events?

Chapter three sets out the philosophical basis underpinning the study both in terms of research paradigm and the principles which provided the impetus for its conception. The construction of the research questions is discussed; the research design is explained and justified. The context in which the study was situated is described and the participants are introduced. The ethical implications of the study and potential dilemmas are highlighted.

Chapter four sets out the method of data collection and the framework for analysis.

In Chapter five the results are tabulated and explained with reference to the research questions. Specific data are highlighted as examples of particular strands of qualitative data.

In Chapter six the implications of the results of the study are discussed. Its limitations are considered. Parallels are drawn and philosophical connections made between theories of pedagogy which highlight the importance of direct experience and mediation strategies by reference to the literature reviewed.

Chapter seven summarises the conclusions drawn from the study. Ideas for further research are suggested.

CHAPTER TWO   Literature Review

Introduction

Pedagogical approaches to conflict between peers can be usefully categorised as cessation or mediation strategies. Those strategies may be seen as influenced by instructivist or constructivist philosophies respectively. The first part of the literature review focuses on theoretical models of teaching and learning and the philosophical bases by which they are underpinned. A theoretical model of social and emotional development is identified. The advantages of pedagogies which emphasise the value of direct experience and learner-agency are highlighted.

The second part of the literature review is focused upon PSED. The teaching of social development is explored, commentators' ideas on conflict are reviewed and a definition of conflict elucidated. Evidence which suggests that social development in children is facilitated by social constructivist strategies is explored by reference to literature on conflicts between children. Cessation and mediation as conflict management strategies are compared and evaluated.

Instructivist and constructivist theories

The philosophical basis of the study is informed by a social constructivist perspective of education. Educational theory and practice in the U.K. was greatly influenced in the last century by constructivist theorists, notably Piaget (1896- 1980), Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) and Bruner (1915-), but also by instructivist theorists informed by positivists including Watson (1878- 1958) and Skinner (1904 -1990). These two dominant traditions stem from contrasting philosophical and theoretical bases and warrant consideration since each is reflected in current educational practice today.

The ontological basis on which Instructivist theory is grounded regards reality as independent and 'external to individuals'. Reality is regarded as 'knowable', (Cohen et al. 2007, p.7). Knowledge is assumed to be empirically based, mirroring the external world and mapping reality onto the minds or behaviours of the learner, (Porcaro, 2011). Instructivists are concerned with facts, truth and that which is scientifically verifiable. Instructivist teaching may be characterised by didactic teaching methods whereby the more knowledgeable educator delivers a curriculum which is received by the learner.

 Constructivist theory covers a wide range of perspectives. However, whilst most accept the existence of an external reality, constructivists argue that reality can only be subjectively perceived and interpreted. Constructivist epistemology regards knowledge as made rather than discovered, (Pritchard and Woollard 2010). Scientific methods are but one way of making sense of the world and pure objectivity of perception is not possible since meaning is a conceptual construction. Whereas instructivists seek proof, constructivists seek meaning.

Social constructivism is a branch of constructivist learning theory which places the social aspect of the construction of knowledge at its heart, fundamental and necessary to learning such that, 'this constructed product [knowledge] cannot come into being before its social invention' (Pritchard and Woollard, 2010, p.9).

Some commentators question the validity of the apparent dichotomy between instructivist and constructivist theoretical models. Pring (2004), states it represents a 'philosophical trap…It is the ancient dualism between mind and body, between the publicly accessible and the privately privileged' (p.33). Cohen et al. disagree: 'How one aligns oneself in this particular debate profoundly affects how one will go about uncovering knowledge of social behaviour' (p.7). The concept of learning adopted by the educator may have fundamental pedagogical consequences. If the educator regards her role as one who imparts to learners' knowledge of reality; 'the way things *are'*, her motivation will be quite different from the educator who regards her role as one who collaborates with learners to develop *their* knowledge, skills attitudes and beliefs. The latter represents a more child-centred model of teaching whereas the former focuses upon knowledge as external to the learner, (Silver and Harkins, 2007). These two approaches can be seen as 'poles on a continuum of educational practice' (Porcaro, 2011, p.40) since much practice is pragmatic and dependent upon macro- and micro- cultural considerations and influences such as national and school-based policy, consensus and tacitly agreed ways of working.

Teaching and learning

Piagetian constructivist learning theory asserts that the learner constructs their own *individual* understanding of reality based upon his or her perceptions of an objective external reality. For social constructivists such as Vygotsky (1978), learning takes place in collaboration with others and knowledge is socially constructed within a specific cultural context (Porcaro, 2011; Edmond and Evans, 2012).Vygotsky (1978), rejected the Piagetian theory of development and learning as independent of one another, claiming that this approach precluded 'the notion that learning may play a role in the course of development', (p.80). He also rejected the behaviourist model of *learning as development* whereby, 'learning and development are reduced to conditioned responses and innate responses are replaced by those which are learned' (p.79). According to Vygotsky's theory of learning and development, the two are mutually

dependent and interactive. 'Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers' (Vygotsky, 1978, p.90). Vygotsky (1978) described the effective educator and learner relationship as operating within the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD).The actual level of development of the learner is a measure of completed developmental cycles; that which is secure and which can be demonstrated independently. However Vygotsky pointed out that whereas learners may reach similar attainment levels at that first level, what they can achieve with the support of a more able other, (the next level), may vary considerably. The lacuna between these levels comprises the ZPD. He defined it thus: 'It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'(Vygotsky 1978 p.86).

 Social constructivist theory regards language as playing a crucial role in development. Whereas for Piaget, language development follows cognitive development, according to Vygotsky language precedes development: It is 'having the linguistic label [which] enables us to develop the concept, (Edmond and Evans, 2012). Bayer, Whaley and May (1995) confirm that 'The dialogue of an adult and child within the space of the ZPD contains the essence of social developmental processes' (p.408). Vygotsky illustrated the process of social cognitive development whereby the child articulates the problem to herself before learning to use social speech as well as egocentric speech. Thereafter, the child internalises social speech thus effecting increased social development

> The greatest change in children's capacity to use language as a problem solving tool takes place somewhat later in their development, when socialised speech (which has previously been used to address an adult) *is turned inward.* Instead of appealing to an adult, children appeal to themselves; language thus takes on an *intrapersonal function* in addition to its *interpersonal use* (1978 p.27).

Whereas most early childhood educators would accept that modes of teaching should be multisensory so as to optimise learning opportunities, much practice remains didactic, formal and directed, informed by instructivist approaches, either by design or by default. The current political climate is target- driven and curriculum focused with educators under pressure to demonstrate academic progress (Williams, 2008; Alexander, 2010). Numerous studies suggest that prevailing teaching strategies focus upon compliance, subduing and preventing distraction from the formal curriculum at the expense of approaches which optimise learner participation, collaboration and agentic modes of learning (Bayer et al. 1995; Chen, 2003; Silver and Harkins, 2007; Blank and Schneider, 2011). Jenkins, Ritblatt and McDonald, (2008) call this a 'deficit mentality', 'the idea that if time is given to one subject, it must be taken away from another' (p431). In instructivist influenced settings, dominated by measureable outcomes diversions from systems and curriculum focused activities may be regarded as time- consuming distractions as illustrated by Adams and Sasse Wittmer (2001) in their article on conflict resolution: 'A systematic approach to teaching a problem-solving process can yield such positive outcomes…. Educators will need to spend less valuable time arbitrating disputes' (p.10). This exemplifies the instructivist approach in that it is outcome driven, (the goal being resolution) rather than process-driven, teacher-directed rather than child-centred and a generalised rather than an individualised strategy. This approach overlooks potential opportunities to teach social skills utilising the potency of direct experience. In addition, 'children may lack appropriate skills simply because they do not have the opportunities to learn and practise them' (Katz and McClellan, 1997, p. 9).

Bandura (2001) asserted that a paradigm shift was necessitated from behaviourist, 'input-output' (and by extension instructivist) theories of learning because of a failure by behaviourists to recognise the part played by the child in their own learning. According to Bandura (2001) people are, 'agents of experiences rather than simply undergoers of experiences' (p.4). Rather than a mere recipient of stimuli, the child is an active participant, acting upon stimuli, employing a synthesis of sensory, motor, and cognitive skills.

In recent years developments in other academic disciplines have lent support to teaching approaches informed by social constructivist perspectives. Rushton (2011) points to advances in neuroscience confirming the 'unique organisation' of each brain and concludes that 'A 'brain-compatible' classroom enables connection of learning to positive emotions. The most naturalistic way for this to occur is by allowing students to make relevant decisions and choices about their learning,' (p.92). Pritchard and Woollard (2010) cite the psychology based self- determination theory adduced by Ryan and Deci, (2000) in support of constructivist based pedagogies:

> The findings of Deci and Ryan have led to the idea of three innate psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness. When these are satisfied within the classroom, enhanced self-motivation and emotional well-being are likely to follow; if they are not satisfied, learners become demotivated and disengaged (p.31).

Social and emotional competence

The relationship between social competence and emotional competence requires clarification since the two are not synonymous.

Emotional competence concerns *intrapersonal* knowledge, attitudes and skills. The components of emotional competence include, self-awareness; the ability to identify one's own emotional state, self-regulation; the ability to manage one's emotions, and resilience; the ability to employ coping mechanisms, (Weare and Grey, 2003; Denham, et al. 2012; Evans and Price, 2012; Woolf, 2012).

Social competence concerns *interpersonal* knowledge, attitudes and skills. It implies the ability of an individual to interact with his or her physical and social environment according to context specific norms, integrating sensory, cognitive and motor skills moment by moment. Further, social competence involves culturally appropriate responses to one's own and to others' socially determined goals, (Barblett and Maloney 2010). In short, social competence concerns the ability to forge mutually

satisfying relationships with others, (Katz and McClellan, 1997; Stanton-Chapman, Denning et al. 2010), a fundamental aspect of mental health and well-being. Rubin and Rose- Krasnor, (1992) provide a useful definition of social competence as 'the ability to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations' (p.4). I have used this explanation to define social competence as it is meant in this study.

Social competence is dependent upon emotional competence which in turn depends upon the quality of care-giving (attachment) (Katz and McClellan 1997; Ashiabi 2000; Evans and Price 2012). Early childhood educators are care-givers and as such their influence upon emotional development may be significant or even profound. Evans and Price (2012) confirm that, 'issues of social and emotional learning are now firmly established as being of significant influence on broader issues of learning, welfare and wellbeing' (p.119). Therefore educators need to recognise the link between the behaviour of children in their care and those children's interpersonal and intrapersonal stages of development. The framing of social competence as developmental, where social skills move from 'primarily egocentric approaches to increased perspective-taking abilities,' (Silver and Harkins, 2007), affords the educator the opportunity to consider strategies for facilitating development (Han Kemple, 2006).

Experiential learning

The notion of learning through direct experience rather than through instruction alone has a long tradition in education (Ethridge and Branscomb, 2009). Rousseau's (1762) work Emile, illustrates his belief that the teacher should respond to the natural interests of the child. Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) believed that education should be a balance of 'heart, head and hands' representing the spiritual, intellectual and practical, none of which should be neglected. He advocated starting from what he called 'Anschauung', or direct perception.

Dewey (1938) highlighted the importance of direct experience as fundamental to effective learning. He recognised what he called, 'an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education' (p.20). For a young child in an educational setting, interests and concerns are often of an immediate, tangible yet transient nature. In an active learning environment there are constant opportunities, challenges, negotiations, alliances, in an ever changing social landscape. It follows then that many of the child's interests and concerns will be of a social nature. There are experiences to be had. Although each experience is unique, the resulting social challenges are not and these reoccur to provide opportunities for the exercise and development of social skills. To what extent the child can operate effectively in the social domain will depend upon her level of development. Dewey (1938) made the point that just because education is borne of experience; all experiences are not of themselves, educational. Thus, the educator has an important role in supporting the child as she negotiates the social landscape, sensitively assisting her to frame her experiences in terms which are educationally constructive. For Dewey (1938) active experience is necessary but not sufficient to constitute education. 'Everything depends upon the *quality* of experience which is had' (p. 27). This is the basis of the principle Dewey called the 'experiential continuum'. An experience is educational according to Dewey (1938) when it comprises two elements; interest and influence on experiences that follow. The educator is positioned to be an influence upon learners' experience.

Recent advances in neuroscience affirm Dewey's emphasis on the importance of direct experience to learning. Rushton (2011) cites four basic principles of 'brain-based learning' that is, using pedagogic strategies which are consistent with current neuro-scientific knowledge as to how the brain is organised. The author argues that neuroscience confirms the belief that 'children's brains need to be immersed in real-life, hands-on, and meaningful learning experiences' for effective learning' (p.89).

Approaches to teaching social development

There is broad agreement that poor social skills are linked to anti-social behaviour (Broadhead 2009). McLaughlin (2008) noted the increased recognition of the importance of addressing social and emotional development in education in the last decade: 'The focus on emotional well-being is an international phenomenon and policy initiatives in education can be found in Australasia, the Americas and across Europe' (p.354). She cites Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (DES 2005) as evidence of such a policy in the UK. SEAL (DES, 2005) was widely adopted by primary sector schools in the UK to promote pro-social behaviour in children. Adopting a whole school, long term approach, SEAL (DES 2005) aimed to inculcate values and modes of conduct explicitly taught and reinforced by educators. Whilst recognition of the importance of addressing social and emotional development as part of the primary curriculum is to be welcomed, both its impetus and its sufficiency are questionable. Social compliance is not the same as social skill development and programmes such as SEAL (DES 2005) have received criticism for aiming to subdue children rather than to extend their social skills (Kivel 2006). Indeed, Craig (2007) in her critique on SEAL (DES 2005) describes attempts to get children to adopt particular values as 'disrespectful and disempowering' (p.74). These criticisms highlight the important point that attempts to address social and emotional development in education are not *intrinsically* positive. Although the Early Years Foundation Stage (DFE 2012) situates personal, social and emotional development (PSED) as one of three *prime* areas of learning, beyond that phase of education there is a danger that a discrete approach, such as SEAL (DES 2005) is regarded as sufficient to address this crucial area of learning. Ethridge and Branscomb's (2009) study concluded that personal experience is a necessary component of learning for young children. They reported that 'hearing information and reflecting on it through discussion were not sufficient' (p.406). This supports the contention that situations which challenge children's social skills (such as conflicts) have richer learning potential than teacher-constructed approaches taught discretely via a curriculum.

Conflict

Conflict may arise intentionally or unintentionally but it is inevitable wherever there is human interaction (DeVries and Zan 1994). Early years settings are highly social, complex environments and so may be particularly challenging for children. It is incumbent upon educators to ensure that learners are sufficiently socially competent to engage and participate so as to optimise inclusion (McCay and Keyes 2002; Weare and Gray 2003).   Conflicts between peers are regarded by many educators as an unwelcome distraction from learning and as intrinsically anti-social in nature because of negative associations with aggression and socially undesirable or proscribed behaviours. The opportunity for naturalistic behaviour increases the probability of conflicts which helps explain why some educators resist informal or naturalistic learning environments preferring order, discipline and compliance with authority. Conflicts may involve aggression on the part of one or more of the protagonists but aggression is not intrinsic to conflict. Engaging in conflict is not in itself anti-social although it may be perceived as such by educators (Bayer et al. 1995).

Blank and Schneider (2011) describe the concept of conflict as 'a cultural invention' (p. 198) thereby highlighting its subjective definition. The definition of conflict adopted in this study is provided by Chen (2003) as where 'a person protests, retaliates or resists the actions of another' (p.203). The educator's strategy in the face of peer conflict will depend upon the complexion of the particular incident but will be influenced by whether she perceives her role as to achieve compliance in learners or to provide strategic assistance to enable them to manage conflicts more skilfully; in other words, a teaching and learning opportunity. According to Chen, Fein, Killen and Tam (2001) conflicts afford 'natural contexts for children to develop socially, morally, and cognitively' (p.540). Piaget (1959) regarded conflict as an important means of reducing egocentrism thereby recognising its potential value as a means of social and emotional development, as *competent* conflict management can be regarded as social rather than egocentric in orientation. Nutbrown (1996) sites pedagogical practice within the context of respect for children and their rights to assert their own interests. She advocates the teaching of assertiveness as 'this way of working is not about

judgements or rights and wrongs as seen through the eyes of the educator. It is about self-assertion, children protecting themselves, their feelings and their bodies' (p.105). Mediation strategies attempt to enable learners in this way.

Management not resolution

Mashford-Scott and Church, (2011) make a distinction between educator strategies intended to bring resolution to conflicts and those intended to promote agency. This is a useful distinction in that it recognises that agency is 'foundational to learning, development and wellbeing outcomes' (p.16). It also recognises that conflict situations provide a potential vehicle for such development, social, emotional and linguistic. They confirm that 'It is widely acknowledged that children learn and develop through *active* interaction with others and participation in their environments' (p.16). Thus, it is helpful to conceptualise responses to conflicts as 'conflict management' rather than 'conflict resolution'. That is the terminology I have adopted throughout the study as it accurately reflects the focus of my concern.

Optimum intervention

Katz and McClellan (1997) describe children's social interactions as involving 'recursive cycles' of behaviour that become internalised and are reinforced by peers. They argue that young children who experience difficulty in their interactions with peers should be supported by expert others in order to help them shift from a negative to a positive cycle. This 'optimum intervention' approach allows children the opportunity to resolve disputes themselves but offers support where necessary. It acknowledges and values the part which may be played by peers in the construction of social mores but also potential learning which a more able other can facilitate. Adult intervention could potentially apprehend child-initiated conflict management thereby precluding positive collaboration between children. Ideally children develop these skills themselves 'largely through their own efforts and in the company of more expert peers, rather than in the company of adults actively seeking to 'scaffold' their development'

(Broadhead 2001 p.34). Indeed, the mere presence of adults may inhibit children's negotiations. Adult support does not necessarily assist social development. The aim of the research project is to consider what kinds of intervention might.

Teachable moments

Hyun and Marshall (2003) reported that no definitive explanation exists of what constitutes a 'teachable moment' in early education literature although the description given of what they term 'on the spot support' described by Kemple and Hartle (1997) satisfies the criteria of a teachable moment:

> One of the most useful sets of tools an excellent teacher of young children may possess is her skill in facilitating children's interactions as they are occurring, in the least intrusive way that is effective for a particular situation, for a particular child, at a particular time' (p.140).

Arcaro-McPhee, Doppler and Harkins (2002) used the phrase 'teachable moments' to describe how educators can observe, monitor and react 'only when children's skills fail them' (p.20). This description exemplifies the naturalistic, optimum intervention strategy which underpins the approach at the setting and which is the focus of this study. There is compelling evidence to suggest that mediation strategies are effective in facilitating skills development. Bayer et al. (1995) confirmed that, 'In general higher levels of cognitive, social cognitive and social development are associated with children's abilities to negotiate interactional opposition effectively and appropriately' (p.406). In order to learn how to negotiate effectively, children need the opportunity to practise them (Katz and McClellan, 1997).

Cessation and mediation strategies

Chen (2003) defined cessation strategies as: 'interventions focused on the external management of conflict situations by telling or directing children on what they should do, physically separating the children, and/or by removing the source of conflict to

end the dispute' (p.205). Cessation strategies prioritise whether consciously or unconsciously the maintaining or restoring of peace by use of what Silver and Harkins (2007) term, 'external management'; that is, external to the learner.

Chen (2003) defined mediation strategies as, 'interventions focused on helping the conflicting parties resolve their own conflicts' (p.205). Evidence suggests that settings in which mediation based approaches are employed result in children resolving a greater proportion of conflicts themselves (Chen, 2003). According to Chen (2003) 'there are strong theoretically based recommendations' for the use of mediation strategies in conflict management (p.205). The use of these strategies is consistent with a social constructivist approach and Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (Sims, Hutchins et al. 1996; Chen 2003; Blank and Schneider 2011).

Silver and Harkins (2007) confirmed that studies have shown pre-school aged children are able to demonstrate conflict management skills. Their research findings indicated that, 'Those children in classrooms characterised by more mediation strategies were more successful in the resolution of conflicts than those children in classrooms characterised by fewer mediation strategies' (p.628). They also reported that the former group used 'higher levels of negotiation strategies' than the latter (p.628). It follows that time spent in supporting children in managing incidents of conflicts is well spent. Cessation strategies may be appropriate where there are safeguarding issues such as emotional distress or intimidation but as a default approach to conflict management cessation strategy may preclude development and result in more anti-social behaviour on the part of learners.

CHAPTER THREE   Methodology

Principles underpinning the study

The impetus for the study stemmed from a conviction of the importance of PSED and a desire to explore this area with a view to developing practice. PSED is a generic term and as such lends itself to incorporation of core principles which I wanted to underpin the specific focus of both the study and my practice. The core principles comprise inclusion and empowerment.

I have employed the term inclusion in its widest sense to include notions of social justice, not just for individuals but for the community and wider society. Inclusive practices *teach* children how to be inclusive rather than merely enable them to participate. Nutbrown confirms this view: 'Inclusive education is as much about helping children to behave inclusively as it is about including particular marginalised groups' (2011, p.77). Within a social constructivist paradigm we are shaping our social reality together. Learners act as agents in this symbiosis and act as educators of others. Therefore inclusion must be a fundamental concern for educators in the constructivist classroom.

There is an abundance of evidence to support the view that autonomy is key to effective learning (Bandura 2001; Pritchard and Woollard 2010; Rushton 2011). The concept of empowerment however, whilst incorporating notions of agency and autonomy has a wider interpretation. Children are particularly vulnerable as a group in our society in that they are subject to physical, political and social structures in every aspect of their lives yet from which they can be denied a voice. Pedagogies which are child-centred such as *Te Whariki* and Reggio Emilia are based upon respect for the right of children to work in alliance with adults rather than reliance upon them. This represents both a political and s philosophical stance discussed further below.

Constructing the research question

My decision to focus upon conflict, one specific area of social interaction as a window into children's social development was borne of a number of factors. As a manifestation of social difficulty, incidents of conflict represent opportunities to teach (Katz and McClellan, 1997). Pressure to focus upon curriculum or planned activities means that such teaching opportunities can be overlooked. I wanted to explore whether we were overlooking those opportunities in our setting. I wanted to examine whether and how mediation approaches to conflict management were compatible with a social constructivist theories of teaching and learning. I was interested in why we intervened in disputes at the setting, which pedagogical strategies we used and to what extent do those strategies correspond with our stated philosophical approach to conflict management. Finally I wanted to look for evidence of the effectiveness of our interventions in facilitating the social development of the children in our care. These considerations formed the bases of my research questions.

The long-term goal of educators concerned with PSED is children's acquisition of social and emotional competence. This is not the same goal as achieving resolution to conflicts between peers. Conflict resolution as a goal is short term and product focused. In other words, a resolution to a conflict howsoever achieved is a successful outcome in relation to that goal. Although learning and development may ensue as a result, that is not the primary concern. Therefore, acquiescence, apology, cessation or passivity could achieve the goal of resolution. Social development as a goal is open-ended and process focused. I wanted to establish whether educators were effective to any extent in supporting individual children, whatever their developmental level, manage the challenges inherent in conflict in a manner which helped them to make progress, however small, in their acquisition of social skills. Denham et al. affirms this approach: 'The more microanalytic elements of SEL [social and emotional learning], at the model's lowest level—all of which are primarily individual—are vital contributors to a child's ultimate successful, effective interaction with other people and associated age-appropriate tasks' (2012, p.179). Through these considerations I determined that

my research question would focus upon educator responses to conflicts rather than learners'. The wording of my question was chosen to reflect that the ownership of the conflict should belong to the parties to the conflict rather than the educator, hence the terms 'facilitate' and 'during' rather than 'teaching' and 'managing' by educators which both imply power and control are assumed by the adult.

Because, by their nature, conflicts are unplanned, naturalistic intervention strategy, or what Kemple and Hartle (1997) call 'on the spot support' (p. 141), can be used to offer assistance to learners as they experience social challenge rather than postponing intervention to a more convenient time or addressing issues in a planned, discrete session. Whilst such alternatives may have value, naturalistic intervention strategy has several advantages. From a social constructivist perspective it affords opportunities for discourse between peers and between learner and educator as a 'more able other'. It enables skills to be practised and modes of more constructive interaction to be learned as interaction occurs and it is specific to the individuals involved. It offers 'teachable moments'. I used this phrase rather than 'on the spot support' or 'naturalistic intervention strategy' because of the implied opportunity inherent in the phrase and the fleeting nature of that opportunity. Also its purpose is explicit in that teaching and learning is the intention rather than the aim of moral support or the restoration or establishment of order.

Research design

The strategies integral to the research design comprised aspects of case study, grounded theory and action research. The intention was to collect qualitative data by way of observation from the whole cohort and colleagues in the setting over a week. I made all of the audio recordings which comprised the data. My colleagues in the setting both of whom were participants in the study were given no instructions other than a description of the study in the information sheet prior to its commencement.

Case study

The case study aspects of the design evolved from considerations that stemmed from the research questions. One measure of the efficacy of educator responses to conflict incidents could be how well the needs of individuals of *differing* levels of development or social competence were met by educators. Given the age range in the cohort, the variation in language development was apparent as were differences in sociability, social competence and popularity. This provided a rationale for focusing on the whole cohort rather than an individual or a smaller group. Further, in their meta-analysis of the teaching of social and emotional competence in schools Weare and Gray (2003) found that much of the emphasis had been on children perceived as ' troublesome' and as a result 'troubled' children whose difficulties posed no problem to others might easily be overlooked (p.25). Therefore a focus on the whole cohort would potentially yield data on a variety of social characteristics rather than those in individuals selected by the researcher. Also, working with everyone avoided stigmatising the few (Weare and Gray, 2003). In addition, working with everyone in the cohort worked towards the goal of developing shared meanings in their interactions (Sims, Hutchins et al. 1996). This met my criterion of inclusion as a key aspect of my aims as a researcher and as an educator.

There were pragmatic reasons for adopting the whole cohort as my research sample: Denscombe (2010) emphasises issues of feasibility in relation to choice of research strategy. My choice was influenced by my obvious data source i.e. the cohort, which suited the aims of my research questions exactly. In addition I had to consider the amount of data I was likely to amass over the collection period. The cohort is small and the collection period was short. An even smaller sample may have resulted in little or no data.

Denscombe (2010) defines a case study as boundaried, 'so that it is distinct from other things of the same kind', in other words it is 'a self-contained entity' (p.56). The purpose of a case study is to 'understand the complex relationship between factors as they operate within a particular setting' (Denscombe, 2010, p.5). This focus upon

relationships and processes suited both the social constructivist paradigm in which the study was sited and its aims.

Grounded theory

The study shares aspects of grounded theory in its design. Grounded theory suits small scale research projects concerned with qualitative data. My study was exploratory in that it sought to find out what occurred during conflict events to generate theory as a result of its findings. (Denscombe 2010).The design did not involve testing a theory as none of the educators had received training or instructions relating to mediation strategies with children. Their responses were all naturalistic i.e. carried out as part of everyday routine. The requirement of the approach to be 'grounded' i.e. based on empirical evidence suited the research question which asked 'How do educators respond to conflicts between peers?' which sought to establish what *actually* happened rather than what ought to happen. I set out with an open mind but from a certain perspective; the principles that underpinned the study of empowerment and inclusion, and the notion that conflict events held learning potential. I wanted to explore whether this notion was 'grounded in reality' (Denscombe 2010 p.123).

Action research

Although my study is not predominantly action research it shares some of the characteristics associated with the strategy in terms of motivation, method and purpose. In their meta-analysis of works of action research Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) suggested criteria common to the genre included the requirement that it should be 'practice-oriented', that is, carried out with a view to improving practice, explicit about its assumptions and reflective (p.417-418). Certainly, one of the motivating factors in my choice of study was that of self-reflection and I was keen to build this in to the design. McNiff (2002) expands on this when she explains action research as:

> ...a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be. Because action research is done by you, the practitioner, it is often referred to as practitioner based research; and because it involves you thinking about and reflecting on your work, it can also be called a form of self-reflective practice [pages not numbered].

Self-reflection is central to action researchers: 'Empirical researchers enquire into other people's lives. Action researchers enquire into their own' (McNiff 2002). Because my data included my own interactions with participants it was important for me to be self-critical and self-reflective when analysing the data and the results. This was so in terms of both the purpose and the strategy of the study. The purpose relates to personal motivation. Elliot (2013) describes educational action research as 'an activity of the spirit'. In doing so he is not referring to a religious conviction but as 'the search for experiences in the teacher's transactions with their students that enhance their feelings of psychological effectiveness and thereby intensify their sense of self' (p.8). In other words a search for personal values reflected in practice.

Action research is not however, a purely introspective exercise. Its philosophical routes lie in critical theory, concerned with bringing about change for the improvement of individuals, communities and wider society (Cohen et al. 2011). As such action research is intrinsically political:

> 'Action research' is more than just another way of finding out: it is a challenge, a political position, that says research is a form of (political) action in the world, and our actions, thoughtful as they are, can and should involve research' (Stern 2013 p.126).

My study was intended to be relevant to me personally but I hope to my environment and community; not just an academic exercise. Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) confirm that action research is 'focussed on significant issues relevant not only to themselves but also to their community/organisation or fellow human beings in the wider world' (p. 418).

Ethical considerations

In this section I have used the term 'children' rather than 'learners' to signify the special status of children as a vulnerable group in relation to ethical considerations.

In working with children in any capacity issues of child protection and safeguarding arise. Working as a researcher raises further specific duties and considerations. Having

outlined the following procedures to be applied throughout the course of the study and thereafter, ethical approval was granted by Sheffield University School of Education Ethics Review Panel which gave consent for the study to proceed. (C.F. Appendix 1).

Given that the study was to be conducted at the school where I am employed as a teacher, I first sought approval to proceed from the head teacher having sent him a copy of my research application to Sheffield University confirming the ambit of the study and the consequent ethical considerations. Having received his approval I then sought consents from those potentially involved in the project, and where minors, their parents.

Parents were each handed a letter and an information sheet explaining the proposed study and their child's potential participation in it. Voluntariness of participation and the fact that consent could be withdrawn at any time without explanation were emphasised. The letter invited parents to a meeting to discuss the study or to ask questions about it and the offer was made to speak to parents individually about any questions or concerns they might have. All children in the cohort were potential participants and all parents granted consent for their children to take part if they wished to do so. Confidentiality was assured along with the caveat that child protection issues would over-ride this assurance.

Gaining consent from children to participate in the study raised issues particular to them as a vulnerable group. I had to take into account when seeking informed consent from young children several factors:

Imbalances of power

Our fiduciary relationship made it easy for me to gain consents. The advantage of an existing relationship meant that I was trusted and familiar to the children. The research was to be undertaken in their ordinary, familiar surroundings. However, the fiduciary aspect of the relationship meant that as the authority figure my request was unlikely to be declined. I could not know categorically that consent was willingly given. This placed the highest ethical burden upon me to ensure that I had considered every aspect of the study in terms of its potential impact upon the welfare of each child.

Informed consent

Because of the academic nature of the enterprise, concepts beyond the experience of the children (such as universities and research), and the varying degrees of language and cognitive development amongst them I had to choose the language employed with care with the aim of optimising the children's understanding of just what it was they were being asked to participate in. In order to try and obtain informed consent from the children for their participation I first spoke to them as a class in their usual classroom setting. I did this the week before the planned data collection to give them time to reflect upon what was being proposed but not so long as to lose relevance for them before the project began. I used simple language to explain my purpose and what was proposed. I showed the children the digital recorder I planned to use and how it operated. I approached each child individually the following day, reminded them of my proposed study and asked them as neutrally as I could if they would prefer to be recorded or not recorded. I took account of indications from demeanour and body language as well as verbal responses.

Confidentiality and child protection

It was important for me to be explicit with the prospective child participants about child protection issues and to be sure as far as possible that they understood what I was telling them. I explained that I could only keep good secrets and never bad secrets so that if someone was hurting them then I could not keep it a secret. This was my attempt to explain the caveat to confidentiality.

Confidentiality of data

The audio recordings were kept under my sole control. No-one else was given access to them. All of the transcripts made of the recordings were composed on a lap-top computer which was password protected. All protagonists were given pseudonyms so that none was identifiable. At the conclusion of the study the audio recordings were destroyed.

On-going consents

All of the children and their parents gave their consent to participate. On-going consent was monitored throughout the project with a view to ceasing recording of any participant who appeared to be uncomfortable or in any way compromised as a result of the data collection procedures with the assumption that consent had been withdrawn.

My two colleagues at the setting were recruited informally at first through dialogue. They were later each handed an information sheet together with consent form to take away and consider. I invited each of them to ask questions or discuss and questions or concerns that they might have before obtaining their verbal and signed consents. Finally, at the beginning of each day of data collection I checked for their individual on-going consents.

Wellbeing of participants

The welfare of children remained paramount and over-rode any research considerations. Had any distress as a direct or indirect result of the research been caused, involvement of the participant(s) in the project would have ceased immediately. If any issue relating to child protection had arisen, I would have made a report to the designated officer for child protection in the school without delay.

In respect of adults, if a conflict of interest had arisen, professional considerations would have over-ridden research considerations so that professional relationships would not have been compromised.

Observations took place over a discrete period (five days) and not beyond. Individual recordings ranged from a few seconds to several minutes but no child was recorded for more than fifteen minutes per day and no adult was be recorded for more than thirty minutes per day so that recording was not over burdensome or overly intrusive for any individual participant.

CHAPTER FOUR   Method and framework for analysis

Context and participants

The study was set in an independent school in rural Oxfordshire. The cohort comprised sixteen learners between the ages of three years and one month and five years and seven months. They were all members of the Foundation class at the school. All the learners were fell time save for three of the youngest children only one of whom featured in a conflict event during the data collection period. There were three members of staff involved in the study all of whom worked in the Foundation class. They comprised: me, a qualified teacher and Head of Early Years Foundation Stage at the school where I had worked for four and a half years; an Early Years' Practitioner with a Level 3 NVQ who had worked at the school for eighteen months and an Early Years' Assistant with a Level 3 NVQ qualification who had worked at the school for six months. The children spent full days in the setting. typically from 8.30 am until 4pm. Data collection took place between these hours. Usually two or all three of the educators who took part in the study were present throughout the day including lunchtimes.

Method

Data collection took place over the period of a working week (five consecutive days) in the spring term. I chose a week in the middle of the half term where the children would be engaged in their usual routine in the hope and expectation that their interactions would be typical and unaffected by extrinsic events. I decided to limit total recording time to thirty minutes per day and determined to record no individual for a total of more than fifteen minutes per day. These restrictions were adopted for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was aware that data collection involved an extrinsic invasion of privacy for children and colleagues and I wanted to be as unobtrusive as possible. Also, I did not want anyone or any area of the learning environment to be

adversely affected by my preoccupation with the study and so aimed to achieve a balance of competing responsibilities. Finally, I needed an amount of data which would be manageable and I estimated that a maximum of two and a half hours audio recordings would be more than sufficient to satisfy the aims of the study.

During each of the five days I carried a small cloth bag over my arm which contained the audio recorder. The children were aware of its contents and although there were two verbal expressions of interest during the week, it was largely ignored by them. Every conflict between children of which I was made aware was recorded during the week. I carried out all recording because this yielded more data; events in context and visual data. It also afforded me the opportunity to make an audio aides-memoire. Each evening I listened to the recordings and established in each case whether the criterion of conflict had been satisfied, i.e. whether the interests of one party were perceived by them to be at odds with the interests of another and he or she protested, retaliated, or resisted the actions of the other (Chen, 2003). I ensured that recordings were transcribed on the day that they were made in order to assist recollection and memory retention.

Data

During the data collection period thirteen incidents were recorded. Of the sixteen learners in the setting, thirteen were recorded. All of the educators, including myself, were recorded. Of the three children not recorded, one was absent and two part-time. None of the two was observed to engage in any conflict event over the data collection period. The audio recordings which involved conflict events ranged from 30 seconds to 5 minutes and 22 seconds in duration. The total time of audio recordings of conflict events amounted to 33 minutes and 54 seconds. The qualitative data was transcribed as accurately as possible, with indications of pauses, or visual cues being recorded as they were heard or recalled by me as witness to them. These indications were a valuable source of data.

Although my motivation for the study was borne of interest in mediation strategies as an educational tool, my analysis did not use pre-defined codes of recognised mediation practice. My analysis was inductive and the codes 'emerged' from the data (Cohen et al 2007). I chose this method of analysis for several reasons: I would have prejudged what I expected to see from the data rather than discovered it empirically. The evaluation of practice was an important aspect of the study and central to the research question above; also, had I used pre-defined codes I may have overlooked significant data which did not fit my codes. The grounded theory approach required very thorough sifting of data and I found that revisiting the data many times helped me to avoid the 'premature formulation of theory' which Cohen et al. warn against when using this approach (2007 p.492).

Analysis

The process of transcribing the audio recordings was illuminating. As I listened, listened again, transcribed, read and re-read I became aware of minutiae which changed how I perceived the data and revealed insights which would have been overlooked by a more cursory perusal. Clough and Nutbrown (2007) refer to this phenomenon as 'radical listening' whereby subjects of research are recognised as participants as their 'voices' are really heard (p.79).

In my analysis each research question was addressed. The first question, 'How did educators respond to conflicts between peers?' was unproblematic. I categorised each event as cessation or mediation strategy on the part of educators. Cessation strategies were characterised by educator attempts to bring the event to a close by imposition of a judgement, direction or closed question(s). Mediation strategies were characterised by educator attempts to facilitate management of the process by the parties to the conflict event. The one event where there was no educator involvement was classed as mediation strategy since it fulfilled the criterion.

There were some inherent difficulties in linking the data to the research questions. The first lay in establishing what counted as evidence to address the second research question 'Was there evidence of educators' attempts to support social development of learners?' My grounded theory approach meant that although I was using an interpretive model of data analysis, I needed to establish that my interpretations were empirically based (Denscombe 2010). Strategies imply intentions on the part of educators. I could not infer intentions on the part of educators since intentions are not observable. However, I determined that I could observe actions which demonstrated pedagogical approaches which may or may not be intentional. From these approaches I was able to constitute strategies. The educator strategies I constituted from analysis of the data are listed in appendix 2.

My research questions were focused on educators' strategies but my analysis had to include learner responses to those strategies as an indication of their efficacy to address the research question, 'Was there evidence that educators' responses facilitated the social development of learners at the setting? This was the most important research question since it provided the basis of the whole study. The difficulty here was that of measurability. I could not measure the efficacy of educators' interventions by measuring the actual level of individual development in the learners engaged in the conflict event due to issues of validity and reliability. The modest aim of the research question was to establish whether educator responses to conflict events in the setting were useful in that they enabled potential learning in the social domain. To answer that question I based my analysis on what learners were enabled to practise as a result of the educators' strategies.

Framework for analysis

After familiarising myself with the data I began the process of applying initial codes. Domain analysis was used as a method. A cultural domain is a generic category into which other smaller categories of related meaning can be situated (Malloy and McMurray 1996; Cohen et al 2007). The cultural domain which constituted my first categorisation of the raw data was that of 'enabling' strategy on the part of educators. This initial coding was very broad; asking merely; 'Was the strategy identified helpful to learners in any way?' A 'broad-brush' approach was used as I did not want to discount data that might have proved significant had it been included. I then coded pro-social actions of learners within that cultural domain. The coding within both cultural domains was refined several times to ensure consistency of interpretation across all events.

Codes

Constructive dialogue
Involves more than speech: one or more of the following must be present:
negotiation, willingness to engage in problem solving, acknowledgement of others'
issues.
a = No constructive dialogue
b =Constructive dialogue between educator and learner(s)
c = Constructive dialogue between learners supported by educator
d = Constructive dialogue between learners without educator support

Listening
Involves more than silence: one or more of the following must be present: response
(verbal or non-verbal) in response to other parties to conflict
e = No listening
f = Listening between educator and learner(s)
g = Listening between learners with educator support
h = Listening between learners without educator support

Clarification of issues
Occurs when all parties to the conflict become clear about the points at issue
i = No clarification of issues
j = Issues clarified by educator
k = Issues clarified by learner(s) with educator support
l = Issues clarified by learner(s) without educator support

Mutualising of concerns
Occurs where there is a realisation that the parties share the same or similar goals
that are not incompatible with one another.
m = No mutualising of concerns
n = Concerns were mutualised by educator
o = Concerns were mutualised by learner(s) with educator support
p = Concerns were mutualised by learner(s) without educator support

Accommodation of others' interests
Occurs when one or more of the following is present: offer to compromise, offer of
solution, empathy, generosity, friendly overture, altruism
q = No accommodation of others' interests
r = Accommodated of others' interests by 3rd party solution
s = Accommodation of others' Interests with educator support
t = Accommodation of others' Interests without educator support

CHAPTER FIVE   Results and interpretation

Results

Social interaction analysis results																			
	Dialogue				Listening				Clarifying				Mutualising				Accommodation			
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
1				*				*	*							*				*
2			*					*				*		*						*
3	*				*				*				*					*		
4			*					*				*	*							*
5			*					*				*				*			*	
6			*					*		*						*			*	
7				*			*		*				*						*	
8		*				*			*					*			*			
9			*				*		*				*						*	
10			*				*				*			*					*	
11		*					*				*		*				*			
12		*			*					*					*				*	
13		*			*						*					*			*	

Conflict event number

Table 5.1

The social interaction analysis results are shown in table 5.1. Of the thirteen conflict events one was categorised as a cessation strategy (event 8). All of the other conflict events were categorised as mediation strategy. Event 1 involved no adult involvement but was witnessed. Event 3 involved a child who was not a party to the conflict, in the role of educator. She volunteered a solution to the protagonists in the dispute and the adult educator affirmed her actions. The results in relation to that event are given in relation to the parties to the conflict rather than the third party. The initiation of educator involvement, length of events and specific strategies used are outlined in Appendix 2.

Evidence of interpersonal skills used by learners																			
Dialogue				Listening				Clarifying				Mutualising				Accommodation			
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
1				*			*									*				*
2		*						*				*								*
3																				
4		*						*				*								*
5		*						*				*				*			*	
6		*						*								*			*	
7				*			*												*	
8	*					*														
9		*					*												*	
10		*					*				*								*	
11	*						*				*									
12	*					*									*				*	
13	*					*					*					*			*	

(Transcript number — left-side vertical label)

Table 5.2

Cessation strategy results – Event 8

Learners engaged in dialogue and listening with the educator but not with one another. There was no evidence of any other social skills employment.

Mediation strategy results – Events 1-7 & 9-13

Learners engaged in dialogue in eleven of twelve events. In six events dialogue between learners was supported by the educator and in two, dialogue took place without support.

Learners engaged in listening in eleven of twelve events. In five events listening between learners was supported by the educator and in four, listening took place without support.

Learners engaged in clarifying issues in six of twelve events. In three events clarifying issues was supported by the educator and in three, clarifying issues took place without support.

Learners engaged in mutualising in five of twelve events. In one event, mutualising was supported by the educator and in four, mutualising took place without support.

Learners engaged in accommodation of others' interests in ten of twelve events. In seven events accommodation was supported by the educator and in three, accommodation took place without support.

Interpretation of results

The results show clearly that approaches satisfying the criteria of mediation strategies were used during most responses to conflict events between peers during the data collection period. Where mediation strategies were used by educators there was clear evidence of attempts to facilitate learners' social development: Educators were neutral in approach; listened; invited dialogue between the parties; explored issues by questioning rather than directing; clarified positions; mutualised areas of agreement; offered solutions; acknowledged feelings and affirmed pro-social conduct. Aside from directing the parties to meet, no directives were given.

The results indicate that optimum intervention strategies were used successfully since skills deployment by learners took place without support in seven of the twelve conflict events where mediation strategies were employed. Where support was not necessary, none was given, at least in these instances. Where support was given in every event where mediation strategy was employed, learners exercised skills.

Some of the data represented conflict incidents were more significant than others in terms of qualitative data. This was due either because of brevity of the event or because of its lack of significance to the parties. The results of the conflict event which resulted in event 1 (the sole example of no educator response) indicated dialogue, listening, mutualising and accommodation were all achieved without support. However, the incident was very brief and appeared to pose little social or emotional challenge to the parties. In terms of quantitative data, all events yielded data pertinent to the research question, 'Was there evidence that educators' responses facilitated the social development of learners at the setting?' The results in table 5.2 illustrate instances of social skills practice with and without educator support, all of which would have been apprehended by cessation strategies. However,

the relative value of learning as a result of mediation strategies is revealed by examination of the qualitative data.

I have chosen to comment specifically on three events, two of which suggest that mediation strategies facilitated learning in the social domain. The first event (reproduced in table 5.3) represents the only instance of aggression witnessed between peers during the data collection period. This provides an example of an incident involving high emotion, albeit brief. The second event (reproduced in table 5.4) constitutes an example of an exchange between peers who have limited language development. The final transcript (reproduced in table 5.5) is the sole example of cessation strategy.

The conflict event in table 5.3 involved George, a boy aged 4 years 11 months and Gilbert a boy aged 5 years and 2 months. A game of pirates is taking place between Gilbert, George, Billy and Florence in the garden. Billy alerted Olive, the educator to tell her that George had taken Gilbert's sword.

Table 5.3

Transcript 6	Exchange	Mediation strategy
George	(Shouting) I didn't snatch it you liar!	
Olive	(Calmly) George, could you come here please?	Neutral approach
George	(Calmly) I didn't snatch it.	
Billy	(Calmly) You did	
George	I didn't	
Billy	Did	
George	I just said I'd give him a thousand pounds	
Billy	He didn't	
George	I did	
Olive	Gilbert, Could you come here too please? Ok, who does this involve?	Brings parties together
George	I said I'd give him a thousand pounds didn't I Gilbert?	
Olive	Gilbert could you tell me, or could you tell George what happened?	Invites dialogue between parties
Gilbert	He just snatched it off and said please, please, please loads of times	

Olive	Said please, please, please loads of times? Because you really wanted that did you? (To George)	Acknowledges feelings
George	(quietly) Yeah…	
Olive	And who had it?	Seeks clarification
Gilbert	(Calmly) I had it first	
Olive	Is that right?	Seeks consensus
George	Mmm…	
Olive	So what could we do?	Asks learners to generate solutions
Florence	Maybe… maybe, George can go first, Gilbert can go first, George can go first and Gilbert can go first	
Olive	So they could take it in turns?	
Florence	Yeah!	
Olive	I think taking turns is a good idea but…	Seeks to give ownership to protagonists
George	Oh! Another good idea! You can have the hat and I can have the sword! And that'd be a good idea! Yeah? So we can both be Peter Pans.	
Gilbert	Oh we can't. We can't	
Olive	Why?	
Florence	Because there's no because there's no…two Peter Pans	
Gilbert	I think we have to make two Peter Pan costumes	
Olive	Do you? Is there any? What bit did you really want?	
Florence	I'm going to read my Peter Pan book	
George	I just really wanted this (the sheath he's wearing)	
Olive	You really wanted that. What about you? (To Gilbert)	
Gilbert	Erm… I think we have to make Peter Pan costumes	
Florence	Wait, wait… I got a genius…	
Olive	Wait a minute 'cos we need to listen to Gilbert and what he wants because he had it first. What do you think?	
Gilbert	I think you have to make Peter Pan costumes. One for George and one for me.	

In the above exchange mediation strategy enabled Gilbert and George to assert their positions, generate their own solutions, mutualise their interests and compromise. These actions represent evidence of interpersonal skills. In addition George was able

to regulate his emotion which before the intervention had been unregulated as evidenced by his aggression.

The conflict event reproduced in table 5.4 involved younger children with less-developed language skills. Florence, a girl aged 4 years and 7 months is sitting on a tractor tyre half of which is submerged in the ground. Peter, a boy aged 4 years and 5 months calls for help from Olive, the educator.

Table 5.4

Transcript 10	Exchange	Mediation strategy
Peter	Olive!	
Olive	Yes?	
Peter	Florence won't let me up there!	
Florence	But I like it like this. It's nice and comfortable.	
Peter	But Florence wasn't up there…Florence didn't…	
Olive	Did you speak to her about it?	Invites dialogue
Peter	Yes	
Olive	What did you say?	
Peter	I wanted to go up but she said no	
Florence	But I was…You can't snatch if you… if people climb there and…and…and girls fall and girls fall down they might hurt their heads and they might break their bones.	
Olive	So what are you saying? Are you saying that there's not enough room for two people on there?	Clarifies position – modelling language
Florence	Yeah…	
Peter	But it's not fair….Jasmine's on the other one	
Florence	Yeah 'cos I want to have some sunset	
Peter	Jasmine's on the other one…	
Olive	I know she is…What did you say Florence?	Acknowledges Peter's position
Florence	I said, I said no you can't but	
Olive	Oh, You wanted to sunbathe?	Clarifies language
Peter	But I want to do that too	
Olive	Is there room for two?	Explores solution
Peter	No	
Florence	He can go up on the (inaudible)	
Peter	I don't want to	
Olive	How long are you going to be there?	Explores solution
Florence	I just have a long, long time on here and Peter just have a long, long time on here yeah, and I have a long, long time here.	
Peter	I haven't!	
Olive	He hasn't had a go, Why don't you come back	Explores solution

	later? (To Peter)	
Peter	I don't want to	
Olive	Because this place is taken isn't it? Florence's here already. And if there's not room for two – I think she's right- do You? Do you think there's room for two up there? (Peter shakes his head)	Articulates problem .
Olive	No. there's only room for one person and she's there.	
Peter	But if you wanna go you can	
Olive	When no-one's up there you can.	
Florence	When Peter's down there and I just climbed up and I was here lying down.	
Olive	So what are you saying? Are you saying 'I was here first?'	Modelling language
Florence	Yes	
Olive	And 'I haven't finished yet'?	Modelling language
Florence	Yeah	
Peter	But (inaudible) take a long time	
Olive	But you could come back later	
Peter	I don't want to.	
Florence	You have to. You have to listen to Olive	
	A minute goes by	Allows parties ownership
Florence	I can be in this car!	
Peter	No I don't want to be the car. I'm going to wait here 'til Florence gets off	
Florence	Hey Peter! I can sit here and you can sit there	
Peter	But I might fall off	
Olive	Oh so if you're sitting and not lying down you think you can share?	Articulates the solution generated by Florence
Florence	Yeah	
Olive	Do you want to sit up there Peter? With Florence?	
Peter	I might fall off	
Olive	You think you might fall off so…	
Florence	No! You will sit here safely	
Olive	Florence thinks you can sit there safely. Do you want to have a look? Shall we have a look? What do you think? Do you think you can sit up there safely? (Peter nods)	
Olive	I'll help you climb up	
Florence	I can (inaudible)	
Olive	There we are. You can sit side by side. Do you feel safe Peter?	Mutualises positions
Peter	Uh-huh	
Olive	Good. Thank you Florence.	Affirms Florence's accommodation

In the above event mediation strategy enabled both parties to assert their positions

and listen to one another with support. Florence was able to generate solutions and

she accommodated Peter's interests. There was evidence that Florence was practising her language skills in her attempts to articulate the problem, her position and her solutions.

There was only one brief incident in which cessation strategy was employed. It is reproduced in order that the elements which justify its categorisation can be demonstrated. It is not presented as evidence that cessation strategies cannot facilitate learning.

In this incident Peter aged 4 years and 5 months and George aged 4 years and 11 months were repeatedly pushing over a large plastic seesaw. The conflict arose when each party blamed the other when challenged by an educator.

(Table 5.5)

Transcript 8	Exchange	Cessation Strategy
Daphne	I think I just saw you pushing the seesaw Peter (Calmly)	
Peter	He did it (pointing at George)	
Daphne	Are you sure?	
Peter	Yes	
Daphne	Now I know you weren't doing it to hurt each other because you were just trying to push it over but do you think that's safe to push it over like that?	Closed question
George	No	
Peter	He was doing it to me.	
Daphne	He was doing it to you.	
Peter	George	
George	I wasn't	
Peter	He was	
George	I was just joining in	
Daphne	What do you think you should just play together on the seesaw nicely so that you don't hurt anyone else?	Closed question
George	Ok then	
Daphne	Do you think that's the best thing to do George?	Closed question
George	Yes	
Daphne	Do you think that's the best thing to do?	
George	Yes	

In the above event, the educator achieved cessation of the anti-social behaviour. There is little evidence of interpersonal skills deployment by learners save listening and responding to the educator's closed questions. The questions are categorised as

closed when the answer is implicit in the question posed. It represents compliance on the part of the learners.

CHAPTER SIX   Discussion

The value of the study

The aim of the study was to examine one aspect of the teaching of PSED in the setting and evaluate its worth. That aspect was naturalistic intervention strategy and the use of teachable moments. The research question which asked; 'Was there evidence that educators' responses during conflicts facilitated the social development of learners at the setting?' was underpinned by two others:

'How did educators respond to conflicts between peers?' and 'Was there evidence of educators' attempts to support social development of learners?'

In the discussion that follows I will highlight the value of the findings before discussing the limitations and their ramifications.

The findings indicated that mediation strategies were routinely used by educators in their responses to conflicts. Conflicts were used as an opportunity to teach in all but one event. Chen (2003) confirms; 'Such strategies are in keeping with a constructivist perspective which views conflict [and its resolution] as an important part of the curriculum, rather than a problem to be managed' (p.205). The findings indicated that mediation strategies were conducive to facilitating social development. They enabled learners to practise several skills intrinsic to social development from a Vygotskian social constructivist perspective. Learning was collaborative and socially constructed within a specific cultural context (Porcaro, 2011; Edmond and Evans, 2012).

There was evidence of specific practice conducive to learning in the social domain as a result of mediation strategies in the following respects:

The results showed that children were enabled with or without support to engage in dialogue, listening and clarifying. Ideas were rehearsed in articulating problems and generating solutions. Educators modelled appropriate language where learners' skills failed them, according to Arcaro-McPhee, Doppler and Harkins (2002) the essence of a 'teachable moment'. These aspects were demonstrated in Table 5.4 where Florence struggled to articulate her position but succeeded in communicating them. Language plays an important role in social cognitive development (Bayer et al 1995; Vygotsky 1978). Florence may have been articulating the problem to herself, engaging in 'self-talk' as well as practising social speech. Using speech as an interpersonal function precedes the development of its intrapersonal use as a problem-solving tool (Vygotsky 1978).

Clarifying issues involves cognitive as well as language skills in that analysis is required. This was illustrated in event 10 at Table 5.4 where in resisting Peter's protestations Florence analysed the problem and the consequences that might flow.

The codes of mutualising and accommodating relate to intrapersonal as well as interpersonal skills in that they necessitated the ability to take on another's perspective and in the case of accommodation, to regulate egocentricity. In both events 6 and 10 at Tables 5.3 and 5.4 respectively, such skills were demonstrated as enabled by mediation strategies. Although George managed to regulate his emotions, in his proposed solution, he retained the sword, the source of the dispute. Gilbert however, in his proposed solution acknowledged George's desires and sought to accommodate them as well as his own. In event 10, Florence, after contemplating the problem for some time, moved from a position of egocentricity where she resisted Peter's wants to a position of accommodation when she made room for him alongside her. She did this after a good deal of thought. Where mediation rather than cessation strategies were employed, as here, learners were given time to reflect. Katz and McClellan (1997) confirmed the importance of allowing learners the time to practise skills and Ethridge and Branscomb (2009) pointed out that opportunities for reflection are a necessary component of experiential learning. Questions used by educators acted as prompts for such reflection.

An aspect of mediation strategy that also concerned time was that of immediacy. All educator responses to conflicts occurred contemporaneously i.e. none was postponed. Cessation strategy often involves postponing a response; 'See me at playtime' for example. Constructivist theory suggests that such postponement is not conducive to learning since it precludes active participation (Arcaro-McPhee, Doppler and Harkins 2002) and proximity. Rushton (2011) confirms the view that 'Children's brains need to be immersed in real life, hands on, and meaningful learning experiences' (p.92). Supporting children during rather than after the event potentially optimises the impact of these elements.

Weare and Gray's (2003) meta-analysis of PSED teaching found that the most effective programmes shared particular elements in that they were aimed at the promotion of the positive, environmental and not simply curriculum-focused and holistic, creating long-term impacts (i.e. changes to pupils' attitudes). Certainly the mediation strategies evidenced in the conflict events were without exception neutral or positive in approach. This unthreatening approach is evidence of the learning environment at the setting. The study was focused on one small aspect of the teaching and learning environment rather than curriculum focused and the evidence suggests that in respects of responses to conflict, the importance of the social environment is recognised at the setting with regard to the teaching of PSED. The long-term impact of the approach was not part of the study.

Mediation strategies enable educators to employ formative rather than summative assessment of learning so that teaching is tailored to individual needs. Torrance and Pryor (2001) found that formative assessment resulted in practitioners engaging in more complex interactions with children and making more finely grained judgements about their learning. Learners with ineffective interpersonal strategies may suffer rejection from their peers. The targeting of support within teachable moments may apprehend unhelpful strategies being rehearsed and embedded (DeVries and Zan 1994). Such targeting was illustrated in response to George in event 6 when his aggressive outburst disconcerted one of his peers who sought help from an educator. Mediation strategies used by the educator helped George to change his tactics and he

moved from verbally attacking his opponent to generating solutions in co-operation with his peers.

The principles underpinning the study were those of empowerment and inclusion. Rushton (2011) argued that educators should, 'allow young children to make their own decisions and choices' (p.90). The use of questioning and absence of directives suggests that learners were empowered by mediation strategies in that they retained relative autonomy. Using Nutbrown's (2011) definition of inclusion, which emphasised the need to teach learners inclusive practises as well as including marginalised individuals or groups, there was evidence of pro-social inclusive behaviour by learners. In fact, no-one in all thirteen conflict events was rejected or excluded by peers even where individuals' conduct was adjudged anti-social by them.

Limitations

The study's aims were met insofar as the three research questions were addressed and answered in the affirmative. I am satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that educator approaches to conflict at the setting are helpful to learners' social development. However, there were limitations to the study in terms of the evidence and its findings and these are now addressed.

The Evidence

The data collection was very small. This was due to a number of factors. There were time constraints and the cohort comprised only sixteen learners. In addition there were relatively few incidents of conflict during the data collection period and of these only one with a demonstration of aggression; event 6 at Table 5.3. Of the educator responses to conflicts, only one represented cessation strategy and so any inferences drawn could not be reliable as evidence. According to Denscombe (2010), the aim of a case study is to,' illuminate the general by looking at the particular' (p.53). It is not as credible to generalise from such a small data set as it might be if many more observations had been carried out. Theory is generated on the basis of what is confirmed again and again. This is the essence of inductive reasoning. However,

although not conclusive, the evidence findings did indicate that mediation strategies are conducive to learning in the social domain.

Bleach's framework of 'Levels of Evidence Parameters of Evidence Effectiveness of interventions' reproduced at Table 6.1 is helpful in evaluating the reliability of the findings. (Bleach 2013 p.21)

Levels of Evidence	Parameters of Evidence	Effectiveness of interventions
4. Causal	Sound and substantial evidence that the outcomes are as a result of the programme and/or clear evidence showing which ingredients of the programme are responsible for the outcomes i.e. repeated case studies or randomised control trial	Efficacious
3. Indicative	Systematic evaluation with evidence showing that the desired changes have occurred i.e. goals and outcomes are attained, competencies increased, high satisfaction rates	Functional
2. Theoretical	Sound, plausible programme rationale or theory to explain why a programme should work and with whom	Plausible
1. Descriptive	Clear, explicit specification of essential elements of programme: goals, target groups, methods and activities	Potential

(Table 6.1)

The study findings did not meet the criteria required to satisfy the highest level of evidence; causality, between interventions by educators and outcomes in terms of social development in learners. Although skills were practised by learners which are conducive to social development it could not be demonstrated that specific skills were developed as a result of particular educator responses. Influences upon social development come from a variety of sources, individuals, relationships and environments and it would be simplistic to assume one cause (i.e. the educator's intervention). In any event the study was concerned not with outcomes but processes and these were evident through analysis of the data. The next level of evidence; indicative, might be met by the design of the study with a larger data set and over a longer period. In this way theory generated would be more reliable and evidence analysis could take into account changes over time in learner competence as well as within the moment which would give corroborative indications of efficacy. Rubin and Rose- Krasnor's (1992) definition of social competence as 'the ability to achieve

personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with *others over time and across situations'* (p.4), (my italics) is illustrative of the limitation of my current study in that whether educator interventions during 'teachable moments' impacted upon learners over time and across situations was not measurable in the study. It was however, able to provide evidence of learners' skills deployment in the moment.

Case studies have a holistic focus rather than an outcome or end product orientation (Denscombe, 2010). Outcomes in my study are not easy to measure. Not only might learner performance be influenced by numerous and indiscernible factors, the impact of educator responses upon learner's social development may not be immediate. It may manifest later or not at all. Denscombe asserts that 'The real value of a case study is that it offers the opportunity to explain *why* certain outcomes might happen- more than just find out what those outcomes are' (2010 p.53). Certainly my study is concerned with outcomes that *might* happen and seeks evidence *why* that might be. In this study, systematic evaluation of evidence did show desired changes occurred. As the descriptive and theoretical aspects of mediation strategy are met, in my view the criteria for 'plausibility' are met with potential for 'functionality' according to Bleach's (2013) criteria.

There is a danger in assuming that the findings of a small scale study are generalisable beyond the confines of the sample. Denscombe points out that any such generalisation is 'theoretical' (2010 p.123). This raises the plausibility of a larger scale study or a study using separate samples for comparison.

Thomas and James (2006) dispute the status of grounded theory as 'theory' in the scientific as opposed to the vernacular sense. According to them, because grounded theory is a form of qualitative enquiry it is more accurately described as 'interpretation' (p 772). They regard grounded theory as having served a purpose historically in that it 'represented a resolution of different epistemological positions and a solution to a broader problem about perceptions of the status of qualitatively based knowledge in the social sciences' (p.767-768).Having served that purpose they claim slavish adherence to the procedures and concepts of grounded theory are a

hindrance and that 'grounded theory oversimplifies complex meanings and interrelationships in data' (p768) better served by other forms of qualitative enquiry. Thomas and James (2006) make a valid point in alleging that researchers concerned with qualitative enquiry are necessarily interpreters of data. In respect of their claim that grounded theory represent over-simplification of data, in my view that depends upon the focus of the research question as opposed to the data source. Qualitative data can be interpreted in a myriad of ways but specific questions require the data to be interpreted in ways which are constructive to their being addressed.

Thomas and James (2006) argue that constructivism is incompatible with grounded theory: ''Ground,' with its intimations of solidity and fixity, simply does not mix with 'construction,' with its contrasting intimations of the tenuous, the mutable, the interpreted (p.770). I have some sympathy with their view inasmuch as qualitative data is complex and heterogeneous and attempts to reduce it to categories can be seen as intrinsically simplistic. Thomas and James (2006) argue that unbounded and creative approaches to qualitative enquiry are likely to be more illuminating. They note that paradigm shifts are borne of imaginative and creative possibilities rather than of induction. However, I would argue that the aspects of grounded theory used in my study did not preclude creativity and imaginative possibilities in the analysis of data. I am using creativity in this sense as open-mindedness, sensitivity to other possibilities and willingness to 'listen radically' (Clough and Nutbrown 2007). The ordering and categorising of the data was a separate process, one which occurred after the creative process just described. This was necessary not in order to *reduce* ideas but to render them communicable. Further, the approach used was appropriate to the research questions. The questions were boundaried. The events, (although not the interpretation of those events), were pre-defined. Only certain aspects of the data were relevant to my aims, hence the need to refine through domain analysis what those aspects comprised.

Bridges (1999) challenges the notion that educational research need not establish itself as 'true'. He claims that establishing the truth or falsity of a proposition cannot legitimately be avoided. My study is not about establishing truth; it concerns usefulness, constructiveness, improvement, validity and plausibility. He says himself

that 'propositions of contested status', such as moral assertions may be manifestly true, establishing the truth of a particular proposition is, 'deeply problematic'. Bridges (1999) employs an unnecessary polemic. His approach attempts to reduce ideas to being either true or false, potentially jettisons much of what is of value. Indeed, notions of the 'truth' of certain ideas imply hierarchies of thought which may be undemocratic, exclusive and disempowering. From a constructivist perspective, truth represents a value judgement. I prefer to frame notions of truth in terms of effectiveness (Elliot 2013).

Questioning mediation strategies as empowering and inclusive

One of the principles underpinning the study was that of empowerment; the desire to optimise learner autonomy and agency by facilitating skills development. The use of mediation strategies in response to conflict events as a form of empowerment is recognised by Chen (2003) who described their use as 'fostering children's independence by helping children recognize that their ideas or feelings are different from another's ideas and feelings and by verbalizing their view' (Chen 2003 p. 205). However this position has been challenged some commentators. According to Wohlwend (2007) child-centred practices designed to empower learners 'may not be taking into account the potentially deleterious effects of children's agentic behavior (sic)' (p.74), suggesting that children can and do reinforce stereotyped and inequitable norms in their un-tempered situated identities. Wohlwend's construction of 'empowerment' differs from my own. To empower learners effectively is to support their development by optimising their agency. Optimising agency is not the same as maximising it whereby learners are left to their own devices. Optimum intervention requires skilled and sensitive pedagogy, providing support and guidance where it is needed. In her analysis of her own attempts to fulfil the role of child-centred mediator Wohlwend (2007) found a masked authoritarianism and contradictory aims of achieving child-independence but child-compliance. She cites examples whereby, 'adult authority was often masked by indirect and elaborated speech styles typified by parent and teacher directives delivered in the form of questions, suggestions, or explanations' (p75). I do not share Wohlwend's discomfort

with the concept of authority and neither do I see an intrinsic contradiction between independence and compliance. The authority of the educator can be an essential tool in supporting learners. It enables her to provide security, reassurance and guidance to learners when and where needed. It is where the power of authority is misused by educators as coercion, denying avenues for development or expressions of self that authority becomes problematic. Blank and Schneider (2011) also describe some mediation practices as embodying 'expectations of learner independence and covert expectations of child compliance' (p. 208). They argued that often, mediation strategies rather than seeking to empower learners fostered the use of language which 'revoiced' educators' authority (p.209). They cite practises of 'validating feelings', 'determining cause', 'eliciting information regarding resolution strategies' and 'describing and modelling expected language use' as destructive rather than constructive (p.209). There are elements of these practices in each of the three conflict events reproduced in tables 5.3 – 5.5. However, in my view Blank and Schneider's criticisms betray a confusion born of semantics. For example, *validating* feelings is a value-judgement and as such does not satisfy the criterion that mediation strategy should be impartial. *Acknowledging* feelings is a closely related but different in kind as it is value-neutral and as such satisfies the criterion. The emphasis on resolution is unhelpful in that it is goal-orientated rather than process-focused. In the former, the goal belongs to the educator. In the latter the process belongs to the learners. Ownership of the process by the parties is a key component of mediation strategy. The educator did generate solutions, particularly in event 10 at Table 5.4 where she suggested 'You could come back later', 'Is there room for two?' but crucially these were not taken up by the parties and were not imposed by the educator. It was interesting how Florence, recognising the educator's authority sought to capitalise upon it when she told Peter, 'You have to. You have to listen to Olive'. Notwithstanding this, in this event the parties maintained ownership of the process throughout. 'Determining cause' is also an educator led, goal- driven activity which does not constitute a mediation strategy. However, clarifying issues does since it involves supporting the parties to the dispute where needed and helps them to maintain control of the process.

Modelling is a valuable teaching tool. Crawford (2005) reported that 'Studies indicate that affective qualities are taught more effectively through authentic teacher modelling than through direct instruction or the implementation of a formalized character education program' (p.322). The use of language modelling can and should be judicious and employed where language skills are insufficiently developed (as in the case of Florence in Table 5.4) rather than as an imposition of ideas or covert directive. That said there are occasions when direction or cessation strategy might be appropriate. Where learner actions entail distress or danger, then other immediate considerations may override the learners' interests. As the 'more able other' (Vygotsky 1978), it is incumbent upon the educator to give support and guidance sensitively and appropriately depending upon the circumstances.

The conflict events which comprised the data were not highly charged with emotion. One of the potential difficulties with 'teachable moments', is accurate assessment of when a moment becomes teachable. Learners may be distressed, angry or emotionally overwhelmed by a conflict event and it might be that comfort or reassurance might be more appropriate responses in the immediate term.

CHAPTER SEVEN   Conclusions

The research questions

The modest aim of the study was to answer these three questions in respect of the setting: 'How did educators respond to conflicts between peers?'; 'Was there evidence of educators' attempts to support social development of learners?' and 'Was there evidence that educators' responses facilitated the social development of learners at the setting?'
The conclusion is that educators at the setting appreciate the potential teaching and learning opportunities that conflict events offer. There is evidence that their

interactions in this regard over the data collection period were helpful to learners' social development.

Personal reflections

The study has proved to be a journey of learning and reflection for me. I have been introduced to writings of those concerned and engaged with ideas about the nature of teaching and learning, knowledge and 'reality' and I have been inspired by those able to crystallise and communicate their ideas and experience which resonate with some of my own, nebulous and unarticulated thoughts. Motivated by a desire for my research to be practice based, the purpose of the study was to evaluate practice, with a view to its development and improvement. The highlights of the study included studying the works of others as just described but also studying the minutiae of interactions between children. All of the participants in the study are well known to me and as a practitioner I spend each day in cycles of observation and planning informed by observation. However, the intense focus and reflection necessitated by repeated sifting of data revealed to me degrees of insight which were surprising and illuminating.

The representation of the data and the findings was problematic. I had doubts about how to represent the findings fearing discrepancy between analysis of data and its representation. I struggled with notions of legitimacy, truth, interpretation, discovery and theory. I think that struggle lies in the siting of my study as within social constructivism whilst wanting to demonstrate rigour and validity. Although I believe that reality can only be understood by us through conceptual constructions it is not the case that all constructions are of equal value. I think the struggle I have experienced has been a search not for 'truth' but for authenticity and I believe that doubt has proved a useful tool in this regard.

Wider Implications

The study has given rise to several potential areas for further enquiry:

Mediation strategies represent one form empowerment in action. The focus upon mediation strategies as a vehicle for development has provided a microcosm of the potential value of empowerment as a vehicle for learning across other areas of the curriculum and as a philosophical basis of education. Research into how the potential power of this approach might be better realised could be illuminating.

Further research over a longer period could help establish whether the benefits of mediation strategies are evidenced over time as well as in the moment and help promote mediation strategies as a valuable tool for the educator.

According to commentators and from anecdotal evidence, most educators use routinely employ cessation strategies in the face of conflicts or other threats to order and compliance (Silver and Harkins 2007). Alternative strategies in managing conflicts are worthy of far more attention since they have been given relatively little attention in educational discourse.

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Dear Nicola

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER
Dissertation - Early Childhood Education (EDU7100)
Title of Research: How can practitioners facilitate children's social development when managing conflicts between peers?

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc   Dr Ann Clare

APPENDIX TWO

Event outlines

1.1 Non-intervention

Transcript	Recording duration	Adult involvement initiated			Adults	Children
		None	**By adult**	**By child**	**Non – Intervention strategy**	**Evidence of learning**
1	35 secs.	*			Observed	Dialogue established Complaint verbalised Positions asserted All parties satisfied by concession made

1.2 Cessation Intervention

Transcript	Recording duration	Adult involvement initiated			Adults	Children
		None	**By adult**	**By child**	**Cessation strategy**	**Evidence of learning**
8	35 secs.		*		Neutral approach Directed Closed questioning	

1.3. Mediation intervention

Transcript	Recording duration	Adult involvement initiated			Adults	Children
		None	By adult	By child	Mediation strategy	Evidence of learning
2	3 mins. 10 secs.		*		Neutral Directed parties to meet Invited dialogue Listened Explored issues by questioning Mutualised areas of agreement	Dialogue established Problem analysed Listened Positions modified Compromise achieved Moved from egocentric position Friendly overtures accepted and reciprocated
3	50 secs.		*		Affirmed child's strategy to child & gave practical support to implementation. Affirmed child's strategy to protagonists	Cognitive problem solving employed and solution offered to protagonists in dispute.
4	2 mins. 7 secs.			*	Neutral Invited listening Invited clarification Affirmed positive conduct	Dialogue established Positions asserted Co-operated Evaluated
5	5 mins. 2 secs.			*	Neutral Invited dialogue Explored issues by questioning Listened Acknowledged feelings Offered solutions Clarified positions	Dialogue established Positions asserted Listened Acknowledged positions Mutualised Offered solution Compromise achieved Friendly overtures accepted and reciprocated

6	2 mins 40 secs				*	Neutral Directed parties to meet Clarified positions Listened Explored issues by questioning Mutualised areas of agreement	Listened Positions asserted Compromise offered Solution offered Mutualised areas of agreement Friendly overtures accepted and reciprocated
7	30 secs.				*	Neutral Invited dialogue between children.	Dialogue established Verbalised complaint Apology offered and accepted
9	1 min. 35 secs.				*	Neutral Listened Invited dialogue Explored issues by questioning Offered solutions Affirmed positive conduct	Dialogue established Listened Positions asserted Accommodated other's interests
10	3 mins. 43 secs.				*	Neutral Listened Invited dialogue Explored issues by questioning Clarified positions Mutualised areas of agreement Offered solutions Acknowledged feelings Affirmed positive conduct	Positions asserted Position modified Offered solutions Listened Accommodated other's interests
11	5 mins. 22 secs.				*	Neutral Listened Directed parties to meet Acknowledged feelings Clarified positions Explored issues by questioning	Listened when directed Positions asserted
12	4mins 23 secs.				*	Acknowledged feelings Invited dialogue Explored issues by questioning Listened Clarified positions Directed –	Positions asserted Solution offered Friendly overture
13	3 mins. 22 secs.			*		Explored issues by questioning Offered solutions Clarified problem	Positions asserted Problem analysed Offered alternative solution & implemented it