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Teaching Toddlers to Solve Social Problems

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Abstract

Toddlers' peer conflicts, common in early learning centres, have the potential to be powerful learning events, however, the quality of learning is often dependent on how teachers respond. There is a paucity of research that explores how teachers can promote toddlers' learning within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand. Prompted by this deficiency, this study explored teachers' self-reports of their roles, their teaching practices and the conditions that influence and, specifically support, teachers' responses to toddlers' peer conflicts, within the contexts of four early learning settings. The study used a mixed methods approach, with focus group interviews and a web-based questionnaire, to explore the perspectives of 31 toddler teachers. Findings suggest that the key teaching roles were to: protect toddlers, physically and emotionally; advocate for toddlers without judgment; and to role model and coach social-emotional skills. Through these roles, and by utilising conflicts as teaching and learning opportunities, teachers' intentions were to empower toddlers and teach them social-emotional skills that they might later use independently. In this context, teachers' professional decisions regarding how and when to intervene in toddlers' peer conflicts were made in response to concerns for toddlers' safety, both physical and emotional, and were guided by teachers' knowledge of, and relationships with, the toddlers involved. Results suggest that effective teaching practices were supported by: positive, responsive relationships; teachers' in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; professional learning; perspectives of toddlers as learners and of conflicts as learning events; teachers' emotional awareness; and the desire to maintain toddlers' dignity, esteem and mana.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This study explored teachers' self-reports of their responses to toddlers' peer conflicts, and highlights the practices that teachers value and use to support toddlers (one to three-year-olds) and promote their learning, during moments of peer conflict. Factors that influence teachers' practice, and that support effective practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, are also explored, to give insight into the conditions that enable teachers to promote valuable learning outcomes for toddlers.

The study used a mixed methods research design and drew on the perspectives of 31 toddler teachers, from four early learning settings in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a researcher and teacher, I was guided by a pragmatic approach to research, and an eclectic theoretical approach to teaching and learning for young children. To set the context for the present study, this introductory chapter begins with an outline of my background, including my views as a researcher and teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand, before providing a brief overview of early childhood education for toddlers in Aotearoa New Zealand. A rationale for the study focusses on interactions that are everyday events for toddlers in early education and care settings—toddlers' peer conflicts—and argues that it is critical to know more about how teachers can support toddlers and promote their learning in moments of peer conflict. This rationale leads into a description of the research aims, to explore teachers' roles and the pedagogical practices that teachers value and use within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Finally, key terms are described and defined.

1.2 Researcher Background

Ko Takitimu te waka

My waka is Takitimu

Ko Waitaki te awa

My river is Waitaki

Ko Aoraki te maunga

My mountain is Aoraki

Ko Ngai Tahu te iwi

My iwi is Ngai Tahu

My teaching background is in playcentre, education and care centres, and kindergartens, where I have worked with infants, toddlers and young children. I currently work as a relieving teacher, which allows me opportunities to get to know many teachers, families, young children and toddlers in a range of early childhood settings. Through my teaching experiences, I have become increasingly interested in how toddlers are supported, and how their learning is promoted, in early learning settings, and I have become increasingly aware of how critical it is to support and promote toddlers' social-emotional skills. I believe it is valuable to explore the beliefs and practices of teachers who work with toddlers, to gain a richer understanding of current approaches, and to examine this in light of current research related to social-emotional competence.

1.3 The Aotearoa New Zealand Context

As a teacher and as a researcher in early childhood education one of my first considerations is my commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Through Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand has a commitment to provide an education system where pedagogy is informed by Māori worldviews and language, and where Māori children can succeed, as Māori. As a bicultural document, Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), brought hope that this commitment might be honoured. There was a "new era of bicultural expectations" (Ritchie, 2002, p. 33), at least in early childhood education. Progress has been noted, for example by Ritchie (2002, 2013) who suggests that bicultural development is supported in early childhood centres where teachers follow *Te Whāriki's* principle of empowerment and build relationships with Māori whānau. However, over 20 years after the introduction of *Te Whāriki*, Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood education system remains dominated by English worldviews and language. For example, of the 3633 services reporting use of te reo Māori in 2014, aside from Kohanga Reo, there were only 28 early learning centres and one kindergarten where te reo Māori was spoken more than 50% of the time (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 22). It is important to acknowledge this context

because the way forward, towards biculturalism and self-determination for Māori people, begins by acknowledging the colonial history, and the treaty obligations, of Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.4 Early Childhood Education for Toddlers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Teachers' pedagogical responses to peer conflicts are set in the wider contexts of the early learning environment, the emotional climate, the programme, practices and procedures of the setting, and teacher–toddler relationships. Dalli et al. (2011) emphasise that toddlers need sensitive, responsive relationships with their teachers—relationships that promote reciprocity in interactions and that are characterised by attunement. Contexts that support teachers to form these types of relationships with toddlers are characterised by small group sizes, low stress levels, trained and qualified teachers, adequate child–teacher ratios, and by supportive structures, including positive teacher–teacher relationships and effective organisational, philosophical and leadership practices, which work together for the benefit of the children (Dalli et al., 2011).

Furthermore, because toddlers have distinctive developmental needs, they need specific learning programmes. The Education Review Office (ERO) (2009, 2015) reminds us that toddlers' rapidly developing independence, autonomy and urge to explore is sometimes in conflict with their need for security, predictability and support from adults. Therefore, toddlers need a stimulating environment where they have opportunities to practise their physical, social, language and reasoning skills, and they need responsive, knowledgeable teachers and specifically designed learning programmes (ERO, 2015).

However, not all early learning programmes respond well to toddlers' specific needs. ERO (2009, 2015) evaluations, regarding the quality of care and education in infant and toddler centres, found that although the programmes they examined were generally of good quality, some services were not so responsive to toddlers' needs. More critical reflection and evaluation of programmes was deemed to be necessary.

The most recent report, (ERO, 2015) focussed on how well 235 early childhood services supported infants and toddlers to communicate and explore. In almost half of the services that ERO reviewed, teachers provided appropriate care in terms of wellbeing and belonging but did not support infants and toddlers well in terms of communication and exploration. ERO (2015) reported that “teachers in these services had a more limited understanding of *Te Whāriki* and teaching practices specific to infants and toddlers” (p. 24) and recommended that teachers “extend their knowledge and understanding of current research, approaches and philosophies to provide a relevant and responsive curriculum for toddlers, particularly two-year-olds” (p. 24). Given that, in 2014 in Aotearoa New Zealand, 44.2% of all one-year-olds, 64.5% of all two-year-olds and 93.1% of all three-year-olds were enrolled in some form of early learning service (Education Counts, 2016), it is critical that services that cater for toddlers provide care and learning opportunities that are responsive to the unique needs of this age-group. Because of the critical need to effectively support toddlers in education and care settings, the present study focussed on teachers’ responses to toddlers within the context of potentially powerful learning events, events that can also be emotionally-charged and challenging—toddlers’ peer conflicts.

1.5 Rationale

Peer conflicts are interactions when one child opposes, resists or retaliates against another (Chen, Fein, Killen, & Tam, 2001). Children’s peer conflicts can be meaningful and constructive learning events, opportunities to learn important social-emotional skills, including the skills to appreciate another’s perspective, to communicate, negotiate and compromise and to learn how to recognise, understand and appropriately express emotions (Chen et al., 2001; DeVries & Zan, 2012; Gloeckler, Cassell, & Malkus, 2014; Joshi, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Yet peer conflicts are often challenging situations, especially for toddlers. To manage a peer conflict, toddlers, who are only just beginning to learn social-emotional and language skills, need to apply a myriad of skills, strategically and simultaneously, in what can be an intense interaction (Chen et al., 2001; Saarni, 1999). Therefore, and especially

because the social-emotional skills that toddlers and young children learn while they are young can make a lifetime's difference (Goodman, Joshi, Nasim, & Tyler, 2015), the teachers' role to support and to teach toddlers during moments of conflict, is critical. However, in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, apart from a study from Smith, Barraclough and Sutcliffe (1996), it is difficult to find evidence of practices that teachers value and use when they respond to toddlers' peer conflicts. It is also difficult to find evidence of how teachers are supported to work effectively with toddlers in moments of peer conflict.

1.6 Research Aims

Given the limited research around toddlers' peer conflicts in Aotearoa New Zealand, and given the critical role of the teacher to support toddlers in moments of conflict, it is important to discover more about the pedagogical practices that teachers use within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Teachers' perspectives and self-reports of their practice can provide descriptions of, and rationales for, teaching practice.

Therefore, through teachers' self-reports of practice, the aims of this study are to:

- identify teachers' roles within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts
- identify practices that teachers value and use to support toddlers and promote their learning during moments of peer conflict
- identify factors that influence teachers' responses to toddlers' peer conflicts
- identify factors that enable teachers to effectively support toddlers and promote their learning, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts.

1.7 Introduction to Key Terms

This section defines or describes key terms that are used throughout this study.

These definitions reflect the common understanding in the literature of the field, however, it is acknowledged that the teachers involved in this research are likely to define or describe these terms based on their own perspectives and experiences.

Peer conflicts. For this research, peer conflicts are defined as disagreements, interactions when one child opposes, resists or retaliates against another (Chen et

al., 2001). Peer conflicts are also framed as learning events, opportunities to recognise and appreciate the perspectives of others, to learn how to negotiate, compromise and resolve disagreements (Chen et al., 2001).

Social-emotional skills. Social-emotional skills can be defined as skills that support interactions that, per the culture and context in which they occur, are personally and socially successful (Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Saarni, 1999). Social-emotional skills include, but are not limited to, emotional management and expression, emotion knowledge, self-regulation, persistence, empathy, the ability to see the perspectives of others, kindness, cooperativeness, resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Denham et al., 2003; Goodman et al., 2015).

Social problem solving. Social problem solving is a conflict resolution process that involves discussing and evaluating options for resolution and making decisions, during interpersonal interactions (Gloeckler et al., 2014). Many social-emotional skills are needed to effectively solve social problems, including emotional expression, knowledge and regulation, and communication skills.

Intersubjectivity and scaffolding. Intersubjectivity describes a process in which teacher and learner work together, with the same goals and a shared purpose. Intersubjectivity is a key feature of scaffolding, where teacher and learner collaborate to work through a challenging or culturally meaningful activity (Rogoff, 1990; Salkind, 2005). Another feature of scaffolding is that the expert partner in the interaction adjusts the amount, or type, of support, to give the learner the minimum support necessary to succeed. Support is withdrawn gradually or over a period of time, so that the learner can eventually accomplish the task independently (Rogoff, 1990; Salkind, 2005).

Te Whāriki. New Zealand's early childhood curriculum is guided by the principles of whakamana/empowerment, kotahitanga/holistic development, whānau tangata/family and community and ngā hononga/relationships. Together with

strands (essential areas of learning and development), goals and learning outcomes these principles create a learning framework that is based on relationships and children's interactions with people, places and things. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) is the curriculum for all licensed early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Early childhood education. This term is used to represent services that offer out of home care and education, and are licensed by the Ministry of Education. There is a diverse range of early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand, including teacher-led services, such as kindergartens and early education and care services (early education and care services are also referred to as early learning centres) and whānau or parent-led services, including ngā kohanga reo and playcentres (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Early learning settings. Three early learning centres and one mixed-age kindergarten participated in this study. Throughout the thesis these four settings are collectively referred to as early learning settings, and individually referred to as early learning centre or kindergarten. In Aotearoa New Zealand, although there are many different models, early learning centres typically enrol children from infancy up to school age, sometimes in mixed-age settings or sometimes in separate rooms or sections, based on age. State-owned kindergartens typically cater for children from two years old to school entry age (five or six years old), however, as is the case in this study, mixed-age or whānau-based kindergartens may enrol infants, toddlers and young children. In the cases where early education services are referred to in the literature review, the term used by the author/s of the reviewed literature is used; for example, childcare, daycare or prekindergarten.

Teacher. Throughout this thesis, the term “teacher” is inclusive of adults with and without a teaching qualification, and in-study, who interact with children in a professional capacity in an early learning setting.

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is presented across five chapters. The present chapter introduces the researcher and research context. A literature review sets the scene for the research topic in Chapter Two. The literature is reviewed, first in relation to general social-emotional learning and then, more specifically, in relation to toddlers and their social-emotional learning and development. From there, literature relevant to toddlers' peer conflicts and social problem solving is examined, with a focus on what toddlers might learn during peer conflict events and how teachers might effectively support toddlers in this learning. Finally, the implications for Aotearoa New Zealand research are summarised and a set of research questions is proposed.

The mixed methods research design is outlined in Chapter Three. Details of the research design, including ethical considerations, research questions, participant recruitment, design of the questionnaire and focus group interviews, and the processes of statistical and thematic analysis, are described.

The results of the research study are reported in Chapter Four. The chapter opens with a description of the research participants. Next, teachers' descriptions of their roles within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts are reported. Teaching practices that teachers value and use to support toddlers and promote their learning during moments of conflict are identified. Additionally, factors that influence teachers' practice, and factors that support teachers to work effectively with toddlers, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, are identified.

In Chapter Five, the results are discussed and critically examined in relation to the extant research literature, with the intention of explaining the results, and of relating them to effective practice and how that might be achieved. Practices that support toddlers' social emotional competence and promote their learning are highlighted, along with factors that support and enable teachers' effective practice in moments of toddlers' peer conflict. Each main section of Chapter Five concludes with a summary of the section, including implications for practice. Finally, the limitations

and delimitations of this study are discussed and wider implications for practice, policy and research are identified. Chapter Five ends with an overall conclusion of the research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review explores the meanings and importance of social-emotional competence in general then, more specifically, in relation to toddlers. The focus narrows to toddlers' peer conflicts and social problem solving, to what toddlers might learn during conflict events, and how teachers might effectively support toddlers in this learning. The implications for Aotearoa New Zealand research are summarised and a set of research questions is proposed.

2.1 Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between January 2015 and December 2016. Search terms included social, emotion, peer conflict, resolution, problem solving, relationships, infants, toddlers, young children, brain, development, epigenetics, early childhood education, childcare, kindergarten, teachers, bicultural, Ministry of Education, Education Review Office, *Te Whāriki* and New Zealand. Combinations of these terms were often used. Reference lists, from relevant literature, were scanned to source further information. Searches were conducted through the Discover search tool of the Massey University Library website, and through databases including ERIC, A+ Education, Scopus and Google Scholar. Searches were also made through Google and the Massey University Library catalogue. Some books, especially classic texts, were sourced by browsing through libraries and bookshelves. No date limit was set on searches because some older literature and research studies provided informative and relevant information, which strengthened and balanced the literature review. All material was evaluated for relevance and quality. Searches were repeated regularly to access any newly published material.

2.2 What is Social-Emotional Competence? What are Social-Emotional Skills?

Social-emotional competence is demonstrated by the ability to interact with others in ways that are personally and socially successful, per the culture and context in which they occur (Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Saarni, 1999). It involves the knowledge and application of an array of skills. Skills are practical and proficient applications of knowledge, which are often developed through experience or education (Funk &

Wagnalls Company, 1902). Ergo, social-emotional skills are the practical, proficient, and learnable applications of social-emotional knowledge. Goodman et al. (2015) categorise social-emotional skills into five broad groups: 1) self-perceptions and self-awareness, including self-esteem, self-efficacy and internal locus of control; 2) motivation, which is associated with ambition, effort and perseverance; 3) self-regulation, which includes emotional expression and management, the abilities to overcome impulsivity, to persist in tasks and to see the perspectives of others; 4) social skills, including empathy, kindness, sharing and cooperativeness; 5) resilience and coping, involving positive and purposeful responses to stress and the developing ability to handle adversity.

Emotional skills are often categorised as emotion knowledge, emotion regulation and emotional expressiveness; these emotion skills relate to and support social skills (Denham et al., 2003). Emotion knowledge, of personal and others' emotions, supports social skills by enabling children to more accurately determine emotional states in others and therefore respond appropriately. As Hyson (2004) states, children with greater knowledge of emotions are more likely to behave sympathetically, to help those in distress and to share resources. Emotional regulation, involving the abilities to control emotions and manage behaviour, also supports social interactions. Without emotional regulation, emotions can be overpowering and can impede thought processes, communication and successful social interactions (Denham et al., 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Children's emotional expressiveness can also support, or obstruct, social interactions. Denham and colleagues explain that ongoing negative emotional expressions, especially anger, are likely to obstruct positive interactions or friendships. Conversely, patterns of positive emotional expressions, such as happiness, are more likely to support social interactions.

2.3 Why are Social-Emotional Skills Important?

Social-emotional skills are associated with numerous short term wellbeing and learning outcomes, including greater acceptance by peers, the ability to form and

maintain friendships, academic success, and positive attitudes to learning and social experiences (Denham et al., 2003; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a). Having the social-emotional skills to interact with others means that children tend to have more opportunities for social interactions and reciprocally more opportunities to practise and strengthen social-emotional skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a). Furthermore, social-emotional skills developed in the early years of life are unequivocally associated with later life outcomes (Brownell & Kopp, 2007; Chen et al., 2001; Goodman et al., 2015; Hyson, 2004; Katz & McClellan, 1997; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a).

Significant associations between childhood social-emotional skills and numerous beneficial outcomes later in life have been identified through Goodman and colleagues' (2015) comprehensive literature review and analysis of data from the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) and the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). These later life outcomes include adult wellbeing, educational attainment, health and healthy behaviours, socioeconomic status, partnership and family status, and life satisfaction. Furthermore, Goodman and colleagues (2015) found that many childhood social-emotional skills are predictors of positive outcomes in later life, independent of educational attainment, explaining that "social and emotional measures provide important signals about likely outcomes above and beyond what is picked up by measures of literacy and numeracy" (p. 87).

2.3.1 Why teach toddlers social-emotional skills?

The strong connections between young children's social-emotional skills and lifelong outcomes highlight the value of teaching social-emotional skills to young children. In accord with this, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004a) say that the concept of school readiness must include "the capacity to form and sustain positive relationships with teachers, children, and other adults, and develop the social and emotional skills for cooperating with others" (p. 5). Moreover, it is the social-emotional skills that are developed in the early years of life that have

the greatest impact on learning and lifelong outcomes. One reason for this is that, during fetal, infant and toddler periods, development and malleability of the brain are stronger than at any other time in life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010; Rowley, 2011).

2.3.2 Brain development in the first three years.

The interplay between intrapersonal and interpersonal development has become more widely understood as advancements in behavioural and neuroscience research provide insights into the connected roles of nature and nurture. Brain development begins before birth, but the brain is by no means complete when the child is born. During the first three years, the brain grows, establishing neural connections at the rate of around 700 to 1,000 new connections every second (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.).

With repeated use and in response to the environment and experiences, neural connections become stronger and more able to create increasingly complex circuits in the brain (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). Social-emotional experiences and interactions are key to this brain development process. This is because the brain circuits associated with emotions are highly interactive with those associated with executive functions, including self-regulation, response inhibition, concentration, problem solving and decision-making (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Thompson, 2009). Thus, early social-emotional experiences play a critical role in learning and development. As the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child assert, "as young children develop, their early emotional experiences literally become embedded in the architecture of their brains" (2004b, p. 1).

Furthermore, environment, interactions and experiences affect development at a genetic level. In response to external experiences, such as stress, nutrition or environmental toxins, genes are effectively turned on or off. While the DNA sequence is not changed, the way genes are read by the body does change. This

process, called epigenetics, shapes development of brain and body (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, some epigenetic modifications are temporary while others have long lasting, maybe even intergenerational effects. Epigenetic modification may also impact positively or negatively on development, health and later-life outcomes. For example, repeated, stressful experiences early in life can cause epigenetic modifications that compromise the ability to manage stress as an adult. Conversely, early exposure to supportive environments and interactions promotes epigenetic modifications that increase learning capacity (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).

Epigenetic modifications and the brain's ability to reorganise and adapt in response to the environment occur throughout life, however, it is the learning and development in the first three years that creates a foundation, either robust or weak, for whatever happens in later life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Brownlee (2010) sums it up: "What happens in those first three years will become the foundation for everything that follows. Everything" (p. 14).

2.4 The Toddler

Over one hundred years ago, in their *Standard Dictionary of English Usage*, Funk and Wagnalls Company (1902) defined a toddler as one who toddles, like a little child. Ever since, guidelines regarding the age-range of toddlerhood have remained generally within the years when walking begins and when steps are short and rather ungainly. This flexibility in the demarcation of toddlerhood reflects the fact that development is complex and occurs at different rates (Brownell & Kopp, 2007). Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) defines toddlers as being in the general age category of one to three years, explaining that the age category is general because there are variations in child development, in children's capacities to learn and in cultural perspectives and learning contexts. Although guidelines for toddlers' age-range vary amongst developmental scientists, there is widespread agreement that toddlerhood is a time

of rich development and a time of multiple intrapersonal and interpersonal transformations (Brownell & Kopp, 2007). The act of toddling is one of the most significant transformations a toddler makes. The ability to walk provides toddlers with new perspectives as they interact with the environment and other people, and experience a dramatic increase in social interactions. Therefore, as infants move into toddlerhood, they are faced with many opportunities to practise their developing social-emotional skills and to learn an array of new skills.

2.4.1 What do toddlers' social-emotional skills look like in action?

Preconceived notions of infants as asocial beings and of toddlers as self-centred, selfish, and even “terrible” individuals have been challenged by recent research (e.g., Page, Clare, & Nutbrown, 2013; Redder, 2014; Rennie, 2014; Salamon, 2011). Infants are increasingly recognised as social, communicative beings who have a “vast array of useful social and emotional skills” (Salamon, 2011, p. 6). This skill-set expands from the period of early infancy, where the infant initially relies on the help of others to regulate his/her emotional expressions, through toddlerhood and to childhood, where the child is increasingly capable of expressing, understanding, regulating and discussing emotions, as well as developing the skills to put his/her social-emotional repertoire to use in everyday life. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) highlight toddlerhood as a period where toddlers' social-emotional skills grow remarkably in the context of their interactions, environment, relationships and everyday social lives, and in close concert with the development of many other skills, including language and cognitive abilities.

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), describes toddlers' feelings as “intense and unpredictable” (p. 23). Toddlers are typically capable of expressing a wide range of emotions, however, at around two-and-a-half to three years of age, in tandem with the development of self-regulatory emotions, such as guilt, shame and pride, toddlers are just beginning to learn how to independently regulate and manage their emotions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Emotional regulation is a complex skill because it involves not only knowing how to express emotions appropriately but also knowing

how emotions should be expressed depending on differing contexts and cultural expectations (Saarni, 1999). As Webster-Stratton (1999) points out, toddlers' emerging emotional regulation skills are supported by, and intimately connected with their physical development, especially the growth and maturation of the nervous system. Because emotional regulation is associated with cognitive and language skills, temperament, and the environment—especially the types of relationships toddlers experience in their daily lives (Webster-Stratton, 1999), secure, attachment-based relationships with parents or caregivers offer a supportive foundation for toddlers' emotional regulation skills to develop and strengthen (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Some researchers have observed various strategies that toddlers employ to regulate their own emotions. These strategies include engaging in reassuring self-talk, changing the goal or plan when the original plan fails and frustration sets in, and avoiding or ignoring emotionally-charged situations (Buss & Goldsmith, 1998; Calkins, Gill, Johnson, & Smith, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). When toddlers can effectively manage their emotions, they are more likely to be able to develop and maintain friendships and, in a snowball effect, more friendships support greater social-emotional development. Having emotional regulation skills also supports toddlers' self-beliefs that they are capable of managing their own feelings; Saarni (1999) calls this emotional self-efficacy.

It is clear that toddlers' developing social-emotional skills are fueled by successful interactions. Toddlers' social-emotional skills can also be promoted through interactions that may not appear to be successful, such as peer conflicts. As Smith et al. (1996) assert, the participation in and resolution of conflict with peers is likely to enhance children's abilities to compromise, negotiate, communicate and to explore similarities and differences, within the give and take of social interactions.

2.5 How do Peer Conflicts Promote Social-Emotional Learning?

In the social milieu of an early learning centre, young children's peer conflicts are a natural part of daily life and occur for numerous reasons, including curiosity and intrinsic urges to explore (Licht, Simoni, & Perrig-Chiello, 2008), disagreements about possession of toys, space or resources, and disputes about play ideas and inclusion (Chen et al., 2001). Although young children's conflicts are brief, most often less than one minute in duration (Chen et al., 2001), they can be eventful and dynamic. Chen and colleagues explain that a variety of emotions and behaviours may come into play during a conflict and the original issue may evolve into a completely different issue.

There is accord amongst researchers that peer conflicts are not only a natural part of daily life, but also present natural and meaningful opportunities for children to learn social-emotional skills (Chen et al., 2001; Da Ros & Kovach, 1998; DeVries & Zan, 2012; Gloeckler et al., 2014; Joshi, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Conflicts can provide opportunities for children to see the perspectives of others and to work out ideas about rules and fairness, especially when peers are of similar status and power (Piaget, 1932). Resolving conflicts is a process sometimes referred to as social problem solving, and involves the "strategies and abilities employed when discussing options for resolution, evaluating choices, and making a decision during interpersonal interactions" (Gloeckler et al., 2014, p. 750). The skills needed to effectively solve social problems include understanding, expressing and regulating emotions, making choices and communicating (Gloeckler et al., 2014).

Although peer conflicts can be emotional, sometimes upsetting events for children, a certain degree of emotion can enhance learning. DeVries and Zan (2012) explain that the experience of emotion that occurs during conflicts can motivate reorganisation of knowledge to promote learning. Rosenthal and Gatt (2010) describe emotionally-charged events as moments of hot cognition, meaning that what is learned is likely to be retained well in the memory. The implication is that conflicts can be rich learning events. In this light, the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2001) suggest that low frequency of conflicts amongst children in childcare does not necessarily

mean high quality of care. However, as Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) point out, what is learned during a peer conflict will depend on the children, the conflict, the level of emotion and the response of the caregiver or teacher.

2.5.1 What do children's and toddlers' peer conflicts look like?

Researchers who have studied toddlers' peer conflicts can provide a picture of what happens when toddlers disagree (e.g., Caplan, Vespo, Pedersen, & Hay, 1991; Smith et al., 1996; Chen et al., 2001). For example, in a North American study of the issues, resolution, incidence, and age-related patterns involved in young children's (two-, three- and four-year-olds; $n = 400$) peer conflicts, Chen and colleagues found that toddlers' conflicts frequently began when one toddler grabbed another's toy. Most of the time the other toddler relinquished the toy or moved themselves and the toy away. Toddlers sometimes used assertive language such as "No!". Another common strategy was to hold tight to the toy, with both toddlers tugging. Chen and colleagues observed that older children's conflicts tended to have abstract and social motivations, such as disagreements about ideas and play, while younger children's conflicts occurred for more tangible reasons, such as possession of toys. The incidence of conflict did not decrease as children grew older, however, the reasons for conflict and the strategies children used during conflicts were different for younger children than for their older peers. Older children tended to resolve conflicts with non-insistent strategies, which include withdrawing, yielding, negotiating and compromising (Chen et al., 2001). The two-year-olds more often used insistent strategies during conflicts, including forceful actions such as grabbing. Insistent strategies tend to be used by children who are less able to understand the perspective of another, who have limited ability to communicate, and have less developed social-emotional skills (Chen et al., 2001). When both children are insistent during a conflict, the conflict is likely to escalate, since neither child can see the other's perspective (Chen et al., 2001).

Disagreeing about possession of toys or resources appears to be a common theme in toddlers' peer conflicts. However, some researchers say that the actual issue in these

conflicts isn't necessarily possession. For example, Caplan and colleagues (1991) examined the relationships between incidences of toddlers' (two-year-olds, $n = 48$) peer conflicts and scarcity or abundance of resources, and found that the reasons for conflict over a toy may not always be because the toddler wants that toy. Caplan and colleagues suggest that because toddlers often appear to want a peer's toy but are not interested in playing with an identical toy, their conflicts are reflective of attempts at social interactions, not issues of possession. Licht et al. (2008) agree that toddlers' conflicts over toys are not necessarily possession issues, however, Licht and colleagues suggest that toddlers' motivations for grabbing a toy have more to do with curiosity and exploration than socialisation. In longitudinal research exploring the motivations underpinning infants' and toddlers' conflicts (at ages 8, 14 and 22 months, $n = 28$), Licht and colleagues analysed peer conflicts from a developmental perspective and concluded that infants and toddlers are often driven by curiosity and an urge to touch objects, which may lead to an infant or toddler grabbing another's toy. Resistance is most likely to occur not because the other child wants the toy but because her/his play has been interrupted. What motivates toddlers' conflicts is important because "what a child tries to achieve in a conflict can be highly relevant for understanding his/her conflict behavior, conflict resolution strategies, manner of coping with the outcome of conflicts, and impact of pedagogical intervention" (Licht et al., 2008, p. 235).

An Aotearoa New Zealand study (Smith et al., 1996; Smith & Barraclough, 1999) examined the peer conflicts of 200 infants and toddlers, with an average age of 16.4 months (ages ranged from 1 month to 26 months). In accord with other literature, the most common reason for conflict appeared to be possession of toys (51%). Infants and toddlers used physical means, such as tugging or pushing, to resolve conflicts during 63% of the conflicts observed by Smith and colleagues. Combinations of physicality and words were used in 34% of conflicts and verbal means only were used to resolve 3% of conflicts. Lack of social-emotional skills and language could explain why the infants and toddlers in Smith and colleagues' study tended to rely on physicality, or a combination of physicality and words, rather than words only to

resolve conflicts. Like Chen and colleagues (2001), Smith et al. noticed that infants and young toddlers tended to rely on insistent strategies, such as attempting to impose their preferred solution on the other toddler, to resolve conflicts.

While forceful actions may come into play during toddlers' conflicts, researchers are in accord that the underlying reasons for force are more likely to be lack of social-emotional skills, including language skills, than aggressive intent (Blank & Schneider, 2011; Chen et al., 2001; Peterson, 2004; Silver & Harkins, 2007). Children's peer conflicts should not be equated with aggression. Conflict is a disagreement, an event where one person opposes another, whereas aggression is an act of deliberate physical or verbal harm (Peterson, 2004). This differentiation is important because the way conflict is perceived influences the way people react to conflict. For example, equating conflict with aggression may lead teachers to intervene and prematurely end conflicts, without providing children opportunities to practise social-problem-solving skills (Silver & Harkins, 2007). Another perspective, which is illustrated in Smith and Barraclough's (1999) research (see also Smith et al., 1996), is that teachers should take time to differentiate what type of conflict is likely to occur, before deciding on an intervention. For example, most of the teachers in Smith and Barraclough's study said they would make a "professional judgement about whether and how to intervene in conflicts, based on the situation, the children and the behaviour" (p. 345).

2.6 What are the Roles of the Teacher and Pedagogy in Peer Conflicts?

Pedagogy involves a repertoire of approaches from which teachers select and enact, according to their knowledge of the learner and dependent on the multitude of factors at play in any given moment of teaching (Dalli et al., 2011). Thus, teachers select from a repertoire of practices to support learning within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. The "right" practice will depend on multiple factors, including teachers' knowledge of the learner. Nonetheless, there are teaching practices that are recommended by researchers to support children during conflict events. These practices include: helping toddlers to resolve conflicts through child-

centred mediation; fostering positive relationships within the learning setting; supporting toddlers to resolve their own conflicts; positioning conflicts as learning events; fostering relationships between the learning setting and its community; and honouring the cultural perspectives of the community. Throughout the next section, the following studies are reviewed to explore these recommended practices: Singer and Hännikäinen (2002); de Haan and Singer (2003); Bayer, Whaley and May (1995); Gloeckler et al. (2014); Göncü and Cannella (1996); and Suransky (1982). In addition, the ways that Māori perspectives might shape teaching practice in Aotearoa New Zealand are explored.

2.6.1 How should teachers respond to toddlers' conflicts?

Singer and Hännikäinen (2002) studied teachers' interventions into the conflicts of 29 toddlers, in Dutch and Finnish childcare centres, focussing on: the occurrence of territorial conflicts and the educational environment; the types of mediating and non-mediating strategies that teachers used; and toddlers' reactions to teachers' strategies. Mediating strategies were characterised by the teacher's desire to help toddlers resolve a conflict through the development of mutual trust, understanding and agreement. Singer and Hännikäinen found that when teachers used mediating strategies they were able to help toddlers to include others into their play, or help an excluded toddler to accept that he/she was not welcome and find an alternative activity. An important aspect of successful mediation was that teachers took the toddlers' activity ideas and their ideas about fairness into account. In other words, constructive interventions were characterised by teachers listening to toddlers and working with toddlers to model and coach social-problem-solving skills. Other authors, including Bayer et al. (1995), Gloeckler et al. (2014) and Göncü and Cannella (1996), similarly highlight the importance of using child-centred mediation strategies such as listening, seeking clarification, questioning, compromising and restoring the relationship after the conflict.

In a review of the teacher's role to support toddlers' and young children's transitions from physical to verbal strategies during events of peer conflict, de Haan and Singer

(2003) say that teachers' work with children should be guided by an understanding that conflict is a natural learning process and that, in general, young children can resolve their own conflicts, especially in situations where they were playing together before the onset of the conflict. These authors argue that, when mediating in children's conflicts, teachers should be aware of the conflict resolution strategies that children have already developed, especially their non-verbal strategies, and should support the children to use those strategies, ensuring that scaffolding is a shared, intersubjective endeavor. De Haan and Singer also emphasise the important role of teachers to foster positive relationships between children, promote a sense of community in the learning setting and structure routines, rituals, the programme and the environment with care. Singer, van Hoogdalem, de Haan and Bekkema (2012) agree, and narrow the focus on peer relationships to within the actual conflict event, saying "teachers should value and support peer relations rather than focussing on the perpetrators" (p. 1661). By focussing on toddlers' relationships with each other, teachers can minimise conflict and create an environment that supports toddlers to resolve their own conflicts (de Haan & Singer, 2003).

American researchers, Bayer and colleagues (1995), who analysed strategies teachers used in the course of 135 non-aggressive conflicts between toddlers ($n = 11$, plus 3 infants), also recommend that teachers view peer conflicts as constructive events, integral to learning. A key message from Bayer et al. is that teachers' interventions should focus on giving toddlers responsibility for the conflict and should support and scaffold toddlers' social-problem-solving skills. When intervening in toddlers' conflicts, a good place to start, according to Bayer and colleagues, is to seek information from toddlers by asking questions such as "What is the problem?" Questions like this may prompt toddlers to verbalise the issue and enable toddlers to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility (Bayer et al., 1995). Bayer and colleagues assert that when a solution has been reached, teachers must verbalise what occurred, providing toddlers with explicit feedback or affirmation of their actions. Likewise, Gloeckler and colleagues (2014) who analysed teachers' ($n = 8$) practices during toddlers' ($n = 51$) conflicts in four American childcare settings,

recommend a paradigm shift that reframes toddlers' peer conflicts as constructive learning events. Gloeckler et al. (2014) suggest that when conflicts are perceived as learning events, teachers can "learn how to empower toddlers through expressing feelings, making choices, and understanding the perspectives of others during intense situations ..." (p. 763).

Göncü and Cannella (1996) draw on the theories of Piaget (1932) and Vygotsky (1978) to construct a framework for the teacher's role in conflict resolution that focusses on intersubjectivity. According to Göncü and Cannella, teachers can effectively guide children to solve their own conflicts, and promote children's autonomy, by asking the children questions about what happened, how the children feel and what possible solutions there are. These authors highlight that teachers should articulate the cultural values that resonate within their learning community so that children learn these values and use them to guide the resolution of their conflict. An example of this, offered by Göncü and Cannella, is a teacher telling children to "treat people the way you want them to treat you" (p. 65). This particular example centres on the belief that when someone is feeling bad a remedy should be sought to make them feel better.

Göncü and Cannella (1996), whose framework drew on observations of American prekindergarten children (with no specific age reported), emphasise that the practices and values they advocate are in the context of a given culture and that for different cultures and contexts, other practices may be more appropriate. Perspectives of conflict, values, rules, ways to communicate, and ways to be as individuals or groups vary across cultures and so too will teachers' responses to conflict. This is illustrated in one of Suransky's (1982) ethnographic case studies. Suransky immersed herself into the everyday events of five American daycare centres, observing practices and interactions through the lens of someone who had become an almost unnoticed part of each setting. At one centre, Suransky (1982) observed that "conflict is *a part of* and not *apart from* everyday life" (p. 145) and so conflict was accepted and often tolerated with ease. Suransky saw this attitude to

conflict as a positive aspect of the centre because this attitude resonated with the everyday lives of the children, teachers and families who attended. There was cohesion between the norms and values of the daycare centre and the cultural norms and values of the community. While Suransky's work is over 30 years old, the importance of the wider world of family and community as an integral aspect of the early childhood curriculum remains current, and is reflected in *Te Whāriki's* principle of whānau tangata, family and community (Ministry of Education, 1996).

2.6.2. How might Māori worldviews shape teachers' responses to peer conflicts in Aotearoa New Zealand?

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori ways of being and doing offer a view of the child that can guide all aspects of teachers' practice. In particular, the concepts of mauri and mana frame children in ways that engender value and respect. Mauri is a multi-faceted concept, a life force or principle which is present in all living things (Pere, 1997). Pere relates the concept of mauri to every child's "right to get the best from the family or community he/she lives in. If a child feels that he/she is respected and accepted, then his/her mauri waxes" (p. 12). Mana, another multi-faceted concept, involves the prestige, power, esteem and inherent quality of a person (Pere, 1997). Mana, like mauri, should be nurtured and protected. Mana is upheld through respectful relationships in which people are treated with care and dignity (Mead, 2003). In emotionally-charged encounters such as toddlers' peer conflicts, teachers' awareness of mana and mauri are particularly important.

2.7 How do Teachers Respond to Toddlers' Peer Conflicts?

The following studies are reviewed to illustrate how teachers responded to toddlers' peer conflicts within the contexts and conditions of different studies: Williams, Mastergeorge and Ontai (2010) and Bayer and colleagues (1995), who posit that the teachers in their studies were focussed on stopping peer conflicts quickly; and Smith et al. (1996) who noticed that teachers often advocated for one of the toddlers in the dispute, and who also identified that teachers' responses are a matter of

professional judgment, dependent on numerous factors, including the nature of the conflict.

Williams et al. (2010) analysed a range of teacher–toddler interactions, including teachers’ responses to toddlers’ peer conflicts, and found that teachers tend to scaffold toddler interactions but often in ways that are adult-directed and intended to support classroom management, rather than toddlers’ learning. Specific techniques that were observed by Williams et al. included distraction, stating rules and giving instructions. Teachers also either physically moved toddlers or removed any toy that seemed to be the object of the dispute. Overall, the strategies teachers used indicated that teachers’ main intentions were to stop peer conflicts and sustain classroom harmony (Williams et al., 2010). The 36 toddlers involved in this American study, which involved three childcare centres and 11 teachers, were between 12 and 17 months old when video observations of toddler–teacher interactions were made.

Bayer and colleagues (1995) observed teachers ($n = 13$) employ a wide variety of strategies when they worked with toddlers during conflicts. Many of the frequently used strategies were teacher-directed, in that teachers told toddlers what to do or moved toddlers from the conflict. However, some strategies were more likely to elicit toddlers’ participation in conflict resolution and social problem solving, and resulted in more child-directed interactions. For example, when teachers sought clarification from the toddlers by asking questions such as “What happened?” the toddlers often became more involved in the social-problem-solving process, especially when teachers asked a question as an initial response. Table 1 (p. 26) shows the types and frequency of teaching strategies observed by Bayer and colleagues over the course of teacher intervention in toddlers’ peer conflicts.

Table 1. Types and frequencies of teaching strategies.

Strategies	Example	Frequency* (% of total teaching strategies)
Explicit instruction or a closed choice	“Max, give it to Sam.” Or, “Do it together or find somewhere else to play.”	16.7
Call out (stop or child’s name)	“Stop!” “Anne!”	12.7
Physical intervention	Physically remove toddler. Remove a toy.	10.9
Explaining objectively or subjectively	...because he could fall and that would hurt. Tommy wants to sit by himself.	10.8
Ask or seek clarification	“Sam, what’s wrong?”	9.5
Articulate expectations for social conduct	It’s not OK to hit our friends.	8.8
Scaffolding with prompts or directives	Tell him to stop. Tell Harry how that made you feel.	7.8
Scaffolding with peer voice	She says that is not OK. Ellie wants me to help her tell you gentle hands.	7.4
Supportive commentary	Good words.	6.4
Negative commentary	That’s so loud. That’s not OK.	5.7
Other	(Miscellaneous strategies that did not fit into any of the other categories or that were not able to be interpreted by the researcher)	3.4

Adapted from: Bayer, C. L., Whaley, K. L., & May, S. E. (1995). Strategic assistance in toddler disputes: ii. Sequences and patterns of teachers' message strategies. *Early Education & Development*, 6(4), 405-432.

* Total frequency = 100.1% due to rounding error.

Smith et al. (1996) whose Aotearoa New Zealand study focussed on the peer conflicts of 200 infants and young toddlers, observed that when teachers intervened in conflicts, they most commonly advocated for one of the infants or toddlers. For example, if a toddler had taken a toy from another toddler, teachers were likely to tell the toddler who took the toy to give it back. Teachers also mediated, diverted attention or reminded toddlers of the rules (e.g., “No pushing”). The teachers in this study seldom responded in a neutral way; they responded differently to toddlers who initiated a conflict than to those on the receiving end. Most often, toddlers who initiated conflicts were either ignored or reminded of a rule, while the teachers seemed more likely to advocate for the toddler who was on the receiving end. This might indicate that teachers’ responses were motivated by their sense of fairness or justice.

In a second phase of their study, Smith and colleagues (1996) interviewed teachers to investigate their perspectives of young children’s assertive conflicts, aggression, and rough and tumble play, and the teacher’s role. Overall, aggression and rough and tumble play were considered to be slightly problematic, whereas assertive conflicts (conflicts that involved standing up for rights, defending property or grabbing/pulling of objects without physical aggression directly to peer) were most often viewed as positive learning opportunities, as ways for children to acquire social skills. Most teachers agreed that aggression should be stopped but that rough and tumble play and assertive conflict should be monitored with the intention of giving children time and space to try to work things out for themselves.

Smith et al. (1996) noted that teacher intervention was considered a matter of professional judgment, necessary to protect children if their physical safety was at risk or to prevent any negative patterns of behaviour. Depending on the type of conflict, teacher intervention was also seen as an important way for teachers to offer strategic support as a scaffold so that children could eventually learn the skills they needed to independently solve social problems. Generally, the teachers in this study thought it was important for children to solve their own problems, however,

whether teachers intervened and how they intervened depended on how they read the situation, and the children involved. Table 2 shows the percentage of teachers who described each given perspective in relation to the decision to intervene and based on the type of conflict. Thirty Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood teachers were interviewed; 11 worked with under-two-year-old children (only 3 exclusively) and 19 worked with children over two years old.

Table 2. Teachers' views, and the percentage of teachers who advocated for each view, about intervening in children's conflicts, based on the type of conflict.

Teachers' perspectives on whether to intervene	Conflict	Aggression	Rough & Tumble
	Percentage of teachers (<i>n</i> = 30)		
Intervene unobtrusively/ Help children solve	60.00	33.33	23.33
Observe/ Monitor/ Wait	46.67	23.33	33.33
Leave children to solve	23.33	30.00	13.33
Prevent hurt, injustice or escalation	16.67	56.67	63.33
Provide alternative	13.33	10.00	6.67
Make a decision based on the children involved	10.00	3.33	0.00
Intervene for no reason	6.67	3.33	3.33
Intervene immediately/ Prevent	3.33	13.33	16.67
Join in/ Encourage/ Allow	0.00	0.00	23.33

Adapted from: Smith, A. B., Barraclough, S., & Sutcliffe, R. (1996). *Young children's conflicts and teachers' perspectives on them: Research Report to the Ministry of Education*. Dunedin: Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago.

The teachers who were interviewed also discussed a wide range of specific strategies that they used and valued when they dealt with infants', toddlers' and young children's peer conflicts (Smith et al., 1996). These strategies and the percentage of teachers who advocated for each strategy are summarised in Table 3 (p. 29). The most frequently suggested strategies, in regards to conflict, were to

suggest alternatives and to talk with the children to reflect the problem back to them, in order to help them come up with a solution.

Table 3. *Specific strategies recommended by teachers and the percentage of teachers who advocated for each strategy, based on the type of conflict.*

Strategies that teachers used and recommended	Conflict	Aggression	Rough & tumble
	Percentage of teachers (<i>n</i> = 30)		
Suggest alternatives	50.00	30.00	56.67
Discuss and reflect problem back to children	33.33	36.67	33.33
Wait/ Observe	10.00	16.67	6.67
Focus on environment	6.67	10.00	0.00
Ignore - let children handle	6.67	6.67	0.00
Stop the conflict immediately	3.30	13.33	13.33
Focus on rules	3.30	13.33	6.67
Focus on victim	3.30	16.67	0.00
Focus on behaviour	0.00	10.00	0.00
Focus on initiator	0.00	10.00	0.00
Use an affective tone	0.00	10.00	0.00
Join in	0.00	0.00	3.30

Adapted from: Smith, A. B., Barraclough, S., & Sutcliffe, R. (1996). *Young children's conflicts and teachers' perspectives on them: Research Report to the Ministry of Education*. Dunedin: Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago.

Smith and colleagues (1996) note some differences between the strategies that were observed in the first phase of the study and those that were reported in the second phase. For example, teachers who were observed often intervened in conflicts whereas the interview results “suggest more hesitance on the part of

teachers in intervening” (Smith et al., 1996, p. 42). Possible explanations for this include the fact that each part of the study involved a different pool of teachers; the teachers who were observed taught only infants and toddlers, while many of those interviewed taught older children. As Smith and colleagues pointed out, the younger age-group may need more teacher assistance than older children. Another possibility is that reports of practice may not precisely align with actual practice. That said, many of the strategies reported by teachers in Smith and colleagues’ study resonate well with teaching approaches recommended in research literature. For example, asking children for solutions, discussing possible solutions and talking with the children to support their negotiation skills are aspects of successful mediation and constructive intervention, as recommended by Singer and Hännikäinen (2002). Contrary to Bayer and colleagues’ (1995) views that teachers see conflicts as problematic, the teachers who were interviewed as part of Smith and colleagues’ study (mostly) described conflicts as learning opportunities where children learned social skills, the perspectives of others and the importance of their own perspective. In general, these teachers felt that their role in children’s peer conflicts was to teach children social-problem-solving strategies that they could later use independently, and to allow children time to practise their skills.

Another aspect of Smith and colleagues’ (1996) study was that some teachers highlighted the important impact that the early learning programme and environment had on children’s behaviour and the nature and incidence of their conflicts. For example, one teacher said that having a small playground and only one room for mixed-age children contributed to the incidence of conflict and aggression. Two other teachers said that they would make changes to the programme or the environment to minimise children’s aggression.

2.8 What Factors Influence Teachers’ Responses to Peer Conflicts?

Teachers’ responses to peer conflicts are influenced by a complex array of interrelated factors that affect the dynamics of an early learning setting and the teaching and learning that occurs within. Many of these factors are identified in

Dalli and colleagues' (2011) report on quality education for under-two-year-olds. They include: the structure of the early learning setting; the programme; the emotional climate; specialised teaching practices; and teacher–toddler relationships. Dalli and colleagues highlight the importance of teacher–toddler relationships based on intersubjectivity and related constructs, including attunement, presence and joint attention. Intersubjectivity, attunement, presence and joint attention involve a coming together of teacher and child which requires the teacher to be emotionally, mentally and physically present, attuned and aware (Rogoff, 1990; Dalli, 2011). When teachers know how to be present and attuned, when teachers understand the special characteristics of toddlers and when teachers have effective environmental and structural support, then responsive relationships with toddlers and effective responses to toddlers' needs are possible (Dalli et al., 2011).

Several studies have explored factors that influence teachers' responses specifically to toddlers' and young children's peer conflicts. Factors include safety of the children or toddlers, teachers' perceptions of conflict, perceptions of children, and teachers' emotional awareness, stress-levels and work conditions. The following studies are described with detail to illuminate these factors: Gloeckler et al. (2014); Rosenthal and Gatt (2010); Bayer et al. (1995); Silver and Harkins (2007); and Ulloa (2011).

2.8.1 Professional learning and development.

Gloeckler and colleagues' (2014) found that a professional learning and development (PLD) intervention was effective in promoting more positive classroom climates and more effective conflict intervention strategies for teachers ($n = 8$). However, in some cases where teachers were suffering from stress or did not appear to be satisfied with their jobs there were no improvements in teachers' conflict intervention strategies that could be attributed to the PLD intervention (Gloeckler et al., 2014).

Gloeckler and colleagues' (2014) PLD aimed to teach a variety of practical teaching strategies, including: strategies to help teachers notice and regulate their own emotions; strategies to support toddlers' emotional regulation; tips for promoting toddlers' emotion knowledge; alternatives to time-out; interactions that build nurturing teacher–child relationships and practices that promote responsive, respectful care within daily routines. Furthermore, the PLD focussed on encouraging a shift in teachers' thinking, from viewing toddlers' behavioural issues as problems to viewing them as problem-solving opportunities, opportunities to teach toddlers simple social-problem-solving strategies within a meaningful context.

Some of the teachers involved in Gloeckler and colleagues' (2014) study reported that it was difficult to put the self-regulation skills they learned during the PLD into practice because they were not accustomed to paying attention to their own signs of stress. Teachers also indicated that the PLD was useful and they would like additional training of this nature: training that focussed on practical, specific strategies regarding their own self-regulation, child self-regulation, and how to facilitate simple social problem solving with toddlers. However, teachers' stress and work dissatisfaction appeared to mitigate the effects of the PLD (Gloeckler et al., 2014). The implications are that a targeted professional development programme may help teachers work effectively with toddlers during their peer conflicts but mitigating factors, including teachers' stress levels, may need to be addressed before PLD has any real effect. This is further illustrated through Rosenthal and Gatt's (2010) research.

Rosenthal and Gatt (2010) implemented a PLD intervention which was intended to increase teachers' understanding of toddlers' social-emotional skills, including how toddlers learn to resolve conflicts. Key aspects of the PLD were that it: explored teachers' attitudes and beliefs about toddlers' social-emotional competence and behaviour; provided a repertoire of strategies that teachers could adapt to the unique needs of their group; and it was experiential, utilising video-aided observations and promoting the teachers' group experiences. Rosenthal and Gatt

found that the teachers who participated in the PLD were significantly more likely (than those teachers in comparison groups who did no PLD) to offer emotional support to toddlers during moments of emotional arousal, such as during conflicts, and to engage in practices that promoted toddlers' conflict resolution and group entry skills. Some of the teachers (specifically those who taught older toddlers, in the age-range of 12 to 36 months) also showed significantly better abilities to be warm and attentive towards toddlers and to be patient, especially during routines.

Twelve childcare centres participated in Rosenthal and Gatt's (2010) study and all shared the characteristics of large group size, poor adult–child ratio and very low teacher education and training level. The working conditions were not ideal. Possibly because of this, the overall quality of care in both the intervention and comparison groups declined over the course of one year. For the comparison group, the decline in quality of care was associated with an increase in teachers' offensive and punitive behaviour towards children. However, this was not the case for the intervention group. Therefore, in this study, the PLD appeared to act as a protective measure against the effects of poor working conditions (Rosenthal & Gatt, 2010).

2.8.2 Perceptions of conflict, safety and harmony.

Bayer and colleagues (1995) posit that teachers' responses to peer conflicts are influenced by teachers' perceptions of conflict, concerns regarding the atmosphere of the classroom and concerns for toddlers' safety. According to Bayer and colleagues, the teachers ($n = 13$) in their study perceived peer conflicts as negative or unsafe events that disrupted the peace in the classroom, which compelled teachers to end conflicts as quickly as possible rather than utilise conflicts as learning opportunities. Additionally, the busy-ness of the environment may have prompted teachers to simply call out to toddlers who were in a dispute, rather than intervene to assist or support the toddlers' social-problem-solving skills (Bayer et al., 1995).

The toddler classroom involved in Bayer and colleagues' (1995) research had guiding procedures, in the form of a document called *Discipline/Guidance Guidelines*, which were supposed to support teachers in ways to use strategic assistance, support toddlers' negotiation and social-emotional skills and promote toddlers' involvement in social problem solving. However, in practice the teachers often relied on strategies that did not encourage toddlers to express their point of view or to become involved in social problem solving. In other words, there was a disparity between policy and practice, pointing to the possibility that mitigating factors may need to be addressed before teaching guidelines and procedures are used effectively. That said, it is not clear whether Bayer and colleagues actually asked the teachers what drove their responses to conflict. Furthermore, Bayer and colleagues' study was conducted over 20 years ago; teaching practices may be quite different now. More current research into teachers' views of conflict and how those views influence teaching practice is needed and could, perhaps, best be approached by asking teachers.

2.8.3 Knowledge and views of children.

To explore teachers' self-reports of practice, Silver and Harkins (2007) gave teachers ($n = 31$) from various American childcare centres several hypothetical vignettes of children's peer conflicts and asked the teachers how they would react in each of the given conflict situations. Overall, the teachers more often reported strategies intended to end conflicts than strategies that were intended to teach the children social-problem-solving skills. Silver and Harkins posit that teachers' working conditions influenced their responses to children's peer conflict. In explanation of this, one centre had greater financial resources and better teacher-child ratios than the other centres involved. The teachers at the well-resourced centre more often reported teaching strategies that taught the toddlers social-problem-solving skills, whereas the teachers at the other centres were more likely to report strategies that simply focussed on ending the conflicts. The suggestion that work conditions, or at least teachers' perceptions of their work conditions, affect teachers' responses to peer conflicts resonates with Gloeckler and colleagues' (2014) findings that

teachers' stress and work dissatisfaction appeared to mitigate the effects of professional development.

Silver and Harkins (2007) also examined how teachers' emotional reactions to conflict, and teachers' perceptions of children, might influence the strategies they used. To ascertain whether teachers' perceptions of children affected teaching strategies, Silver and Harkins assigned the hypothetical children histories that prompted teachers to perceive them as being easy or difficult to manage, or as ambiguous (teachers weren't given information about the child labelled ambiguous so perceptions of this child were considered to be neutral). In the easy and difficult child vignettes, teachers tended to report strategies intended to stop the conflict, however, teachers were more likely to allow time and support social-problem-solving skills for the ambiguous child. Therefore, Silver and Harkins suggest that any underlying belief about children, positive or negative, influences the way teachers respond during peer conflict. These findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study; for example, two of Silver and Harkin's vignettes—the vignette with the difficult child and the ambiguous child—involved physical force, a variable that would be likely to influence when and how teachers responded. Also, the teachers' self-reports of practice may differ from actual practice. For instance, a teacher's emotional response to a vignette may not be as strong or as easy to interpret as that elicited by a real conflict.

2.8.4 Teachers' emotional competence.

Ulloa's (2011) Aotearoa New Zealand research points to the emotional atmosphere of the early learning setting and teachers' own emotional awareness as factors that can determine whether teachers support children's social-emotional skills during peer conflicts. Ulloa's study focussed on how teachers promote children's positive emotional development, and began with observations of three early learning settings, over a 10-week period. Early learning settings where children's emotions were acknowledged and responded to with strategies such as "emotion coaching, encouraging of mastery, expressiveness of feelings and emotion talk, showed less

frequency of aggressive, unresolved conflict compared with centres that used more reactive and preventive strategies” (Ulloa, 2011, p. ii). Ulloa explains that emotion coaching, which involves teaching social-emotional skills by acknowledging, labelling or discussing children’s feelings prior to, during or after an emotional event (Harvey, Bimler, Evans, Kirkland, & Pechtel, 2012; Webster-Stratton, 2012), helps children understand and manage emotional experiences. Encouraging mastery is a process where teachers support or scaffold children to achieve tasks or specific behaviours, while the strategies called expressiveness of feelings and emotion talk require the teacher’s genuine focus on the emotional communication (Ulloa, 2011). While these strategies involve direct teaching, Ulloa’s research also highlights the importance of indirect emotional influences, such as the way teachers model emotional expression and emotionally relevant behaviour. Another influence is teachers’ meta-emotions, which are personal beliefs and feelings about emotions (Ulloa, 2011).

Phase two of Ulloa’s (2011) research involved a professional learning and development programme based on the effective strategies that were observed in phase one, and with the purpose of exploring and coaching teachers’ emotional awareness and emotional competence. An outcome of the intervention was that when teachers were better able to understand their emotional experience and their reactions to children’s emotional situations, they became more aware of children’s emotional needs. Emotionally aware teachers were more able to regulate their personal emotional reaction and respond in constructive, mindful ways to the children’s situations, including conflict situations. In addition, Ulloa described how the emotional atmospheres of early childhood education settings influence the ways teachers promote emotional socialisation, saying “the general emotional atmosphere allows teachers to be more mindful, less reactive, and more strategic in responding to children’s emotions” (2011, p. ii). The implications of Ulloa’s research are that teachers’ emotional awareness, the emotional atmosphere of the early learning setting and teachers’ use of specific teaching strategies, including emotion

coaching, encouraging of mastery and emotion talk, support teachers to effectively promote children's wellbeing and learning during emotionally-charged situations.

2.8.5 Summary of influential factors.

Some of the many factors that influence the ways teachers respond to toddlers' peer conflicts are: the type of conflict and the children who are involved; any desire to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the early learning setting; safety concerns; and teachers' beliefs and attitudes, especially about conflict and social-emotional behaviour. In general, the literature suggests that responding to peer conflicts can be challenging for teachers, who may need more support to work effectively with toddlers during moments of conflict. Some training programmes have improved teachers' abilities to work effectively with toddlers during peer conflicts, for example Rosenthal and Gatt (2010) found that a training programme not only supported effective pedagogy during emotionally-charged events, such as conflicts, but also acted as a buffer against some of the detrimental effects of poor quality working conditions. Ulloa (2011) found that teachers who engaged in training to enhance their own emotional competence and awareness were more likely to meet the emotional needs of children.

2.9 What are the Implications for Aotearoa New Zealand Research?

Smith and colleagues' (1996) Aotearoa New Zealand study found that teachers used a wide variety of strategies when they responded to children's conflicts (see also Smith & Barraclough, 1999). Mostly, teachers aimed to teach the children social-problem-solving skills that they would eventually be able to use independently. Overall, the type and timing of teacher response was a matter of professional judgment, influenced by the type of conflict and the children involved. Many teachers advocated for a watch and wait approach, however, quick intervention appeared to be more valued by the infant/toddler teachers who were observed than those teachers who were interviewed.

Smith and colleagues' (1996) study is the only Aotearoa New Zealand research identified that specifically studied toddlers' peer conflicts and teachers' responses to peer conflicts. In addition, the study is over 20 years old. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of Aotearoa New Zealand research related to infants and toddlers in early childhood education (e.g., Bary et al., 2008; Carrol-Lind & Angus, 2011; Dalli et al., 2011; Jenkin, 2014; Rameka & Glasgow, 2015; Redder, 2014; Rockel & Craw, 2011; Ulloa, 2011; White, 2009) and social-emotional teaching and learning in the early years (e.g., Harvey et al., 2012; McLaughlin, Aspden, & McLachlan, 2015; Ulloa, 2011; Wooler, 2015; Wylie et al., 2004).

Yet, specific information about toddlers' peer conflict and teachers' practices relies predominantly on American research evidence and academic literature, such as empirical studies from Chen and colleagues (2001), Bayer and colleagues (1995) and Gloeckler and colleagues (2014). Not surprisingly, most researchers call for further investigations related to toddlers' peer conflicts and teachers' roles. Gloeckler and colleagues (2014) identify a need for further research on toddlers' social-problem-solving skills and supportive teaching practices. Chen and colleagues (2001) specifically highlight the need for such research in a wide range of cultures. This is certainly relevant for Aotearoa New Zealand, where there is an increased awareness of the importance of social-emotional competence (McLaughlin et al., 2015) but a dearth of current research specifically regarding how teachers respond to toddlers' peer conflicts.

2.10 Summary and Research Questions

Toddlers' peer conflicts, common in early learning centres, are potentially powerful learning events, however, quality of learning is often dependent on the way teachers respond. It is, therefore, important to know how teachers effectively facilitate toddlers' learning within the context of their peer conflicts. Furthermore, it is important to understand factors that influence teachers' responses to toddlers' conflicts, and especially which factors support effective teaching. Yet, there is a paucity of Aotearoa New Zealand research that explores teaching practices and

teachers' perspectives in relation to toddlers' peer conflicts. Ergo, this study aims to explore teachers' self-reports of their responses to toddlers' peer conflicts, within the contexts of four Aotearoa New Zealand early learning settings, by addressing the following questions:

In the context of toddlers' peer conflicts:

- How do teachers describe their roles?
- What practices do teachers value and use?
- What factors influence teachers' practice?
- What supports effective practice?

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the mixed methods design used to explore teachers' practices within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. A pragmatic worldview guided the process of collecting data through a web-based questionnaire and focus group interviews, with the intention of exploring teachers' perspectives. Statistical and thematic analysis methods were used to develop descriptions of how teachers supported toddlers and promoted their learning, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, and to identify factors that influenced and guided teachers' practice in these moments. The following sections outline details of the research design, including ethical considerations, research questions, participant recruitment, design of the questionnaire and focus group interviews, and the processes of statistical and thematic analysis.

3.1 Ethics

Prior to conducting the research, a Massey University Ethics Committee screening questionnaire was completed and the study was identified as low risk. However, to strengthen the research process, a full ethics application was submitted. This was approved by The Massey University Ethics Committee, Application Southern B 15/65 (Appendix 1). In particular, this study was guided by the principle of informed consent. Participants were given written information, detailing the data collection processes and informing participants of their right to withdraw at any stage. As requested, the researcher met with potential participants to discuss the research and answer any questions. Consent forms were signed in regards to participation and approval for release of transcripts. Furthermore, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was respected and preserved at all times, and ethical guidelines for the storage and eventual disposal of data were met. See Appendices: 2) Information to Centres; 3) Information to Teachers; 4) Consent Form and; 5) Transcript Release Form.

3.2 Purpose of Study

The study was designed to learn about teachers' responses to toddlers' peer conflicts, including the pedagogical practices teachers valued and used during toddlers' conflicts, factors that influenced teachers' practice, and factors that supported effective teaching practice. Previous research suggests that pedagogy that supports toddlers' learning during peer conflicts involves complex professional judgments and depends on an array of influencing factors (Gloeckler et al., 2014; Rosenthal & Gatt, 2010; Smith et al., 1996; Ulloa, 2011), however, there is limited research within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Thus, the present study explored teachers' self-reports of practice, to learn which pedagogical practices teachers valued and used, and why, and how the practices were enacted, through the following research questions:

In the context of toddlers' peer conflicts:

- How do teachers describe their roles?
- What practices do teachers value and use?
- What factors influence teachers' practice?
- What supports effective practice?

Although this study is exploratory of teachers' perspectives and experiences, it has the potential to inform further research, policy and practice, to strengthen understandings of toddlers' peer conflicts and related pedagogical practices, and to promote better learning outcomes for toddlers.

3.3 Worldview

Research is often underpinned by a philosophical foundation, or worldview, which encompasses the researcher's beliefs and understandings about the generation of knowledge (Creswell, 2014). This research study was guided by a pragmatic worldview. Pragmatism focusses on real-life issues, emphasises the nature of experience, often examines shared beliefs and utilises multiple ways to learn about research problems (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, a pragmatic worldview supports flexibility in research methods, encourages the use of multiple perspectives and is

often associated with mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). Pragmatism provided an effective foundation for the present research because it supported complementary approaches to data collection and analysis, which promoted the generation of breadth and depth of information and a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

3.4 Research Design

A mixed methods approach was used to develop an in-depth understanding of teachers' perspectives and experiences of their practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Mixed methods research involves the rigorous collection, analysis and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data, which are either merged, connected or embedded into the analysis (Creswell, 2014). This study featured a parallel, convergent mixed methods design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed before the results were compared, contrasted and merged (Figure 1). Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a questionnaire. Demographic information was also obtained, via an email to centre managers or head teachers.

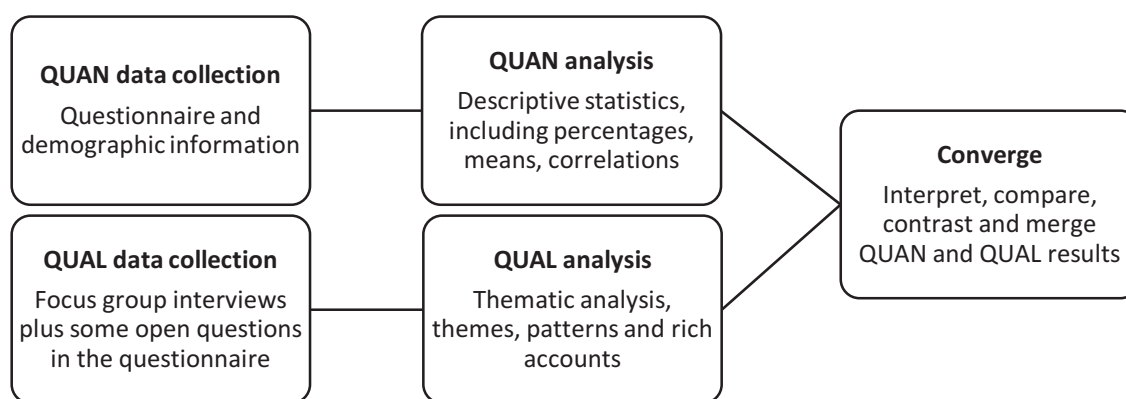


Figure 1. Flow chart of parallel convergent mixed methods design.

Creswell (2014) argues that a strength of mixed methods research is that using both quantitative and qualitative approaches can minimise limitations and maximise strengths of both approaches. In this way, in the present study, biases and

weaknesses in the quantitative data collection and analyses were offset by strengths in the qualitative aspects, and vice versa. For example, teachers may have been more willing to share information anonymously through the questionnaire, than through group discussions. Conversely, focus group discussions may have provided prompts for information that an individual may not have otherwise recalled. Creswell also argues that the mixed methods approach supports sophisticated, flexible designs that are focussed on solving research problems. In this light, the present study's focus group interviews, which involved open-ended questions and discussions, produced rich qualitative data that were compared, contrasted and merged with the quantitative results to produce in-depth answers to the research questions.

3.5 Participants

A total of 31 toddler teachers from four early learning settings participated in the research. A multi-site approach was adopted to gain an understanding of a range of teachers' perspectives across different contexts. However, the sample was not selected to be representative of all early childhood services, given the size and scope of the study and the diversity of early learning services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The four participating groups were selected from a purposive sample of early learning settings that were rated as "very well placed" by ERO. This is the highest rating provided by ERO and indicates that the centres/kindergartens are very well placed against a range of quality indicators to promote positive learning outcomes for children. It was, therefore, expected that the participating groups would be likely to demonstrate effective teaching practices that promoted positive learning outcomes for toddlers. Another criterion was that the early learning settings catered for toddlers within the age-range of one to three years.

Participant recruitment was by invitation, through an emailed letter to early learning settings. The early learning settings were identified through an advanced

search of the ERO website, using the key phrase “very well placed”, by searching the geographical areas near Hamilton, Manawatū and Horowhenua, and by checking that the early learning settings catered for toddlers. In the case where an early learning setting was managed by an umbrella organisation, permission was gained from the organisation before the centre/kindergarten was approached. Seven invitations were sent and three centres and one kindergarten agreed to participate. Agreement from each setting’s manager or head teacher was followed by a process to gain informed consent from individual toddler-teachers within the setting.

3.6 Data Collection

Focus group interviews and web-based questionnaires were used to collect data, and an email was sent to managers or head teachers to request a descriptive overview of their centre/kindergarten, including group size, age-range of the toddlers, teacher–toddler ratio, any special characteristics of the setting and any relevant professional learning or self-review the centre/kindergarten had undertaken. Data collection took place between March 2016 and June 2016. The following sections describe the focus group and questionnaire processes, and the rationale for these processes.

3.6.1 Focus group interview design.

Focus group interviews are interactive group discussions that prompt people to share their opinions, beliefs and attitudes about a topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015). For this study, it was important that the focus group participants felt comfortable, respected and free to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment. Furthermore, as suggested by McLachlan (2005), the focus groups were intended to be enlightening and empowering for the participants and researcher, and to explore the what, why and how of teachers’ practice. Therefore, guided by Krueger and Casey’s recommendations, interviews took place at each participating group’s centre/kindergarten, where the participants were likely to feel a sense of belonging and ease within the environment. To help facilitate productive conversations,

ground rules and guidelines were overviewed in collaboration with participants and the questions were delivered in a flexible style. The focus group questions were designed collaboratively between the researcher and research supervisors and were guided by the literature review. The questions were designed to promote interactive discussions, as recommended by Krueger and Casey, and by McLachlan, and to attend to this study's research questions. Another consideration was that the focus group method is consistent with the type of collaborative approach that is highly valued in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education (McLachlan, 2005). Furthermore, each focus group was flexible and intended to meet the needs of each group, rather than replicate any previous group. Focus groups took approximately 1½ hours and were conducted at a time negotiated by the researcher and the centre/kindergarten. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions were given to the teachers for review and approval. For the full focus group format, please see Appendix 6.

3.6.1.1 Photo elicitation interviews.

A feature of the focus groups was that photographs (Appendix 7) of toddlers in conflict and in emotionally-charged situations were given to teachers to look at and discuss during the interviews, with the intention of enriching teachers' responses. Photographs used had appropriate distribution permissions and none of the toddlers were known to the researcher or participants. Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI) have been used in numerous studies to help the participants give richer answers to the researchers' questions (Torre & Murphy, 2015). One rationale for showing photos during interviews is that photos are understood on a personal level and therefore can trigger responses in relation to the viewer's interpretation of the image. In this way, participants might share memories, experiences, emotions, narratives and reflections—information that is prompted by the photo but that exists outside of the image itself (Shohel, 2012). For this research, the photos were distributed to the teachers, during the focus group, with the intention of prompting and supporting discussion about emotional aspects of conflict. In one focus group, the photos were not used because the discussion already focussed on emotions and

the teachers shared ideas readily throughout the discussion. In other words, the photos weren't needed to prompt or facilitate further discussion.

3.6.2 Questionnaire design.

A specifically designed web-based questionnaire (Appendix 8) was electronically distributed to the participants, after each focus group. The questionnaire was a key data collection tool because it enabled anonymous responses and it guided participants to respond to direct questions, thus complementing the collaborative, open-ended nature of the focus group discussions.

The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with two research supervisors. There were 11 questions and spaces for teachers to make comments. The first four questions asked about demographic information, including teaching qualifications and experience. Question 5 explored teachers' roles in the context of toddlers' peer conflicts and asked teachers to rate eight teaching roles in relation to level of importance, using the following scale anchors: not important, slightly important, important, very important, extremely important. Question 6 explored the value and the frequency of use of various teaching strategies and asked teachers to rate 13 strategies, using the following scale anchors: not valuable, slightly valuable, valuable, very valuable, extremely valuable, and never used, rarely used, sometimes used, often used, nearly always used. Question 7 explored factors that influenced teachers' practice and asked teachers to rate level of influence of eight factors, using the following scale anchors: not influential, slightly influential, moderately influential, highly influential, extremely influential. Question 8 asked teachers to list any professional learning that had supported their work with toddlers within the context of peer conflicts. Questions 9 and 10 explored potentially supportive factors by asking teachers to rate level of helpfulness for a total of 20 factors, using the following scale anchors: not helpful, slightly helpful, helpful, very helpful, extremely helpful. Question 11 asked teachers to list any barriers or challenges that made it difficult to work with toddlers in the context of their peer conflicts. Each scale was weighted as 1–5, with 1 being not or never, and 5 being extremely or nearly always.

Effective questionnaires have questions that are not ambiguous, that are easy for participants to answer, and that gather the necessary information (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). Therefore, in this study's questionnaire, the questions were carefully and clearly structured, based on evidence found in the literature review, and designed to attend to the research questions. The scale, from not/never to extremely for each category, was consistent for each question and weighted as 1–5, to provide an interval-like measure that enabled teachers to choose from a range of ratings. The consistency of the scales also promoted ease of analysis, especially to identify relationships between some of the variables. Space for teachers to comment was important in the event that teachers might want to explain their response or provide additional information. The questionnaire was designed to take less than 20 minutes to complete, was piloted by the researcher's teaching and academic colleagues, including two research supervisors, and was fine-tuned as a result of piloting. At the end of each focus group, participants were reminded about the questionnaire and told when and how they would receive it.

3.7 Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were exported to Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23, for analysis. Qualitative questionnaire data, including teachers' lists of professional learning, were transferred to Microsoft Word documents. The approved interview transcripts were stored as Microsoft Word documents, for thematic analysis.

The following sections describe the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and how the results were merged. The purpose of the data analysis was to describe the teachers' perspectives and experiences for the participating settings, without intention to make inferences or analyses for a wider population. This is because the four participating early learning settings were not intended to be indicative or representative of other early learning settings. Thus, results are descriptive and illustrative of the perspectives and experiences of teachers in the selected settings.

3.7.1 Quantitative analysis.

Demographic information, including group size, age-range of toddlers and the teacher–child ratio for each setting, was recorded and collated by hand. All other descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS. The range and mean were used to describe the participants’ teaching experience, in terms of how many years/months they had taught in total, taught toddlers specifically, and taught at their current centre. Percentages were calculated to report the percentage of participants who held an early childhood teaching degree, early childhood teaching diploma, another teaching qualification, who were currently studying towards a teaching qualification, or who did not hold a teaching qualification. The remaining quantitative data were analysed by calculating means and standard deviations and, where associations between variables were explored, by calculating correlations using Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient (Spearman’s Rho).

3.7.1.1 Means and standard deviations.

Five questions required teachers to rate variables on scales, which were ranked from 1–5. Although the scales were ordinal in nature, the consistent use of rating descriptors across questions provided interval-like data, thus the mean (M) rating was used to describe a measure of central tendency for each set of ratings. Since not all participants rated every variable, means were calculated using the total number of responses (n) for each variable rather than the total number of participants. Standard deviations (SD), the average amount of variability in each set of ratings, were calculated to indicate the dispersion of ratings along each scale. Questions 9 and 10 included a not applicable (NA) choice. Any NA responses were removed from the data and their removal was reflected in the (n) for each variable.

3.7.1.2 Correlations.

Spearman’s Rho (r_s) was used to explore associations between teachers’ ratings of their roles, and associations between teaching roles and frequency of strategy use. Spearman’s Rho, rather than the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, was used to

measure the strength of the associations because of the ordinal nature of the data (see Field, 2009).

3.7.2 Thematic analysis.

Focus group data were analysed thematically in an iterative and cyclic process guided by the work of Patton (2015), Creswell (2013) and Liamputtong (2009). Initially, familiarisation with the content of each focus group was achieved through transcription, reading and rereading of the data. Statements that seemed relevant to the literature or simply significant in some way were identified and labelled with simple code names, as recommended by Liamputtong. The initial coding process was open and flexible, allowing for the emergence of many codes and the identification of common information. Further examination and revisiting of the coded data revealed potential themes into which coded statements were categorised. Three main categories emerged: culture of the centre/kindergarten; teachers' roles; and toddlers, which encompassed teachers' descriptions of their relationships with toddlers, teachers' perceptions and knowledge of individual toddlers, and knowledge of toddlerhood. As the analysis continued it became apparent that the differences between the categories were not always clear so data were split, combined and in some cases discarded accordingly, in the type of process described by Creswell and Liamputtong. Sub-themes and categories emerged within the main themes. Throughout the process, each category was critiqued based on how well the data fitted together within the category, how well the category described the data and whether the data had meaning in relation to the research questions (see Liamputtong, 2009). However, answering the research questions was not the only focus. As recommended by Creswell (2013) there was also an intent to make meaning of, and gain insight into, what the participants said, regardless of whether that related to the research questions. Descriptions that summarised the data were applied to each theme, alongside teachers' statements, and connections were made to the literature. Finally, for each of the three themes, the final iterations from the four focus groups were compared, merged and collated

into three final documents, labelled culture of the centre/kindergarten, teachers' roles and toddlers, with themes and sub-themes within each document.

3.8 Limitations and Delimitations

This study explores teachers' self-reports of their practices, rather than direct observation of practice. It is acknowledged that self-reports are reflective of teachers' personal perspectives and, therefore, there may be a difference between teachers' descriptions of their practices and what an independent observer would witness when looking at that same practice. That said, a benefit of investigating teachers' perspectives is that teachers are likely to be able to describe not only what they do but also how and why they do it, providing potentially rich insights into their pedagogy (Krueger & Casey, 2015; McLachlan, 2005). Such insights are important because other practitioners and researchers may find something within this research study that is relevant, and perhaps helpful, to their own contexts and situations (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). However, given the small size and scope of the present study, the intention of the data analysis is to describe the participating settings rather than make inferences for a wider population of early childhood education settings where teachers work with toddlers.

3.9 Summary

The methodology outlined in this chapter provides information to support the validity of this research and to allow for replication of this study. A mixed methods approach, featuring focus group interviews and a questionnaire, was used to explore teachers' perspectives of their pedagogical practices within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis methods, which provided complementary quantitative and qualitative results. These results were compared, contrasted and merged to develop in-depth answers to the research questions. The following chapter presents the results, in relation to the research questions.

Chapter Four: Results

The results of the study are reported in this chapter, in sections that are aligned with the research questions. Section one describes the research participants. Section two explores teachers' descriptions of their roles within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts (How do teachers describe their roles?). Section three explores teaching practices, including how much teachers valued and how frequently they used various practices (What practices do teachers value and use?). Section four explores factors that influence teachers' practice (What factors influence teachers' practice?). The final section describes conditions that support teachers' effective practice (What supports effective practice?). Throughout this chapter, teachers' practice refers to pedagogical practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Direct quotes from teachers are given in italics. In addition, data reported for the questionnaire will show the (*n*) as a table note or a data column. Response to each question was voluntary and not all questions were answered by every teacher.

4.1 The Participants

Three early learning centres and one kindergarten participated in the research. Consistent with the purposive sampling design, the four early learning settings had been identified by ERO as very well placed to support children's learning. All the settings catered for toddlers, within the age-range of one to three years. Special characteristics of each of the four settings are outlined in Table 4 (p. 52). Group sizes and the age-ranges of children in each setting varied. Setting one was a toddler room (part of a larger early learning centre) that catered for toddlers from 13 months up to three years old. Setting two was a mixed-age early learning centre that enrolled children from infancy up to school-age. Setting three was a mixed-age kindergarten that enrolled children from infancy up to school-age, and setting four comprised two sections/rooms of an early learning centre; each section catered for children from infancy up to (mostly) two years old, with a few toddlers between two and three years old.

Table 4. *Characteristics of each early learning setting.*

Setting	Maximum group size	Teacher–child ratio	Age-range	Characteristics
1	34	1:5	From 13 months up to 3 years	Toddler room
2	40	1:5 (recently changed from 1:3)	From infancy up to school-age	Mixed-age/ whānau-based kindergarten
3	40	1:4 for under 2-year-olds and 1:8 for over 2, with an additional teacher included when under 2 and over 2 are joined together	From infancy up to school-age	Mixed-age. Flexibility with shared or separate spaces
4	22 in each section	Under two 1:4 and over two 1:7, which equates to 1:4 or 1:5 for the mixed-age group	From infancy up to 2 years, plus a few toddlers between the ages of 2 and 3 years old	Two separate sections of the same centre

Across the four settings, 31 teachers participated in the focus groups: 5 in setting one; 7 in setting two; 6 in setting three; and 13 in setting four. Twenty-two teachers responded to the questionnaire. Teacher characteristic data were collected through the questionnaire and are reported for the 22 responding teachers. Most of the teachers were qualified (91%), with 4.5% unqualified and 4.5% working towards a qualification, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. *Participants' teaching qualifications.*

Qualification	% of teachers
Early childhood teaching degree	68.2
Early childhood teaching diploma	18.2
Other teaching qualification	4.5
No teaching qualification	4.5
Currently studying towards a teaching qualification	4.5

Note. *n* = 22.

The teachers' experience ranged from one month to 32 ½ years, with an average teaching experience of 9 ½ years. Teaching experience specifically with toddlers ranged from one month to 20 ½ years, with an average of eight years. Teachers had been teaching at their current early learning setting from one month to 12 years, with an average of just over five years teaching at their current setting.

4.2 How did Teachers Describe Their Roles?

Key teaching roles of protector, advocate, role model and coach emerged from the analysis of focus group and questionnaire data. Within the questionnaire, teachers rated eight teaching roles according to their level of importance. Table 6 shows the mean level of importance and the standard deviations for each of these roles.

Table 6. Teachers' ratings of the importance of teaching roles.

Roles	<i>M (SD)</i>
	Importance of role ^a
Ensure the toddlers' physical safety	4.45 (.80)
Identify, acknowledge and discuss emotions	4.41 (.80)
Protect the toddlers	4.36 (.79)
Encourage the toddlers' involvement in social problem solving	4.27 (.98)
Give toddlers time and space to work things out for themselves	4.14 (.89)
Mediate and teach the toddlers conflict resolution skills	4.05 (.90)
Maintain a peaceful environment	3.55 (1.22)
Stop the conflict	2.95 (1.25)

Note. $n = 22$

^aScale: 1 = not important, 2 = slightly important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = extremely important.

As shown in Table 6, most of the teaching roles were rated, on average, between very important and extremely important, with little variability amongst teachers'

ratings for each role. However, maintaining peace and stopping the conflict were rated as less important roles than the others ($M = 3.55$; $M = 2.95$, respectively) and there was a greater range of responses for these two roles ($SD = 1.22$; $SD = 1.25$, respectively); in particular, there was a more diverse range of opinion regarding the importance of stopping the conflict.

Teachers identified ensuring toddlers' physical safety ($M = 4.45$) as the most important role, rated between very to extremely important. The role of protecting toddlers also rated between very to extremely important ($M = 4.36$). One teacher commented, *"as well as toddlers' physical safety I rate the emotional safety even higher."* In accord, focus group discussions revealed that teachers acted as protector, *"ensuring that sense of equity ... making sure the children's rights are being nurtured in their journey"*, as well as ensuring physical safety. Protecting toddlers' rights and wellbeing required advocating for toddlers when necessary and being empathetic, without judgment: *"You have empathy for the child who is hurt and you also have empathy for the child on the other side who you want to support to learn the skills to get along with this child over here."* Furthermore, throughout the focus groups, teachers identified acting as a role model as an important and constant teaching role, saying *"toddlers seeing how you deal with your emotion is key to scaffolding them to deal with their emotions"* and *"role modelling is integrated into everything we do."*

During the photo-elicitation stage of the interviews, the images of toddlers in emotionally-charged situations evoked empathy and sympathy from the teachers. Many teachers read toddlers' expressions from the photos and shared toddlers' perspectives and voices: *"Why is this happening to me?" "Don't touch me!"* and *"It's heartbreaking. They are so sad."* However, while some teachers expressed strong empathy with the toddlers' emotions, in general the attitude was not one of pity. Instead, teachers said that their role was to empower toddlers, who they believed were capable of working through difficult situations, especially with the support of a teacher. For example, many teachers agreed that *"it's not necessarily about working*

it out but nurturing the children in their own journey of empowerment for how they can work through the situation." Some teachers identified that they empowered toddlers by teaching them social-emotional skills that they might later use independently. As one teacher said: *"It's going to take some time because they're still quite young but [I aim to] give them the skills so that next time they are better prepared to be able to deal with the situation."* These approaches are in line with two roles that were rated, within the questionnaire, as very important: mediate and teach the toddlers conflict resolution skills ($M = 4.05$); and allow time and space for toddlers to work things out for themselves ($M = 4.14$).

Teachers were aware that toddlers often needed support to regulate their emotions. Therefore, acknowledging toddlers' emotions, helping them to understand that their feelings were accepted, and supporting them to calm down when necessary were identified as important teaching practices: *"At the heat of the moment we have found out that learning doesn't quite work. You have got to give them time to actually get to that point where they are ready to listen because otherwise it just escalates."* Teachers not only offered emotional support to toddlers but intentionally taught them about emotions. One teacher summed this up: *"We are teaching them about feelings."* In accord, within the questionnaire, the role of identifying, acknowledging and discussing emotions was rated as the second most important role ($M = 4.41$).

Taken together, the focus group data and rating data suggested that keeping toddlers physically and emotionally safe was a priority for teachers. Within a safe environment, teachers advocated for toddlers, protected their rights and empowered them to learn. It was important for teachers to intervene in peer conflicts, with intentions to encourage toddlers' involvement in social problem solving and teach social-emotional skills. It was also important to allow toddlers time and space to practise independent social problem solving.

4.3 Which Practices Were Valued and Used by Teachers?

The following section presents teachers' reports of valuable and frequently used teaching practices. Teachers' questionnaire ratings of value and frequency of use of different practices are reported and integrated with focus group accounts of teachers' practice.

4.3.1 Teacher reported value and use of teaching practices.

Table 7 (p. 57) shows teacher ratings of 13 teaching practices. Ratings are provided for the extent to which teachers value each practice and its frequency of use. Overall, if a practice was rated as valuable, it was also rated as frequently used. However, there was greater discrepancy between value and frequency for the practice of calling out to toddlers, which appeared to be used more than it was valued. A possible explanation for this was given by one teacher, who said that sometimes teachers called out to the toddlers, or didn't respond to a conflict, because there was another priority: *"There are times when there is a conflict in the room and you have a child on your knee, giving them a bottle ..."*

As shown in Table 7, the most valued practices—commenting and offering feedback, talking about emotions, explaining and encouraging toddlers to communicate and solve problems—were all rated between very and extremely valuable ($M = 4.50$; $M = 4.25$; $M = 4.25$, respectively). Focus groups revealed that teachers used these types of strategies to *"empower the toddlers to learn."* Encouraging the toddlers to say sorry was the lowest rated practice; it fell within the range of not valuable to slightly valuable ($M = 1.75$) and was used rarely ($M = 2.05$). Two teachers explained that *"sorry can be just a word and children don't necessarily mean it."* The *SD* values indicate that, overall, teachers' ratings for each practice were similar. However, some practices, especially giving the toddlers a closed set of choices, telling toddlers how not to behave, and encouraging the toddlers to say sorry, received more variable responses.

Table 7. Teacher ratings of value and use of practices.

Practice	n	Mean (SD)	
		Value ^a	Frequency ^b
Offer feedback and verbal commentary during or immediately after the conflict	20	4.50 (.68)	4.25 (.55)
Acknowledge and label toddlers' emotions	20	4.25 (.85)	4.10 (.85)
Offer an explanation e.g. <i>Tom wants to sit by himself</i>	20	4.25 (.83)	4.15 (.59)
Encourage toddlers to communicate & solve problems	20	4.15 (.67)	4.15 (.49)
Tell toddlers how to behave e.g. <i>Gentle hands</i>	20	3.90 (.85)	4.20 (.61)
Ask the toddlers questions e.g. <i>Mia, what do you want?</i>	20	3.90 (1.12)	3.95 (.89)
Support the toddlers until a resolution is reached	20	3.70 (1.13)	3.90 (.97)
Seek restitution e.g. <i>Sit with her till she feels better</i>	20	3.30 (1.03)	3.25 (.91)
Call out to the toddlers e.g. <i>Stop</i>	20	2.75 (.72)	3.25 (.72)
Direct the toddlers by giving an instruction e.g. <i>Tommy give it to Max</i>	20	2.75 (1.05)	3.00 (.92)
Give toddlers a closed set of choices e.g. <i>Do it together or find somewhere else to play</i>	20	2.45 (1.15)	2.70 (1.03)
Tell toddlers how not to behave e.g. <i>No hitting</i>	19	2.32 (1.20)	2.63 (1.07)
Encourage the toddlers to say sorry	20	1.75 (.91)	2.05 (1.15)

Note. ^a Scale for Value: 1 = not valuable, 2 = slightly valuable, 3 = valuable, 4 = very valuable, 5 = extremely valuable ^b Scale for Frequency: 1 = never used, 2 = rarely used, 3 = sometimes used, 4 = often used, 5 = nearly always used

4.3.2 Coaching, supporting and using professional judgment.

During the focus group interviews, the teachers offered rich accounts of the practices that they value and use. Through the process of thematic analysis, the practices reported by teachers were categorised according to three key themes: coaching practices, supportive practices and use of professional judgment. Coaching involved: modelling; coaching language skills; offering feedback; commenting on what the toddlers were doing or what they might be feeling; and coaching emotional literacy. (Emotional literacy is defined by Sharp [2001, p. 1] as “the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions”). Supportive practices included: allowing toddlers time to become calm, to process and to practise; supporting toddlers’ independence; being present and mindful; not judging; and focussing on the process not the solution. Professional judgment was used to decide when and how to intervene in toddlers’ peer conflicts. Tables 8, 9 and 10 expand on each category, show the strategies that teachers valued and used, and why, and provide examples of how each strategy might look in practice. Each table is discussed in order.

Table 8 (pp. 59–60) shows the coaching practices that teachers described. One teacher explained that *“when you coach you might be feeding words; you might be using your body language; you are down at their level.”* Teachers coached emotional literacy by acknowledging, validating and naming emotions as well as modelling emotional regulation. The intention was to support toddlers at a level that enabled them to remain involved in the social-problem-solving process. Commenting by calmly describing the events to the toddlers was identified as an important way to model language and help toddlers process the situation. Giving toddlers specific feedback on desired behaviour was a way to encourage the types of behaviours the teachers wanted to see. Asking toddlers questions was a strategy that enabled teachers and toddlers to hear the toddlers’ perspectives, and asking questions was also a way to prompt verbal language. However, not all teachers thought it was important to ask questions, some said they didn’t need to know the cause of the conflict and they did not expect upset toddlers to be able to answer.

Table 8. Coaching practices that were valued and used by teachers.

Practice	Rationale	How teachers described the practice in action
Calmly describe the event and emotions to the toddlers	To help the toddlers process what is happening by commenting. To validate and label feelings or actions and model calmness.	<i>The sports casting technique: If they are not hurt you can calmly say, "[Child's name] has taken the toy. Now you are upset because you had the toy."</i>
Intentionally teach emotional literacy skills	In meaningful situations, acknowledging, validating and naming feelings, as well as role modelling emotional regulation, supports toddlers' emotional literacy.	<i>You're crying, you are upset or you are angry—so we are giving them those sorts of words as well.</i>
Scaffold to support emerging skills and empower learning	To support toddlers to learn and practise skills that they can't manage without help in this given moment, but eventually they may learn to use independently.	<i>Sometimes just dropping in "Gosh there's only one truck." You are not answering [solving the problem] you are providing a drop in the bucket really.</i>
	To empower the toddlers to learn, not to fix the situation or solve the conflict.	<i>Just being there to support the child if they need me but I am not always going to fix everything and that is OK if I don't fix it.</i>
Offer feedback	To respond to and reinforce desired behaviour.	<i>Label what you feel should be reinforced, what you want them to achieve: "That was great sharing. I know it is hard to share."</i>
Explain or instruct	To teach the rules and values of the centre.	<i>Say, "We need to be looking after others and be kind to others." I was there to say, "You need to pass it on now."</i>

Ask	<p>To find out how toddlers are feeling, what they think, what happened.</p> <p>To scaffold communication and to find out how to support the toddlers.</p>	<p>We need to ask ... <i>"What's happening?"</i> Not jumping to conclusions is really important.</p> <p>Ask them what it is that they want. They might be able to communicate to you what they want but can't do it to the child that they're frustrated with. Get them to tell you what they want and then give them the words to use with the other child.</p> <p>You can't say <i>"We don't yell at people"</i> and [yet] you're yelling at them ...</p> <p>We have children looking in to what is going on during a conflict, looking at how a teacher reacts and thinking ... how am I going to react? It's not just this isolation of conflict. There is a wider circle of observers.</p> <p>Model appropriate behaviours on how to share so they are hearing it from us within the team <i>"I am sharing my pen with [teacher's name] because she needs to write her words."</i></p> <p>I model the words that I think the child could be using, telling him what to say. I know very well that he probably can't say all the words but the more often he hears the words and as his language develops then he learns. He learns to say <i>"Move over"</i> or <i>"I want ..."</i> or <i>"I need ..."</i> or <i>"My turn."</i></p>
Model desired behaviours	<p>Because the child begins to practise the same type of behaviour that others practise with him/her.</p> <p>Teachers are role models, both within and outside the context of toddlers' conflicts.</p>	
Coach and model language	<p><i>Being the child's voice is very important because often at that age they don't have the verbal language development and so the support is really needed.</i></p>	

Note. Teachers' quotes are italicised

Table 9 (p. 62) shows the supportive practices that teachers described. Supporting toddlers was a balancing act because it involved offering support while still encouraging toddlers' involvement in the social-problem-solving process. With this in mind, teachers matched the type of support they gave to the situation and to toddlers' needs. Teachers also gave toddlers time to become calm, to process and to practise, as long as toddlers were safe and frustration didn't take over. It was very important to protect, support and nurture toddlers' identity, dignity and esteem. Teachers achieved this by being genuine, mindful, non-judgmental and by focussing on the learning process. Developing and maintaining a trusting relationship and keeping things fair between teacher and toddler were also key to protecting toddlers' dignity and esteem. One teacher said, *"If the situation is unfair between peers, that is not as bad. That builds resilience in the children. If it is unfairness between a child and an adult, that builds mistrust."*

Table 10 (p. 63) shows how teachers used professional judgment to guide their practice. Teachers varied their strategies to find a response that best met the needs of each situation, and the toddlers themselves. Providing the toddlers were safe, it was important to wait and watch, to see whether help was needed and, if so, what type of help was needed. Professional judgment was called upon throughout conflict events too. For example, teachers said they might use many different strategies during a single conflict, depending on what worked.

In addition to practices described in tables 8, 9 and 10, each focus group highlighted the importance of empowering toddlers and optimising teaching and learning opportunities to teach social-emotional skills. As one teacher commented:

I use a diverse range of teaching strategies to support each child in their journey of learning about whakawhanaungatanga and developing self-control and self-regulation. We will have discussed this as a teaching team and identified learning objectives in partnership with whānau.

Table 9. Supportive practices that were valued and used by teachers.

Practice	Rationale	How teachers described the practice in action
Be physically close to the conflict, with the intention of supporting if necessary.	Ensure toddlers' physical safety.	<i>If it's an aggressive conflict, then obviously, it's straight in there. If it is a child that you know has a tendency to become aggressive or to bite, then you are in very close physical proximity while they try to work through it.</i>
	Ensure toddlers' wellbeing, in a holistic way.	<i>Sometimes I will sort of stand back and watch with the intention of showing that I trust them.</i>
Support toddlers to become calm, to process what is happening and to practise.	Support toddlers' emotional regulation skills and allow them time to learn.	<i>You might not need to say anything but just step closer. That can be enough for them to feel secure.</i> <i>Saying "I can see you are crying" is like saying can I be your helper without doing everything for you and taking away that independence.</i> <i>[Sit] with them and giving them time to calm down if the conflict has escalated and they are really upset. So, it is giving them time to calm themselves and then have some sort of korero with them.</i>
Advocate for both toddlers without judging.	To uphold toddlers' dignity.	<i>Just because someone is a lot louder than the other one it is not necessarily what has happened before you arrived so you can't go in and judge.</i>
Encourage toddlers to be assertive.	Some toddlers need support to stand up for their rights.	<i>Sometimes being a voice for those children who are not as vocal about their conflict situation ... those children that you know could be playing with a truck and another child comes and takes it and they just sort of give in.</i>
Be present and mindful.	Being present helps teachers focus on what is happening in that moment and to respond accordingly.	<i>Be with them, be present and be attentive... show them that it is OK doing what they are doing - it is a good learning opportunity. And just be in that moment.</i> <i>Show that you care. Show that you want to be there to help them through their conflict. You actually really want to support them through that learning process.</i>

Note. Teachers' quotes are italicised.

Table 10. Professional judgment practices that were valued and used by teachers.

Practice	Rationale	How teachers described the practice in action
Take time to decide what type of help is needed and individualise responses.	To respond in ways that best support the toddlers and the situation.	<i>Each situation and what you do can be varied according to your knowledge of the child, what you see is happening and perhaps what our team approach has been.</i> <i>Sometimes you might go through five different strategies in one conflict.</i>
Wait in close proximity and intervene when necessary.	To allow toddlers an opportunity to practise independent social problem solving.	<i>Wait. Keep calm. Think - do they need me straight away or can they work this through themselves?</i>
	To keep the toddlers safe but still allow them opportunities to practise independently.	<i>If it is not a safety thing, take that little moment in time to know how to best support them ...</i>

Note. Teachers' quotes are italicised

4.3.3 Summary of valuable and frequently used practices.

Valuable and frequently used coaching strategies included coaching social-emotional skills by commenting, offering feedback, talking about emotions and modelling skills and language. Teachers also asked toddlers questions to prompt communication and to encourage toddlers' involvement in the social-problem-solving process. Teachers focussed on supporting and promoting toddlers' emerging social-emotional skills so that they might later use these skills independently. Supportive practices included ensuring toddlers' wellbeing and safety, advocating for toddlers without judgment, allowing time and space for toddlers to practise, and upholding toddlers' esteem, dignity, positive self-identity or mana. Professional judgment was used to enable teachers to respond in ways that best suited the toddlers and the situation.

4.4 What Factors Influence Teachers' Practice?

Key areas of influence included teachers' desire to protect toddlers, their relationships with and knowledge of individual toddlers, and teachers' knowledge of toddlers in general. In this section, teacher ratings of influential factors (questionnaire data) are examined, and supported by examples from the focus groups. Additionally, associations between teachers' views and their practices are explored using correlations between teacher ratings. The correlations suggest that how teachers perceived their teaching role influenced teaching practices. Finally, additional factors related to the centre or kindergarten environment, identified through focus groups, are examined. Factors that supported teachers' effective practice are explored in Section 4.5.

4.4.1 Teachers' ratings of influential factors.

Teacher ratings of factors that influence their practice, shown in Table 11 (p. 65), suggest that concerns for the toddlers' safety and knowledge of individual toddlers were most influential.

Table 11. Teachers' ratings of factors that influence practice.

Factors	N	M (SD)
		Level of Influence ^a
My concerns for the toddlers' physical safety	20	4.55 (.60)
My knowledge of each toddler's skills and abilities e.g. language skills	20	4.35 (.59)
My knowledge of each toddler's temperament	19	4.32 (.75)
My knowledge of toddlers in general	20	4.20 (.70)
Any positive feelings I have e.g. feeling calm or empowered	20	3.85 (.81)
My desire to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the centre/kindergarten	20	3.40 (1.14)
My personal thoughts and perspectives about conflict	20	3.35 (.93)
Any negative feelings I have e.g. having a headache or feeling stressed	20	2.25 (1.02)

Note. ^aScale: 1 = not influential, 2 = slightly influential, 3 = moderately influential, 4 = highly influential, 5 = extremely influential.

Interestingly, concern for toddlers' physical safety was rated as having high to extreme influence on teachers' practice ($M = 4.55$), with a high level of agreement about this ($SD = .60$). The focus groups agreed that ensuring toddlers' physical safety and general wellbeing was extremely important. A teacher explained, "*Security for the child ... is physical and emotional. We ensure that they feel safe and secure at all times in this environment.*"

In addition, teachers' practice was highly influenced by their knowledge of individual toddlers' skills, abilities ($M = 4.35$) and temperaments ($M = 4.32$) and by teachers'

knowledge of toddlers in general ($M = 4.20$). This was reflected in focus group discussions when teachers said it was important to *“think about age, ability and understanding”* and emphasised that practice would be *“different for all the situations and for all the children’s different abilities.”*

Per the teachers’ ratings, more personal factors, such as teachers’ personal thoughts about conflict, had slightly less influence on teaching practice, although the SD values show more variability in the ratings for this factor ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .93$). Teachers’ negative feelings had only a slight influence on their practice but, again, there was variability in the ratings for this factor ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.02$). Focus group discussions revealed that many teachers were aware of their emotional reactions and managed them accordingly, as is evident in this comment:

Factors that influence my responses to toddlers’ conflict can differ from day to day, depending on the present situation. I do need to reflect on the spot sometimes to adjust my responses. For example, when one particular toddler has had many conflicts in one day I feel a bit over it but I know it is still important to support them.

Another teacher described the impact of personal stress and offered a strategy she used to mitigate this: *“When I feel stressed it has a high impact on toddlers’ behaviour. It is best to walk away and get other staff to support the toddler until you can think clearly yourself.”*

4.4.2 Associations between teachers’ ratings.

Table 12 (p. 67) displays the associations between teachers’ views of their role, calculated using Spearman’s Rho. Field (2009) classifies a correlation of ± 0.5 as strong, however, because of the interrelated and complex nature of the teaching roles, many strong associations were expected. Therefore, correlation coefficients over ± 0.6 were considered to represent particularly strong associations.

Table 12. Associations between teachers' views of role.

	Protect the toddlers	Stop the conflict	Mediate & teach conflict resolution	Give time & space	Identify & discuss emotions	Maintain peaceful setting	Ensure physical safety	Involve in problem solving process
Protect the toddlers	1.00	.37	.50*	-.13	-.07	.46*	.19	.12
Stop the conflict		1.00	.09	-.03	-.10	.65*	.29	.11
Mediate & teach conflict resolution			1.00	.20	.29	.09	.05	.17
Give time & space				1.00	.62*	.15	.54*	.75*
Identify, acknowledge & discuss emotions					1.00	-.04	.38	.51*
Maintain peaceful setting						1.00	.63*	.26
Ensure physical safety							1.00	.58*
Involve in problem solving process								1.00

Note. Correlation coefficients $\geq \pm .6$ are in boldface and underlined.

* $p < .05$

Maintaining peace was strongly associated with ensuring toddlers' physical safety ($r_s = .63$) and with stopping conflicts ($r_s = .65$). This means that teachers who rated maintaining peace as very important also rated ensuring physical safety and stopping the conflict as very important; conversely, teachers who rated maintaining peace as

less important also rated ensuring physical safety and stopping the conflict as less important.

The same trend occurred for maintaining a peaceful setting and the role of protecting the toddlers ($r_s = .46$), whereas, giving toddlers time and space to work things out for themselves was strongly associated with the importance of discussing emotions ($r_s = .62$) and encouraging toddlers' involvement in the social-problem-solving process ($r_s = .75$). In line with this, a focus group discussion revealed that teachers did not value maintaining a peaceful setting if it meant solving problems for toddlers. One teacher said, *"We could solve all the problems every day and it would be very peaceful but it is not what we are here for."*

Spearman's correlation coefficients were also calculated for associations between teaching roles and frequency of strategy use. Table 13 (pp. 69–70) displays the associations between teachers' ratings of importance of teaching roles and frequency of use of each strategy. The strongest association was between the role of stopping the conflict and the practice of encouraging toddlers to say sorry ($r_s = .66$). This suggests that teachers who gave greater importance to the role of stopping the conflict also indicated they more frequently encouraged toddlers to apologise; while teachers who gave less importance to the role of stopping the conflict also indicated they less frequently encouraged toddlers to apologise. These trends were reflected in the focus group discussions, with many teachers saying it was not important to stop the conflict, unless toddlers' safety was at risk, nor was it important for the toddlers to apologise. Furthermore, focus groups revealed that many teachers identified and discussed toddlers' emotions—*"we talk a lot about feelings"*—and allowed toddlers time and space to practise: *"We give children the opportunity to practise because when things like this happen you need the chance to practise and practise it for days and for months and in the journey of practising you develop your competence and skills."*

Table 13. Associations between teaching role and frequency of strategy use.

Frequency of Strategy Use	Teaching Role							
	Stop the conflict	Involve in problem solving process	Give time & space	Identify & discuss emotions	Mediate & teach conflict resolution	Maintain peaceful setting	Ensure physical safety	Protect the toddlers
Encourage the toddlers to say sorry	<u>.66**</u>	.08	-.08	-.24	.05	.59**	.41	.08
Tell toddlers how not to behave e.g. <i>No hitting</i>	.29	-.50*	-.37	-.58**	-.05	.08	-.19	.08
Give toddlers a closed set of choices e.g. <i>Do it together or find somewhere else to play</i>	-.01	-.41	-.34	-.35	.28	-.18	-.48*	.21
Call out to the toddlers e.g. <i>Stop</i>	-.29	.18	.26	-.01	.49*	-.29	-.19	.17
Offer feedback and verbal commentary during or immediately after the conflict	.32	.15	-.11	-.01	-.16	.07	.33	-.06
Acknowledge and label toddlers' emotions	-.16	.26	.24	.42	.05	-.01	.24	-.19

Offer an explanation e.g. <i>Tom wants to sit by himself</i>	<u>-.15</u>	<u>-.12</u>	<u>-.05</u>	<u>.02</u>	<u>.22</u>	<u>-.20</u>	<u>-.03</u>	<u>.07</u>
Use techniques that encourage the toddlers to communicate and solve problems	<u>.45*</u>	<u>-.21</u>	<u>-.13</u>	<u>-.04</u>	<u>-.13</u>	<u>.44</u>	<u>.39</u>	<u>.12</u>
Tell toddlers how to behave e.g. <i>Gentle hands</i>	<u>.13</u>	<u>-.29</u>	<u>-.41</u>	<u>-.04</u>	<u>-.18</u>	<u>-.18</u>	<u>.04</u>	<u>-.14</u>
Ask the toddlers questions e.g. <i>Mia, what do you want?</i>	<u>.45</u>	<u>.17</u>	<u>.05</u>	<u>.23</u>	<u>.26</u>	<u>.40</u>	<u>.53</u>	<u>.37</u>
Support the toddlers until a resolution is reached	<u>.00</u>	<u>.08</u>	<u>-.09</u>	<u>-.23</u>	<u>-.11</u>	<u>-.05</u>	<u>.07</u>	<u>-.21</u>
Seek restitution e.g. <i>Sit with her till she feels better or Come with me to get the ice pack</i>	<u>.38</u>	<u>-.05</u>	<u>-.17</u>	<u>-.05</u>	<u>.02</u>	<u>.26</u>	<u>.15</u>	<u>.12</u>
Direct the toddlers by giving an instruction e.g. <i>Tommy give it to Max</i>	<u>.32</u>	<u>-.08</u>	<u>.03</u>	<u>.12</u>	<u>.28</u>	<u>.15</u>	<u>.16</u>	<u>.41</u>

Note. Correlation coefficients >± .6 are in boldface and underlined.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Another trend, evident in Table 13, was the strong negative correlations that suggest some beliefs about teachers' roles are associated with not using certain practices. For example, telling toddlers how not to behave was negatively associated with encouraging toddlers' involvement in social problem solving ($r_s = -.50$) and discussing emotions ($r_s = -.58$). This suggests that teachers who rated encouraging toddlers' involvement in social problem solving and discussing emotions as less important, more frequently told toddlers how not to behave. Conversely, teachers who rated encouraging toddlers' involvement in social problem solving and discussing emotions as more important, less frequently told toddlers how not to behave.

Unexpectedly, the role of encouraging toddlers' involvement in social problem solving was not highly associated with encouraging toddlers to communicate and solve social problems ($r_s = -.21$); nor was it highly associated with talking about emotions ($r_s = .26$). These low associations were unexpected since discussing emotions and encouraging communication and social problem solving are the types of strategies that might support toddlers' social-problem-solving skills. Likewise, the role of mediating and teaching conflict resolution skills was not strongly associated with strategies that might support that role, such as encouraging toddlers' communication and social problem solving ($r_s = -.13$).

4.4.3 The environmental influence.

The focus group discussions offered insight into how the emotional, physical and temporal environment influenced the incidence of peer conflicts and related teaching practice. The impact of the emotional environment was explained in terms of how it felt when emotions and relationships were not positive:

It [negative emotions] goes through the children which can cause conflicts and unsettledness because the children don't understand what the feeling is within the room. It's not necessarily a certain thing. You just walk in the room and you can feel something is not right. And the kids pick up on that faster than we do.

Some teachers explained how their own emotional regulation supported their work:

We are calm, and that can be hard sometimes when we have had a long day, but as long as you can come [calmly] into that arena of emotion they can see that it is not being heightened by your involvement.

Teachers arranged the physical environment with intentions to promote toddlers' learning and wellbeing:

We reflect on what we provide. What is the need here? Do they need to be outside? Do they need something for jumping? Do they need something for carrying? Do we not have enough of a certain part of equipment? When we set up the environment it is intentional.

Intention was also evident in the ways each early learning setting managed transitions and routines. While each setting had different routines and systems, a commonality was the intention to manage routines in the best interests of the toddlers. Comments that support this include: *"They are little ones so you can't expect too much. Flexibility is good ... we are quite flexible in our routines"* and *"They actually know this is coming first and that is coming next. They are able to preempt it and know what's going on. They feel a little bit in control without being totally in control."*

4.5 What Supports Effective Practice?

Across the questionnaire and focus groups, multiple factors were identified as supportive to teachers' practice. In this section, teachers' ratings of supportive factors are explored. This is followed by an in-depth look at the following areas of support for effective teaching practice: 1) positive, responsive relationships and in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; 2) teachers' perspectives of toddlers as learners; 3) teachers' views of conflicts as learning events and the role of teaching; 4) teachers' emotional competence; and 5) professional learning.

4.5.1 Teachers' ratings of supportive factors.

Teachers rated 20 possible factors in terms of how much they supported effective practice with toddlers during peer conflicts. Table 14 (pp. 73–74) displays mean and standard deviation values for teachers' ratings of helpfulness for each factor.

Table 14. Teachers' ratings of factors that support practice.

Factors	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
		<i>Level of support^b</i>
My positive responsive relationships with toddlers	20	4.85 (.37)
Effective support and guidance from colleagues	20	4.75 (.44)
Role models within my centre/kindergarten or throughout my teaching career	20	4.65 (.59)
My confidence to intervene (or choose not to intervene) in toddlers' conflicts	20	4.60 (.60)
My positive responsive relationships with toddlers' families	20	4.53 (.50)
Sufficient and appropriate resources and space for toddlers	20	4.60 (.60)
My experiences and the relationships I develop through attuned, attentive caregiving moments	19	4.58 (.61)
Effective self-review processes that respond to and support toddlers' needs	19	4.53 (.70)
An environment where I don't feel rushed	20	4.50 (.61)
Policies and procedures that support toddlers' needs	20	4.50 (.51)
My knowledge of various strategies that support toddlers' social-problem-solving skills	20	4.45 (.69)
Well-managed transitions for toddlers e.g. effectively preparing for toddlers' meal times	20	4.45 (.76)
My personal skills and dispositions e.g. patience or ability to communicate with toddlers	20	4.40 (.75)
Well-managed transitions for teachers e.g. effective management of teachers' lunchtimes and other breaks	20	4.40 (.68)
My ability to effectively regulate my emotions	20	4.40 (.75)

My parenting skills	17	4.14 (.95)
Teacher education courses that I have attended	18	4.06 (.94)
My initial teacher education	20	3.90 (.85)
My belief that toddlers can resolve conflicts without hurting each other	20	3.80 (.83)
Parent education courses that I have attended	10	3.60 (.84)

Note. ^a *n* represents the number of teachers who responded and who did not select 'not applicable'

^bScale: 1= not helpful, 2 = slightly helpful, 3 = helpful, 4 = very helpful, 5 = extremely helpful

On average, nearly all the given factors were rated between very helpful and extremely helpful, with teachers' positive, responsive relationships with toddlers rated as the most helpful ($M = 4.85$). Collegial support, in the form of effective support and guidance from colleagues and effective role modelling, were the next highest rated factors ($M = 4.75$; $M = 4.65$, respectively). The *SD* values indicate that there was little variation within teachers' ratings for each factor, especially for the highest rated factors. One teacher's comment highlighted how links to theory and professional knowledge, to the values of her community, and to her team's philosophy supported her practice:

Our teaching philosophy strongly reflects our commitment to te Ao Māori and Pasifika cultures and is very in tune with my own beliefs and values. Having a lens that sees supporting toddlers with peer conflicts as an important part of their learning gives us a really positive focus as a team.

4.5.2 Relationships.

Focus group discussions were in accord with the questionnaire results, placing relationships at the heart of teaching. The teacher–toddler relationship was paramount but relationships between teachers, between teachers and centre/kindergarten whānau, and between the toddlers themselves were all important. As one teacher said: “All ... things are done within the context of close

relationships. In our work as teachers the relationship is everything” and another teacher explained, *“The relationship and knowledge that we have about each individual child hugely impacts on the success or lack thereof during peer conflicts.”* One group explained the importance of teacher–toddler relationships in terms of the teacher knowing each toddler’s “gift”, saying:

We have a key teacher system. So, every child in the room, somebody knows their gift. If you don’t have a system where somebody has discovered the gift, you are much more likely to end up with children who are labelled and who are less managed in conflict situations because no one knows there is a gift and all they see is the behaviour and they don’t see anything else beyond that.

Another group described relationships in terms of whakawhanaungatanga and defined whakawhanaungatanga as *“the journey of tamariki learning about relating to each other and forming relationships and being part of the community.”* In this sense, toddlers’ relationships with their whānau and with each other were part of the learning journey, with some groups highlighting the importance of tuakana-teina, (where children who have more skills, experience or knowledge in a particular situation support and teach their less able peers) and the advantages of learning in a mixed-age setting. Discussions about relationships with whānau focussed on relationships, communication and sharing information and perspectives.

One teacher said:

What’s important is the parent discussions, like talking to a mother of a two-year-old today about what he was working on at home ... good to just spend time with a parent, having that quiet time to just be able to sit and listen.

Another teacher explained, *“Knowing information from home means you might have to take that extra time to explain things [to the toddler] and to validate and work through that at a level of knowing his prior knowledge.”*

Teachers’ relationships with each other supported their practice through processes of: collegial support—*“It is good to have each other’s backs all the time. If you are having difficulty, then you have another teacher to help and they have supported you and the*

child as well”; sharing knowledge—“When we are having issues or we are not sure how to approach something [colleagues] are there to offer support, other ideas and other strategies”; and through a shared philosophy or vision—“Because I work within a team that share the same philosophy it is pretty easy ... everyone is on the same page.”

4.5.3 Teachers’ knowledge of toddlerhood.

Teachers’ knowledge of toddlers in general supported teachers’ understanding of why conflicts might happen, shaped the teachers’ expectations and practices and strengthened teachers’ understanding that, within the context of the human life-span, toddlerhood represents a significant time of development. The significance of toddlers’ learning was illuminated when one teacher said, *“Their mana is quite important too ... learning about their self-identity through the whole toddler stage ... knowing who they are and who they can become.”* Teachers acknowledged that toddlers were learning a lot about emotions, saying *“... how big the learning process is around basic stuff, and around emotions”* and acknowledging that toddlers were still *“developing impulse control and regulation.”* Furthermore, most teachers seemed to accept, and perhaps celebrate, that toddlers *“feel things passionately and deeply.”*

In addition, communication was identified as an important aspect of toddlers’ learning and development: *“It is about their development stage and their communication too. Quite often they are still developing the verbals and how to communicate with each other.”* Some aspects of social-emotional competence, such as turn-taking and sharing were acknowledged as *“not always being on toddlers’ agendas yet”*. As one teacher explained:

One child has just got on to doing something and another child’s ready for their turn and quite often they think the first child is not sharing. They know about the concept of sharing but their understanding isn’t quite developed yet. We are trying to teach children about sharing.

Teachers also agreed that *“part of the special characteristics of toddlers is that they still see things very much from their own perspective so as they move in their journey*

they will start to see things also from others' perspectives." All focus groups said that toddlers were still developing *"a perspective of others and how others' feel."*

Toddlers' urge to explore was a theme in one of the focus groups. Teachers pointed out that toddlers are keen to explore and engage with their environment and they can simply get in each other's way:

They have that drive for learning too. Like if somebody is in the way they want them out of the way ... They don't even realise that their body is in somebody else's way. So sometimes frustrations enter into situations that are not necessarily about peer conflict but result in peer conflict.

This was part of a wider theme of toddlers as learners: *"It is actually about their learning. That's why they have conflicts. They are learning. They are pushing boundaries. They are trying different things. They are trying ways of being and how other people work, how the world works."* Teachers' knowledge, of toddlerhood and the special characteristics of toddlers, was strongly connected with teachers' perceptions of conflicts as learning events and of toddlers as learners.

4.5.4 Teachers' views of toddlers.

Teachers identified toddlers as learners who were competent, capable and trustworthy, a perspective that enabled teachers to respond to toddlers with trust and understanding and with strategies that supported learning. This was apparent when a teacher described a conflict and praised a toddler's independent social problem solving: *"He told her to go away. It was really clever thinking and a very interesting conflict to watch."* Understanding and empathy were evident when a teacher said:

Sometimes you see a child touch another child gently and you can see the hands are caring. Even though there might have been some moments with other stuff in that day, you can see in the journey you are starting to see them portraying the things that are about being caring people in the world. In that it is knowing that they won't always get it right.

There was a common view that toddlers' wellbeing, dignity and identity must be upheld, especially in emotionally-charged events such as conflicts. One group

described the importance of *“enhancing their mana to help them feel I am safe here and this is the way I can deal with these emotions that I am feeling.”*

Teachers also recognised that an important part of their job was to teach toddlers social-emotional skills. For example, one teacher said that she hoped the outcome of her teaching would be *“to be able to give them the skills to deal with things when they aren’t going the way they anticipated.”* Teachers celebrated toddlers’ learning and shared success stories. For example, *“She was really proud of herself. And I knew she could too”* and *“One of our younger boys who is still learning about some of the social competencies had another child push and he turned around and he said, ‘Stop.’ All of us teachers were just ... magic moment.”* Several teachers explained that seeing toddlers succeed gave them satisfaction and a sense of pride in their teaching.

4.5.5 Teachers’ views of conflicts as learning events and the role of teaching.

As well as teachers’ image of the toddler as a learner, teachers’ image of conflicts as learning events supported their teaching practice. Focus groups agreed that *“conflict is actually a good thing. It is a learning opportunity.”* Teachers said that, through peer conflicts, toddlers learned *“to build resilience”* and they learned about *“relating to each other, forming relationships and being part of the community ... in amongst that they are learning about emotional regulation and self-control.”* Learning through conflict also gave toddlers *“the opportunity to grasp other perspectives and to learn alongside others that although you think this way, it is OK for others to think differently”* and to learn *“who they are and what they are capable of.”* Alongside an understanding of conflicts as learning events, teachers spoke passionately of their role to teach toddlers in these moments, saying the teacher’s *“job is so important to actually help them understand their own minds and their own feelings, to be able to move on in life.”* One teacher said, *“What we do in this job is very important. We take seriously the negotiating and the peaceful kind of skills that we teach when we work with children.”*

4.5.6 Professional learning.

Professional learning was identified as one of the keys to effective practice. Teachers explained how their knowledge and ongoing learning, particularly about infants, toddlers and social-emotional competence, supports children's learning. One teacher said:

My teaching is supported by my experience and kete of knowledge about infants and toddlers. I am passionate about the links between theory, current educational thinking and ongoing learning for teachers and the difference this makes to our teaching practice.

Professional learning and reading that had specifically supported teachers' work with toddlers, within the context of peer conflicts, was identified through the questionnaire, focus group interviews and background information provided by each early learning setting. All of this information was collated and analysed to identify key words and phrases and their frequency. These key words and phrases were analysed using Tagul (<https://tagul.com/>), an online word-cloud generator. The word cloud is displayed in Figure 2, with the most frequent words or phrases in larger text.



Figure 2. Key words and phrases from teachers' professional learning.

Some of the teachers had engaged in extensive professional learning and reading, including professional learning that focussed on the infant and toddler age-groups, social-emotional competence, emotional awareness and Māori perspectives of learning and development. Teachers reported that key aspects of effective professional learning, that supported their practice during events of toddlers' peer conflict, included: being prompted to think about their own perspectives and practices; engaging in learning or discussions that involved the whole teaching team; and focussing on infants and toddlers, social-emotional skills or emotional awareness.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the findings of the present study, attending to the core research questions: Within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts:

- How do teachers describe their roles?
- What practices do teachers value and use?
- What factors influence teachers' practice?
- What supports effective practice?

In general, teachers acted as protector, advocate, role model or coach, and used professional judgment to decide which role to take. Teachers aimed to utilise conflicts as learning events by empowering the toddlers, supporting their positive self-identity and esteem, and by teaching them social-emotional skills that they might later use independently. To achieve this, teachers used an array of coaching and supportive practices and were guided by their professional judgment.

Concerns for toddlers' safety, both physical and emotional, influenced teachers' practice, as did teachers' knowledge of individual toddlers. Additionally, teachers' practice was influenced by their relationships with toddlers, collegial relationships and relationships with whānau. The emotional, physical, and temporal environment affected the incidence of peer conflicts and related teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers' perspectives of their teaching role influenced some teaching practices.

Effective teaching practice was supported by: positive, responsive relationships throughout the early learning setting; teachers' in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; professional learning; perspectives of toddlers as learners and of conflicts as learning and teaching events; teachers' emotional competence; and the desire to maintain toddlers' mana, self-identity, dignity and esteem. The following chapter further explores the significance of these findings in relation to the extant literature related to toddlers and peer conflicts.

Chapter Five: Discussion

As the previous chapter has shown, findings from the present study provide examples of teacher-reported practices that support toddlers and promote their learning, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. In addition, this study has identified factors that support and enable teachers' effective teaching practice. Importantly, the findings relate to the specific context of toddlers' peer conflicts, events that are often emotionally-charged, and that may be challenging for teachers as well as toddlers.

In this chapter, the findings of the present study are critically examined in relation to previous research literature, with the intention of understanding effective practices within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts and how this type of practice might be achieved. Throughout this chapter, teachers' roles and teachers' practice refer to teaching roles and pedagogical practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Each of the present study's primary focus areas: teachers' roles; teaching practices that were valued and used by teachers; factors that influenced teachers' practice; and factors that specifically supported effective teaching practice, are examined in section one, two, three and four, respectively. Each of these sections ends with a summary, where implications for practice are identified. In section five, limitations and delimitations of the research, and wider implications for practice, policy and further research are discussed. Section seven concludes the thesis with an overall summary of the research study.

5.1 Teachers' Roles

The present study found that key teaching roles, that enabled teachers to support toddlers and promote their learning, were to protect and advocate for toddlers and to role model and coach an array of social-emotional skills. In the context of these roles, teachers reported that they sometimes intervened in toddlers' conflicts and sometimes allowed toddlers time and space to practise independent social problem solving. Throughout this section, teachers' roles to protect, advocate, role model and coach are discussed in relation to how they support toddlers and promote their learning, within the context of toddlers' conflicts.

5.1.1 Protect.

In the present study, protecting toddlers involved ensuring their physical safety and protecting their wellbeing, dignity, esteem and identity. The importance placed on protecting toddlers is not surprising. In Aotearoa New Zealand, through The Education Council Code of Ethics for Certificated Teachers, (Education Council Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d.), teachers are committed to “promote the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing of learners” (section 1) in their care. Furthermore, both emotional and physical protection are highlighted through *Te Whāriki's* (Ministry of Education, 1996) strand of wellbeing, where teachers are guided to “accept a wide and conflicting range of feelings from toddlers” (p. 51), to protect toddlers “from behaviour such as biting or hitting” (p. 53), and to reflect on ways that unacceptable behaviour is “dealt with to ensure that children are not demeaned or their self-esteem damaged” (p. 62).

In accord with the present study, Smith and colleagues’ (1996) Aotearoa New Zealand-based study found that protecting children was a priority for teachers. Smith and colleagues’ research suggests that one of the main factors that influenced teachers’ practice was the possibility of a child being physically or emotionally hurt. Furthermore, Smith et al. also found that teachers based their decisions, about when and how to intervene in conflicts, on knowledge of the children, observation of the conflict, and the need to protect children if the conflict became aggressive.

A key finding was that protecting toddlers was viewed by participants as a way to empower toddlers and promote their learning, positive self-identity, esteem and eventual independence. Protection, therefore, was viewed as more than physical safety; it encompassed protecting toddlers’ rights. This resonates with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), especially the convention’s theme of empowering children by recognising them as social actors—as active and knowledgeable participants in social interactions, rather than passive recipients (Smith, 2016). As *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40) explains, to empower children, teachers must protect children’s rights to personal dignity and equitable

opportunities, and to safeguard them from physical, mental or emotional harm. Furthermore, as a key principle of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), empowerment relates to ways that children take increasing responsibility for their learning, develop a sense of self-worth and identity, contribute to the learning programme and understand their own unique ways of learning and being. According to a Māori worldview, adults should respect and accept children, in order to protect their dignity, prestige and self-identity, and to uphold children's rights to be accepted and nurtured by others (Pere, 1982, 1997).

Interestingly, the present study did not find a strong association between protecting toddlers and stopping the conflict. A possible explanation is that, when protection is viewed not only in terms of safety but also in terms of protecting toddlers' rights, and when conflicts are viewed as learning opportunities, then protecting toddlers would not necessarily involve stopping conflicts. Teachers reported that they sometimes intervened to stop conflicts but they also ensured toddlers' safety through a variety of other practices, including staying nearby, mediating to support toddlers' emerging emotional regulation skills, and acting as a non-judgmental advocate for the toddlers. These practices resonate with those reported by the teachers in Smith and colleagues (1996) study, who agreed that aggressive conflict should be stopped but that, in the absence of aggression, conflict should be monitored with the intention of allowing children to work things out for themselves. Reflective of the findings presented, de Haan and Singer (2003) believe that teachers should be guided by the belief that peer conflicts are learning opportunities and that, in many cases, children can work through conflicts independently. De Haan and Singer, like Singer et al. (2012), further suggest that when teachers do mediate, they should position social problem solving as a shared, intersubjective endeavour and should focus on the relationship between the toddlers in conflict, rather than focus on the perpetrator.

5.1.2. Advocate.

Many of the participants reported purposefully advocating for both, or all, toddlers involved in a conflict, without judgment. A common theme was that teachers were

focussed on protecting toddlers' dignity, esteem or mana, and therefore, did not judge toddlers' behaviour or motivation. Furthermore, most teachers did not believe they were in a position to make judgments about all that had happened during a conflict event. This contrasts with the practices Smith et al. (1996) observed in the first phase of their study, when they saw teachers respond differently to toddlers who initiated a conflict than to those on the receiving end. In Smith and colleagues' study, those toddlers who appeared to initiate conflicts were likely to be ignored or reminded of a rule, while teachers seemed more likely to advocate for toddlers who were on the receiving end. A possible explanation for the difference in each study's findings is the different data collection methods: In phase one of their study, Smith and colleagues observed teachers' practice, whereas the present study relies on teachers' reports of their practice. Another possible explanation is that many of the teachers in the present study had engaged in extensive professional learning that supported their knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood, social-emotional learning and effective teaching practice within the context of toddlers' conflicts; this professional learning, along with the teaching intention to protect toddlers' dignity, esteem and mana, may support teachers' ability to advocate for both toddlers. Furthermore, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) "the first early childhood framework to give infants and toddlers an inclusive position within a curriculum for teaching and learning" (White & Mika, 2013, p. 93) was not in use as an official curriculum document at the time that Smith and colleagues' data was collected. *Te Whāriki* has now been in place for over 20 years and, since its inception, infants and toddlers have been increasingly recognised as knowledgeable, competent agents of their own learning, and relationships have been increasingly understood as central to learning and development (White & Mika, 2013). It is likely, therefore, that *Te Whāriki*—as a curriculum for infants, toddlers and young children that emphasises the importance of respectful and empowering relationships—supports teachers to advocate for toddlers without judgment.

5.1.3 Role model and coach.

Modelling appropriate behaviour and ways of being was identified by participants as important during conflict events and was also an ongoing teaching role. Within the

context of peer conflicts, teachers reported they modelled language, saying the words that they wanted the toddlers to learn. Emotional regulation was modelled through teachers' calm approaches to conflicts and mediation. In light of sociocultural theory, modelling is a powerful teaching tool because of the belief that children learn through interactions with, and from the actions of, others (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, the present study specifically identified the impact of teachers as role models, not just for those toddlers involved in the conflict but also for the toddlers who were watching. In accord with this, Rosenthal and Gatt (2010) note that, because children watch attentively how teachers react in emotionally-charged situations, "whatever a caregiver does vis-à-vis a social or an emotional event has an effect not only on the specific child but also on all the other children present" (p. 227).

Many teachers described the importance of using child-centred mediation strategies that focussed on supporting and coaching toddlers to learn to solve their own problems. The role of coach was viewed as purposeful and intentional; as one teacher said, *"it is [our] job to give them the strategies."* This does not mean that coaching was teacher directed. Teachers emphasised the importance of encouraging toddlers' participation in the process of social problem solving, saying that it wasn't the teacher's role to solve problems for toddlers, rather the teacher's role was to empower the toddlers to learn. Thus, being a coach involved using practices that were intended to empower toddlers, to support them emotionally and help them process the situation and problem solve. Coaching involved commenting on what toddlers were doing and affirming any successful strategies that were used; it also involved listening, sometimes questioning and sometimes giving toddlers opportunities to practise independently. These types of child-centred coaching practices are well documented in regards to supporting young children's social-emotional competence (e.g., Webster-Stratton, 1999, 2012) and, in terms of supporting young children in moments of peer conflict, are in accord with practices recommended by Gloeckler et al. (2014) and Singer and Hännikäinen (2002).

5.1.4 Summary and implications of teachers' roles.

The key teaching roles of protector, advocate, role model and coach were used to support toddlers and promote their learning within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. The multiple teaching roles were often underpinned by an intention to uphold toddlers' dignity, esteem and mana, which guided teachers' practice and professional decision making. The identification of multiple roles suggests that teachers make ongoing decisions about which roles and related practices to adopt for each new situation when a peer conflict arises. The results also suggest that when teachers' decisions and practices were guided by an intention to uphold toddlers' dignity, esteem and mana, teachers were able to work with toddlers without judgment. Regardless of the role the teacher adopts for any specific peer conflict situation, the removal of judgment seems to be a necessary component for supporting toddlers' learning and protecting their rights.

5.2 Valuable and Frequently Used Pedagogical Practices

Key findings suggest that the teaching practices, identified by participants as valuable and frequently used, fitted into the categories of coaching practices, supportive practices and use of professional judgment. There are clear links between the practices identified by participants and those recommended by current research regarding how teachers should nurture and promote children's social-emotional competence (e.g., Chen et al., 2001; Hyson, 2004; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b; Webster-Stratton, 1999, 2012). There are notable connections between the identified practices and Aotearoa New Zealand research, including Harvey and colleagues' (2012) work on promoting an emotionally warm learning environment, Māori perspectives of learning and development, such as whanaungatanga (Pere, 1997), and the principles and strands of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Many of these practices are already well-recognised and documented as effective ways to promote children's learning and social-emotional competence, however, an essential point is that, in the present study, these practices are identified as valuable and useful within the emotionally-charged context of

toddlers' peer conflicts. Throughout this section, each of the categories—coaching practices, supportive practices and use of professional judgment—is examined in turn.

5.2.1 Coaching practices.

Frequently used practices, reported by participants, that were categorised into coaching practices included: 1) scaffolding toddlers' emerging social-problem-solving skills; 2) commenting and offering feedback; 3) intentionally teaching emotional literacy skills; 4) modelling behaviour and language; 5) asking questions; 6) explaining; and 7) instructing. These coaching practices align well with the types of constructive interventions that are recommended by Singer and Hännikäinen (2002), Bayer et al. (1995), Gloeckler et al. (2014) and Göncü and Cannella (1996), who say effective teaching, in the context of children's peer conflicts, involves listening to toddlers, modelling social-problem-solving skills and using child-centred mediation strategies such as seeking clarification, asking questions and listening. Each of the coaching practices identified in the present study is discussed in turn, in relation to how the practice supports toddlers and promotes their learning.

5.2.1.1 Scaffolding.

Findings indicate that a key teaching intention was to teach toddlers social-problem-solving skills that they might eventually use independently. When teachers were aware of toddlers' existing skills, they offered strategic assistance to support toddlers' emerging skills. As one teacher said, it is good to offer a *“drop in the bucket”*—a strategic amount of support. This type of guided learning process is known as scaffolding, a term which, while not used by Vygotsky, is based on his sociocultural theory of learning and development (Salkind, 2005, p. 1102). Scaffolding might involve modelling, offering hints or asking questions, in order to help the child be successful, without over-helping. As the child becomes more capable, the support can be decreased or removed (Berk, 2005; Salkind, 2005). The importance of scaffolding as a shared endeavour, in which teacher and student are equal participants in the learning process, is encapsulated in the terms *“guided participation”* (Rogoff, 1990), in which the participants may begin with separate understandings but work together to arrive

at a shared understanding, and “intersubjectivity”, which means that both parties are working towards a shared goal (Salkind, 2005). Importantly, to scaffold effectively, the teacher must not only have knowledge of the skills that are required for the task, but also have knowledge of the learner’s existing and emerging skills, and be able to facilitate a learning interaction in which the attention, process and goals are shared. Some literature suggests that scaffolding is not always understood or practised as a shared endeavour but, instead, can be teacher-directed in ways that do not promote toddlers’ involvement or learning (de Haan & Singer, 2003; Williams et al., 2010). However, results of the present study indicate that, when teachers described scaffolding, they focussed on working together with toddlers to support and promote toddlers’ skills and learning, based on their awareness of toddlers’ existing and emerging skills and the need to encourage toddlers’ participation. The additional coaching practices that were identified, while examined separately, can be used as part of a scaffolding process intended to support toddlers and promote their learning through a shared endeavour.

5.2.1.2 Commenting and offering feedback.

The practice of commenting was identified by teachers in the present study and has been well documented through the work of Webster-Stratton (1999, 2012).

Commenting is a coaching tool that involves narrating what is happening in a situation and what children may be thinking or feeling (Webster-Stratton, 1999, 2012).

Commenting, by offering feedback and verbal commentary during or immediately after the conflict, was rated by participants as the most important and most frequently used teaching practice. Commenting was described as a way to define issues, coach social-problem-solving skills, build toddlers’ vocabulary and validate feelings. Giving toddlers specific feedback on desired behaviour was viewed as a way to encourage the types of behaviours the teachers wanted to see. These practices fit well with Bayer and colleagues (1995) recommendations that, when a conflict has been resolved, teachers should verbalise what occurred, to provide toddlers with explicit feedback or affirmation of their actions.

5.2.1.3 Teach emotional literacy skills.

Teachers rated the practice of acknowledging and labelling toddlers' emotions between very and extremely valuable, and reported that this is a practice they use often or nearly always. Toddlers' peer conflicts were identified as meaningful opportunities to coach emotional literacy by acknowledging, validating and naming feelings, and by modelling emotional skills, especially emotional regulation. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) advocate for these teaching practices, especially as ways to support and promote toddlers' emotional regulation skills during emotionally-charged situations. In addition, Webster-Stratton (1999, 2012) advocates for the practice of emotion coaching, explaining that labelling and naming feelings can help build children's emotion vocabulary and support emotional regulation. Labelling feelings at the time the child is experiencing those feelings is particularly powerful because the child is better able to associate the vocabulary with their emotional state (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Webster-Stratton, 2012). Furthermore, the importance of coaching emotional literacy is highlighted by Ulloa (2011), who found that when teachers coached emotion skills, by acknowledging, labelling or discussing children's feelings prior to, during or after an emotional event, there was less frequency of aggressive, unresolved conflict.

5.2.1.4 Model behaviour and language.

Findings identified modelling appropriate behaviour and language as key coaching strategies, used to show toddlers how they might interact during peer conflicts. In particular, teachers emphasised the importance of remaining calm to model calmness. This is in accord with the type of support that developmental research emphasises as important, particularly for toddlers who are only beginning to be able to self-regulate their emotions (Thompson, 2009) and who are, typically, just beginning to learn to express themselves verbally (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). During conflicts with peers, when emotions are aroused, toddlers' thought processes can be impeded (Denham et al., 2003; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) and it can be especially difficult for toddlers to use their existing and emerging language skills (Saarni, 1999; Thompson, 2009), and to fully comprehend what their words actually mean (de Haan & Singer, 2003). Therefore,

support from teachers is vital, both in terms of being attentive to toddlers' nonverbal communication, and supporting their verbal communication. Teachers acknowledged this, specifically describing the importance of modelling language to toddlers to support their emerging language skills and communication.

5.2.1.5. Ask questions.

Findings suggested there were two key reasons for asking toddlers questions. First, questioning was used as a scaffolding technique, to encourage the toddlers to speak and to convey a message to toddlers that their opinion and input was valued. This is in line with what Singer and Hännikäinen (2002) say about questioning—that asking children about the problem and possible solutions can help support children's involvement in the negotiation and problem-solving process. The second reason teachers asked questions was to find out what the issue was, as a way to guide the teaching intervention. However, not all teachers thought this was important; some acknowledged that they may never know the issue or all that had happened during a conflict, and they did not ask questions or expect answers from nonverbal or upset toddlers. Interestingly, some literature warns teachers to take care with the types of questions they ask. Questions such as “Why did you push him?” tend to be ineffective, and even counterproductive, because they can be confrontational and because young children are most likely not able to understand why they behaved that way (Webster-Stratton, 1999). However, it can be argued that questioning supports toddlers and promotes their learning, when care is taken to ensure that questions are genuine, appropriate and not overwhelming, and when time is given for toddlers to respond.

5.2.1.6 Instruct.

Instructing directly (Tommy, give it to Max) was one of the lowest rated practices, however, it still rated within the range of slightly valuable to valuable ($M = 2.75$) and its frequency of use was sometimes ($M = 3.00$). A possible explanation for the lower rating is that instructing is viewed as a teacher-directed strategy that may not promote the valued practice of involving toddlers' participation in social problem solving (see Williams et al., 2010). However, results of the present study suggest that specific types

of instructions were valued and used more than others. For example, telling toddlers how to behave was a more valuable ($M = 3.90$) and more frequently used practice ($M = 4.20$) than telling toddlers how not to behave (Value $M = 2.32$; Frequency $M = 2.63$). Furthermore, results suggest that although direct instruction was not highly valued, there were times that teachers found the practice useful and that instructions, such as “we need to be looking after others” were intended to convey the rules and values of the centre.

5.2.1.7 Explain.

Offering explanations (Tommy wants to sit by himself) was rated as a very valuable and often used practice. Thompson (2009) describes how explanations like this, which verbalise alternative viewpoints, support the development of cognitive flexibility, the ability to switch perspective or mental focus. This in turn, can help toddlers to consider things from another’s perspective. Laible and Thompson’s (2002) research suggests that giving an explanation during conflict events can support and promote toddlers’ social-emotional development, especially conscience development. In explanation, Laible and Thompson found that when mothers offered clear explanations and talked about emotions during toddler–mother conflicts, toddlers’ conscience development was promoted, however, when mothers talked about rules or consequences in a directive or insistent manner, toddlers’ conscience development wasn’t promoted.

5.2.2 Supportive practices.

Findings suggests that teachers supported toddlers in a holistic way that encompassed mental, physical and emotional safety. Specific supportive practices, that effectively promoted toddlers’ learning during conflict events, included being physically close, being mindful and attentive, and allowing time and space for toddlers to practise.

5.2.2.1 Be close.

Teachers reported that being in close proximity enabled quick intervention if the conflict became aggressive. Being close was also a way to help the toddlers feel secure in the sense that they knew support was nearby if they needed it and they knew they

were trusted to try to work through the conflict independently. This resonates well with Bowlby's (1988) theory of a trusted caregiver as a secure base from whom a child can venture and explore but who the child knows will be nearby to assist, encourage, protect or comfort if needed. There are also connections with Gerber's (2002) philosophy to trust in the capabilities of infants and toddlers and to offer only enough support to allow the child to achieve mastery of his/her own actions.

5.2.2.2 Be emotionally aware and mindful.

Teachers said that it was important to be aware of their own emotions, in order to support toddlers during conflict events. One teacher's comment summed up the impact of emotional awareness: *"You can't separate how you are feeling inside, your emotional response. So, understanding ourselves as people is an important part of learning how we can best support children."* This finding resonates with Ulloa's (2011) research, which suggests that emotionally competent and aware teachers are able to regulate their emotional reactions and respond in constructive, mindful ways to events such as peer conflicts. In the present study, a few teachers specifically highlighted the need to be mindful, present, or to *"just be in that moment"*, to work effectively and calmly with toddlers during moments of conflict. Mindfulness involves the ability to be attentive and to experience any given moment with awareness, not judgment (Lau et al., 2006). Being mindful does not mean that an awareness of other people or activities in the room is compromised. Frank, Jennings and Greenberg (2016) explain that dimensions of mindfulness include observation and awareness, which support teachers to develop an "ability to maintain a broad awareness of the array of activities taking place in the classroom while, at the same time, paying close attention to one child or a group of children" (p. 156). Recent research suggests that mindfulness promotes teachers' abilities to offer emotional support to children and to promote learning (Jennings, 2015). Jennings suggests that, especially when challenging behaviour is involved, mindfulness, along with self-compassion, supports teachers' competencies to "establish and sustain a classroom climate conducive to learning and to build and maintain supportive relationships with the children for whom they care"

(pp. 739–740). Importantly, mindfulness is a skill that can be taught and developed with practise (Lau et al., 2006).

5.2.2.3 Allow time and space.

Teachers recognised that toddlers couldn't learn or problem solve when their emotions were highly aroused. Neuroscience tells us that this is because the area of the toddler's brain associated with reasoning and problem solving cannot function well when the area of the brain associated with emotions is highly active (Thompson, 2009). Teachers reported that they helped toddlers calm down by validating their feelings, giving them time and space to become calm, and responding to their individual needs.

Results also highlighted the need to support toddlers by giving them time and space to independently practise their social-problem-solving skills. De Haan and Singer (2003) advocate for this practice, saying that teachers should be guided by an understanding that, in general, young children can resolve their own conflicts, especially in situations where they were playing together before the onset of the conflict. This connects with Gerber's (2002) message regarding the importance of believing in the capabilities of infants, toddlers and young children, and showing them that they are trusted. Allowing toddlers time and space to solve their social problems, without undue interference from teachers, also resonates with messages from many researchers who challenge preconceived notions of toddlers as "terrible two-year-olds" or simply incapable (e.g., Page, Clare, & Nutbrown, 2013; Redder, 2014; Rennie, 2014; Salamon, 2011).

5.2.3 Use of professional judgment.

Teachers reported using professional judgment to respond in ways that best suited the toddlers and the situation. In accord, Smith and colleagues (1996) point out, there is not one correct way for a teacher to respond to toddlers' peer conflicts. The best response will depend on many factors, including the conflict, the toddlers and the teacher, and the relationships they share. In the present study, professional judgments were guided by relationships with, and knowledge of, the toddlers, and by teachers'

views regarding whether the toddlers could work through the conflict independently without coming to any harm. Some teachers explained that their responses to peer conflicts might also be shaped by learning objectives that had been identified in partnership with whānau and the teaching team, or they might be spur of the moment decisions. As one teacher said, *“you might go through five different strategies in one conflict.”* Teachers seemed to agree that it could sometimes be challenging to know how to respond, however, taking a moment to observe and think, and keeping calm were reported as effective ways to support teachers’ professional decision making. Having the support of colleagues was another factor that enabled and supported teachers to make effective professional judgments. Since some research reports that teachers may intervene too quickly to stop conflicts (e.g., Bayer et al., 1995; Williams et al., 2010), these supportive factors—taking a moment to think and be calm, along with support from colleagues—represent important factors that enable teachers to support toddlers and promote their learning, in moments of toddlers’ conflicts.

5.2.4 Summary and implications of valuable and frequently used practices.

Teachers described an array of teaching practices, which were categorised as supportive and coaching practices, and use of professional judgment. Many of the supportive and coaching practices exist in early childhood teachers’ repertoires of teaching practice, or can be supported and enhanced with professional learning and development (PLD). Interestingly, the Incredible Years Programme (Webster-Stratton, 2012), supported by Aotearoa New Zealand’s Ministry of Education, specifically addresses supportive and coaching practices to enhance children’s social-emotional skills, however, the programme is designed for and offered to teachers of children ages three to eight years old (see Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.). Within New Zealand, no equivalent PLD is offered to teachers of infants or toddlers, yet research suggests the first three years are critical for laying the foundations of social-emotional competence. Thus, there is a pressing need to address the professional learning of toddler teachers, with a specific focus on supporting toddlers’ social-emotional competence, and with an emphasis on the role of peer conflict as a natural and potentially productive learning event.

5.3 Factors that Influence Practice

Teachers' practice was influenced by their perspectives of their teaching role, concerns for toddlers' safety, and by the environment of the early learning setting. Throughout this section, each of these factors is discussed in turn. Other influencing factors, that specifically supported teachers' effective practice, are discussed in section 5.4.

5.3.1 Perspectives of teaching role.

Results indicate that some beliefs about teachers' roles are associated with using certain practices (positive associations); some are associated with not using certain practices (negative associations). There were positive associations between the roles of giving toddlers time and space to work things out for themselves, discussing emotions, and encouraging toddlers' involvement in the social-problem-solving process. These associations are not surprising because all these teaching roles are likely to support toddlers and promote learning. For example, when teachers discuss emotions with toddlers they are likely to promote toddlers' emotional literacy skills, especially emotion vocabulary and emotional regulation (Webster-Stratton, 1999, 2012). And, encouraging toddlers' involvement in the social-problem-solving process, or giving them time and space to work things out independently, represent child-centred, rather than teacher-directed interactions (de Haan & Singer, 2003; Gloeckler et al., 2014; Göncü & Cannella, 1996; Singer & Hännikäinen, 2002). The role of giving toddlers time and space is particularly interesting because, initially, it may not appear to be an intentional teaching role. However, as participants identified, it is important to give toddlers opportunities to practise independently because it is in the journey of practising that skills are learned.

The role of stopping the conflict and the practice of encouraging toddlers to apologise were positively associated. According to previous research (Bayer et al., 1995; Gloeckler et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2010), stopping conflicts is a contentious practice because toddlers may miss important learning opportunities when they are not given the chance to work through conflict events. Likewise, some researchers warn that

encouraging young children to apologise is a practice that may be unlikely to support their learning. For example, Blank and Schneider (2011) argue that, when the focus is on resolving conflicts through apology, then the learning focus is compliance rather than learning to express a point of view or to hear the perspectives of others. Possibly, the associations between stopping the conflict and encouraging toddlers to apologise, evident in the present study, exist because neither stopping the conflict nor encouraging an apology were highly rated in regards to the importance of the teachers' role, or value and use of practice.

Some teaching roles were not associated with practices that might be related to those roles. For example, the role of mediating and teaching conflict resolution skills was not strongly associated with the practice of encouraging toddlers' communication and social problem solving. The present study did not reveal a clear reason for these unexpected results, suggesting there is a need to further explore associations between teachers' views of their role and the strategies they use.

There were positive associations between the teaching roles of stopping the conflict, ensuring toddlers' physical safety and maintaining peace. These results resonate somewhat with other research, particularly the research of Bayer et al. (1995), Gloeckler et al. (2014) and Williams et al. (2010), which suggests that when keeping peace or safety concerns are priorities for teachers, then teachers may compromise teaching and learning opportunities by intervening to stop conflicts. However, in the present study, stopping conflicts was the lowest rated teaching role, rated within the range of slightly important to important, and focus groups indicated that stopping conflicts was not a priority. Additionally, some teachers asserted that it was not important to maintain peace if that meant intervening in toddlers' conflicts in a teacher-directed manner. Furthermore, teachers reported that they use a variety of strategies, not solely stopping conflicts, to address concerns for toddlers' safety. This is significant because it is essential that toddlers' safety is ensured but it is also essential that toddlers are supported to work through conflicts and solve social problems, rather than being denied opportunities because conflicts are stopped. It is, therefore,

important for teachers to reflect on their perspective of teaching role, and whether this role actually supports toddlers' learning.

5.3.2 Toddlers' safety.

Teachers rated concern for toddlers' physical safety as having high to extreme influence on teaching practice ($M = 4.55$). As stated, results suggest that concerns for safety can be addressed through a variety of practices that keep toddlers safe without compromising learning opportunities (e.g., being physically close, demonstrating an attitude of trust). Supporting toddlers' social-emotional skills, especially emotional regulation skills, were other ways that teachers addressed their concerns for toddlers' safety. In other words, the present study suggests that concerns for safety prompted teachers to support toddlers' skills to resolve their own conflicts in peaceful ways. Furthermore, safety not only encompassed physical aspects, but also emotional safety and general wellbeing. Again, this is significant because toddlers' safety is important, and results suggest that it is critical for teachers to consider safety as a holistic concept, and to use teaching practices that keep toddlers safe without unduly compromising learning.

5.3.3 Environment.

Results suggest that when emotional, physical and temporal aspects of the learning environment function in ways that support the learning community, then teachers are more able to effectively support toddlers and promote learning during conflict events. Some teachers described how quickly toddlers responded to the emotional climate of the early learning setting, with more conflicts occurring when the emotional climate was not warm or positive. Similarly, other research suggests that a warm emotional climate enables teachers to be less reactive, more mindful and more strategic in their practice (Andersen, Evans, & Harvey, 2012; Ulloa, 2011).

In the present study, having sufficient and appropriate resources and space for toddlers was viewed as helpful to teachers' practice. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the importance of intentionally arranging the physical environment to

support the toddlers' needs. Setting the environment in response to toddlers' needs, and with intentions to promote their engagement in play and learning, are important because, as Clare (2012) points out, the physical environment plays a crucial role in the learning and development of toddlers. Environments that are planned with an understanding of child development and knowledge of the toddlers' needs and interests will enable toddlers to feel secure and to engage in exploration, play and learning.

5.3.4 Summary and implications of factors that influence teaching practice.

Teachers' practice was influenced by their perspectives of their teaching roles, concerns for toddlers' safety, and by the early learning environment. Significantly, results suggest that some perspectives of teaching role are associated with using, or not using certain teaching practices. An implication of these findings is that, if teachers want to change their practice or adopt new practices, they may need to begin by reflecting on their beliefs about their roles as teachers. Notably, teachers' views of safety, and protecting toddlers, were paramount. To support effective practice, teachers may need to move beyond a basic view of protecting physical safety, to a view of protecting toddlers, and ensuring their safety, in a holistic way that involves an array of practices, intended to involve toddlers in the process of solving social problems and to empower toddlers to learn peaceful ways of resolving conflicts. This is not intended to undermine the importance of physical safety or the need for toddlers to be protected from harm. However, results from the present study might challenge teachers, and all those involved in early learning communities, to critically consider toddlers' rights to be involved in their own learning and to be protected in ways that empower, rather than compromise learning.

5.4 Factors that Support Effective Practice

Results suggest that positive responsive relationships throughout the early learning setting; in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; perspectives of toddlers as learners with rights that must be upheld; perspectives of conflicts as learning events;

and teachers' emotional competence all supported teachers' effective practice. Each of these factors is discussed in turn.

5.4.1 Relationships.

The early childhood education sector, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand, recognises that responsive, reciprocal relationships are a foundation of teaching and learning. Relationships are a key principle of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which acknowledges that "[c]hildren learn through responsive reciprocal relationships with people, places and things" (p. 14) and that the "wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum" (p. 14). The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004a) state: "Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development (p. 1). De Haan and Singer (2003) emphasise the important role of teachers to foster positive relationships between children and promote a sense of community in the learning setting, specifically as ways to support young children to learn to resolve their own conflicts. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers in the present study identified the supportive influence of their positive relationships with toddlers, whānau and colleagues. Interestingly, as McLaughlin et al. (2015) explain, it is likely that intentionality is required in regards to forming and maintaining positive professional relationships. This means that teachers do not simply leave relationships to chance. Instead, they plan and practise strategies to help build and strengthen their relationships with children and families (McLaughlin, Aspden, & Snyder, 2016). Examples of such strategies, evident in the present study, were operating a key teacher system where teachers are supported to form close relationships with toddlers and their families, and making time to talk with parents, especially to share different perspectives.

5.4.2 Knowledge of toddlers.

Teachers' practice was highly influenced by their knowledge of individual toddlers' skills, abilities and temperaments. Teachers said that when they knew about a toddler's skills and temperament, it was easier to provide effective support for the

toddler. These results align quite closely with those of Smith et al. (1996) who found that teachers made professional judgments about how they respond to conflicts, based largely on their knowledge of the children or toddlers involved. In contrast, Silver and Harkins (2007) suggest that teachers are more likely to support a toddler's social problem solving and learning when the teacher has no, or little, prior knowledge or perspective of the toddler, than when they know the toddler well. One possible explanation for the difference in findings between the present study and Silver and Harkins' research is the different data collection methods. Silver and Harkins gave teachers vignettes of conflicts involving hypothetical children, who might be perceived as easy/prosocial, difficult/antisocial or ambiguous, and asked teachers how they would respond. In contrast, the present study relied on rich, experiential accounts of teachers' perspectives of, and experiences with, real toddlers.

5.4.3 Perceptions of conflicts as learning events.

Teachers described conflicts as learning events, where toddlers learned to build resilience, to relate to and begin to understand others, to form relationships, be part of the community and to learn social-emotional skills, including emotional regulation and self-control. This is significant because other research suggests that teachers' perceptions of conflict influence the ways teachers' respond to toddlers' or young children's peer conflicts. For example, Bayer and colleagues (1995) say that, in their research, teachers perceived peer conflicts as negative events, which compelled them to end conflicts as quickly as possible rather than utilise conflicts as learning opportunities. Other researchers, specifically de Haan and Singer (2003) and Gloeckler et al. (2014), assert that teachers must view conflicts as learning events in order to empower toddlers to learn in these moments.

5.4.4 In-depth knowledge of toddlerhood.

Findings suggest that teachers' in-depth knowledge of toddlerhood also enabled teachers to interact with toddlers in ways that promoted toddlers' learning and supported their wellbeing within the context of peer conflicts. Teachers' knowledge was supported by their professional learning, especially learning that focussed on the

toddler age-group, on brain development, emotional awareness and on social-emotional teaching and learning. Teachers knowledge and professional learning is a significant factor because, as Dalli and colleagues (2011) point out, when teachers better understand the special characteristics of toddlers, attuned relationships with toddlers, and effective responses to toddlers' needs, are possible.

5.4.5 Perspectives of toddlers as learners with rights that must be upheld.

In the present study, teachers identified toddlers as learners, celebrated their learning, their strengths and special characteristics, and acknowledged their place of belonging within the centre/kindergarten community. In many ways, this image of the toddler is reflected in Malaguzzi's (1993) statement: " ... our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults and children" (as cited in Anning, 2004, p. 59). The image of the toddler, evident in the present study, also resonates with Māori ways of being and doing, which emphasise that every child should be respected and accepted, and every child has a right to get the best from his/her family or community (Pere, 1997). The understanding that every child has a right to be respected and accepted was evident throughout the present study, where teachers' responses to toddlers were underpinned by a common intention to treat toddlers with respect and dignity. Teachers talked about protecting toddlers' esteem, dignity, self-identity and upholding their rights. One group of teachers emphasised the importance of protecting and enhancing toddlers' mana. Results suggest that teachers' intentions to protect and enhance toddlers' esteem, dignity, self-identity or mana supported and enabled teachers to effectively support toddlers and promote learning.

5.4.6 Summary and implications of factors that support effective practice.

Many of the factors that supported teachers' practice in the present study have been associated with overall quality practices for toddlers in existing literature (see Dalli et al., 2011). These factors included: positive responsive relationships throughout the early learning setting; in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; and perspectives of toddlers as learners with rights that must be upheld. In the present

study, however, teachers identified these factors as specifically supportive during peer conflicts, which are often emotionally-charged contexts for toddlers and teachers. Other supportive factors that were identified included teachers' perceptions of conflicts as learning events and teachers' emotional competence, which may be more directly related to supporting toddlers during peer conflict, but less recognised as important factors.

Perceptions of conflict are particularly important because, for teachers to work effectively in the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, teachers must view conflicts as constructive learning opportunities. As previous research (Bayer et al., 1996; Gloeckler et al., 2014) has noted, this may require a paradigm shift that confronts preexisting perceptions of conflict as disruptive or detrimental, and that addresses teachers' fears for toddlers' safety. These types of shifts in thinking and in practice require critical reflection, not solely by individual teachers, but by teaching teams, and are often addressed through collaborative self-review processes (Cahill, 2006). Collaboration is key because, as teachers in the present study pointed out, effective practice is easier when teaching philosophies and objectives are shared. Furthermore, to support teachers to work effectively with toddlers within the context of peer conflicts, PLD programmes must also explore, and perhaps confront, teachers' perceptions of conflict, in ways that involve the whole teaching team.

5.5 Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations and delimitations of this study should be considered when interpreting the results. Given the small size and scope of the present research, and the intention to explore and describe practice within the participating settings, the results are limited to the particular settings and are not intended to generalise to other early education services. Thus, the practices reported by teachers, along with the factors that influenced or supported those practices, represent the experiences and perspectives of the teachers in these settings and might not represent the experiences and perspectives of teachers in other settings. In addition, it is important to note that the associations identified in this study were based on a small

sample that was not intended to represent other early learning settings. This is the reason that the correlation coefficient was reported, rather than statistical significance.

This study explored teachers' self-reports of their practices, rather than direct observation of actual practice. It is acknowledged that self-reports are reflective of teachers' personal perspectives and, therefore, there may be a difference between teachers' descriptions of their practices and what an independent observer would witness when looking at that same practice. That said, teachers have provided rich insights into the ways they support toddlers and promote their learning during toddlers' peer conflicts—insights that may have been difficult to identify through observation of practice.

5.6 Implications for Practice, Policy and Further Research

As noted, the findings describe the experiences and perspectives of the participating teachers, rather than representing, or being generalisable to, teachers in other early learning services. Nonetheless, the settings selected were identified as very well placed to support children's learning and had received professional development to help promote effective practices. Therefore, practices and factors reported may be informative or insightful to teachers in other settings, to professional learning and development or policy initiatives, and to further research, especially when considered alongside the current literature regarding how to nurture and promote young children's social-emotional skills. In addition to implications described throughout the discussion chapter, a few additional insights for practice, policy and further research are outlined below.

An unexpected finding of the present study was teachers' references to mindfulness, or being in the moment, to support their practice in the context of peer conflicts. Mindfulness, as a teaching practice, might not be widely used by early childhood teachers, yet may be particularly relevant to support toddlers in peer conflicts. Stress management is a common issue for teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mitchell &

Brooking, 2007) and peer conflicts can be challenging and stress-inducing situations, especially for teachers who already feel stressed. Nonetheless, it is important for teachers to respond to toddlers' peer conflicts, and all teaching, calmly, thoughtfully and in the best interests of the children involved. Mindfulness and emotional awareness skills can support teachers' ability to achieve this (Andersen et al., 2012; Frank et al., 2016; Harvey et al., 2012; Jennings, 2015; Ulloa, 2011). However, early childhood teachers may not be offered training to support these skills. While the Incredible Years Programme (Webster-Stratton, 2012), supported in New Zealand by the Ministry of Education, includes a section on how teachers might manage their own stress by addressing negative thought patterns and by having a colleague support network, there is not a strong focus on how teachers might develop their own emotional awareness or mindfulness skills, or why these skills are important. Thus, there is a need for more information about mindfulness and emotional awareness as teaching tools, especially in the specific context of toddlers' peer conflicts, along with support for teachers to access PLD programmes that promote emotional competence, awareness and mindfulness skills.

The present study paints a very positive picture of teachers' work with toddlers by highlighting effective practices, and factors that enable effective practice, within settings that were very well placed to support toddlers' needs. However, as national evaluation reports from ERO (2009, 2015) show, not all early learning settings are as responsive to the specific needs of toddlers, and the quality of practice is variable. For some services, this may be because of changes to structure or participation. For example, with increasing numbers of two-year-olds enrolled in kindergartens that are traditionally geared for older children, and that typically feature large group sizes, kindergarten teachers face new challenges to respond to the specific needs of toddlers (Duncan, 2005; Duncan, Dalli, & Lawrence, 2006). For other services, variability in quality may be because toddler teachers are not required, for licensing purposes, to undertake any specialised training. In fact, only 50% of teachers in a teacher-led early childhood service are required to be qualified, and of that 50%, none are required to work fulltime at the service (Education.govt.nz., 2016). Findings from the present study

indicated that teachers' in-depth knowledge, including knowledge of toddlerhood and of social-emotional learning and development, enabled effective teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers reported that PLD was effective when it focused on the infant and toddler age group. When considered in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, the findings suggest there is a pressing need for initial teacher preparation and PLD that provides specialist training for teachers to address the unique needs of toddlers.

The present study contributes knowledge and complements Smith and colleagues' (1996) existing research related to teachers' perspectives of toddlers' and young children's peer conflicts, in Aotearoa New Zealand. Key implications of the findings highlight the need for specific training and PLD for toddler teachers. The focus on teachers as agents in supporting toddlers learning in peer conflict is essential, and teachers' perspectives are very valuable. Nonetheless, further research might investigate teaching practice, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts, from other key perspectives, such as the perspectives of the toddlers and their families or through a cultural lens. Especially in Aotearoa New Zealand, it would also be useful to explore infants, toddlers' or young children's peer conflicts through the lens of a Māori worldview. As Rameka and Glasgow (2015) assert "there is much to be gained by capturing Māori and Pacific Polynesian cultural and traditional knowledge for raising and caring for infants and toddlers" (p. 147), including better outcomes for Māori and Pasific children and families, and the dissemination of knowledge that reflects the context and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.

5.7 Conclusion

A key aspect of the present research is the description of teaching roles and practices that support toddlers and promote their learning, within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts. Results indicated that effective teaching roles were the roles of protector, advocate, role model and coach. Through these roles, and by utilising conflicts as learning and teaching opportunities, teachers aimed to empower toddlers, support their positive self-identity and esteem, and teach them social-emotional skills that they might later use independently.

Teaching practices that promoted toddlers' learning, and empowered toddlers to learn in the context of peer conflicts involved an array of coaching and supportive practices that were guided by professional judgment. Many of the identified practices, including commenting and offering feedback, and acknowledging, validating and labelling emotions, are well-documented and increasingly recognised as practices that nurture and promote young children's social-emotional skills. Teachers' professional decisions regarding how to respond to conflicts were made in response to concerns for toddlers' safety, both physical and emotional, and were guided by teachers' knowledge of the toddlers involved and, in some cases, by learning objectives that were discussed with the toddler's whānau and the teaching team.

Results suggest that effective teaching practice was supported by: positive, responsive relationships; teachers' in-depth knowledge of toddlers and toddlerhood; professional learning; perspectives of toddlers as learners and of conflicts as learning events; teachers' emotional awareness; and the desire to maintain toddlers' dignity, esteem and self-identity. For some teachers, an underpinning intention was to work with toddlers in ways that protected and enhanced toddlers' mana.

Toddlers' peer conflicts can be constructive learning events where toddlers can learn social-emotional skills, and form an image of themselves as capable social problem solvers who are increasingly able to regulate their emotions and solve conflicts in peaceful ways. These skills and ways of being are vital aspects of toddlers' developing social-emotional competence and support toddlers' learning and wellbeing in childhood, and throughout the life-span. Teachers play a critical role to support toddlers and to promote their learning during moments of peer conflict, however, toddlers' peer conflicts are events that may be challenging for teachers as well as toddlers. Thus, research such as the present study is vital to uncovering and describing what teachers might do to achieve important outcomes for toddlers.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Ethics Approval



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHURŌA

2 November 2015

Linda Clarke
117 Hanning Road
RD6
TE AWAMUTU

Dear Linda

Re: HEC: Southern B Application – 15/65
How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?

Thank you for your letter dated 27 October 2015.

On behalf of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are now approved. Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Mr David Robinson, Acting Chair
Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B

cc Dr Tara McLaughlin
Institute of Education
PN500

Dr Karyn Aspden
Institute of Education
PN500

Prof John O'Neill, Director
Institute of Education
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Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

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Appendix Two: Information to Centres

(Document has been redacted to remove personal name and name and address of early learning setting)



How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?

19 November 2015

Dear

My name is Linda Rose Clarke. I am a Massey University Master of Education student, currently undertaking a research project to explore teachers' pedagogical practices during toddlers' peer conflicts. The aims of this research project are to:

- explore teachers' perspectives of toddlers' peer conflicts and teachers' self-reports of practice during toddlers' peer conflicts
- explore relationships between teachers' self-reports of practice and teachers' perspectives of conflicts as well as teachers' demographics and other contextual variables

has been identified as a potential setting to capture positive examples of quality teaching and learning in early childhood settings. I would like to invite to consider contributing to the research project, *How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?* Potential benefits to include the generation and sharing of knowledge about toddlers' social-emotional learning and, in particular, how teachers can promote toddlers' learning during peer conflicts. Through this project, will have the opportunity to contribute to the early childhood community and to the research community.

Should you agree to participate, this would involve:

1. **Allowing me to contact your toddler teachers at** to offer letters of invitation and detailed information about the project, with the intention of gaining their informed consent to participate. The teachers would

be asked to complete a questionnaire and attend a focus group interview. Note that this research project only involves teachers, not toddlers.

2. Centre information:

In order to explore teachers' practices in context, I would like some background information about your centre. This could be sent to me (perhaps by the centre administrator or manager) either electronically or as printed forms, and would inform me of:

- Centre philosophy statement
- Policies or procedures relevant to teaching practices during toddlers' peer conflicts – for example social-emotional teaching and learning policy or guiding behaviour policy
- Teacher to toddler ratio
- Group size in the toddler room
- Any special characteristics of your toddler setting – for example, mixed-age or same-age

3. Your centre's support of a focus group interview: A focus group interview would be held at _____ or at an alternative venue agreed upon by _____ and myself. The interview will take approximately 1½ hours and will be conducted at a time negotiated by _____ and myself, possibly during a time that would normally be set aside for a staff meeting. It is up to you whether this interview is conducted inside or outside of teachers' paid work hours.

I would invite you to discuss this project further by contacting Linda Clarke at linda.tiakikaika@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Linda Clarke.

Appendix Three: Information to Teachers

(Document has been redacted to remove name of early learning setting)



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?

INFORMATION SHEET

Kia ora. My name is Linda Rose Clarke. I am a Massey University Master of Education student, currently undertaking a research study to explore teachers' teaching practices during toddlers' peer conflicts. The intentions of this project are to:

- explore teachers' perspectives of toddlers' peer conflicts and teachers' self-reports of practice during toddlers' peer conflicts
- explore relationships between teachers' self-reports of practice and teachers' perspectives of conflicts as well as teachers' demographics and other contextual variables

In your position as a toddler teacher at _____ I invite you to participate in two key activities associated with this research project. These two key activities are:

1. **Questionnaire:** The aim of the questionnaire is to explore your teaching practices during toddlers' peer conflicts and also to explore some of the conditions that may, or may not, affect those teaching practices. A questionnaire will be electronically distributed to you and can be filled out and returned electronically. I will know the completed questionnaire comes from a teacher at your centre, but you will not be identified. Centres and teachers will be coded with a pseudonym to protect privacy. You may choose your own pseudonym. It is anticipated that each questionnaire will take no more than 20 minutes to complete.
2. **Focus group interview:** A focus group interview will be held at your early childhood centre, or at an alternative venue agreed upon by your centre and myself. The focus group interview will take approximately 1½ hours and will be conducted at a time negotiated by your centre and myself, possibly during a time that would normally be set aside for a staff meeting. It is your centre's decision whether the interview will be conducted inside or outside of teachers' paid work hours. The interview will be audio recorded and the recording will later be transcribed. Before being used, The transcribed data will be given to you for emendation and approval. All focus group participants have the right

to review and edit their own transcript. Privacy will be maintained by using pseudonyms, for your centre and for the teachers.

Potential benefits for you may include professional learning and growth, particularly from shared discussions during the collaborative focus group interview. You may also benefit from the opportunity to contribute to the teaching profession and research community. As a participating teacher in this research study you will receive a summary of the research findings.

It is not expected that you will experience any major harm or discomfort as a result of your participation in the project. However, please be aware that the focus group interview will be an interactive group discussion that will prompt teachers to share their opinions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about toddlers' peer conflicts and related teaching practices. There is a possibility that some of the interactions will be challenging. It is my intention to maintain an open, honest and professional discussion during the interview, without burdening or causing stress to any participant. It is expected that the focus group will be a constructive, professionally rewarding discussion about teaching practices, which may spark insights into new ideas and enthusiasm for trying out new ways.

It is not anticipated that any conflicts of interest will occur as a result of this research.

Should you agree to participate, the process would include the following:

1. Complete and return the questionnaire (Key activity 1).
2. Participate in a focus group interview involving the researcher and your centre's participating toddler teachers (Key activity 2).

All data gathered for this study will be kept in a secure and confidential manner and used for the purposes of exploring teachers' pedagogical practices during toddlers' peer conflicts, to partially fulfill the requirements of Massey University's Master of Education degree; and also any publications that arise from this work. Confidentiality and anonymity of individual participants and centres will be maintained and no personally identifiable information will be shared. Please note that your centre will be described within the research, however pseudonyms will be used to protect your centre's privacy. A summary of the research study will be provided to all participating centres and teachers at the completion of the project.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question
- withdraw from the project at any point
- ask any questions about the project at any time during participation

- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of the project activities when it is concluded

Please feel free to contact the researcher or supervisors at any time if you have any questions in relation to this project.

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/65. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr. Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix Four: Participant Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree not to disclose anything discussed in the focus group interview.

I agree to the focus group interview being sound recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name - printed _____

Individual participant consent form

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

Institute of Education
Cnr Albany Drive & Collinson Road, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand T +64 6 356 9099 www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix Five: Transcript Release Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

How do teachers teach toddlers during toddlers' peer conflicts?

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full Name - printed _____

Appendix Six: Focus Group Format

(This format is a guideline only)

Kia ora. Welcome. To begin, I offer you a whakatauiki: Ahakoa he iti he pounamu. Although it seems small, it is a great treasure. With this in mind, please know that I value your contribution to this research project; I acknowledge that you are sharing your time, your knowledge and your ideas with me. I value what you have to say so please don't be afraid to share your ideas. Ahakoa he iti he pounamu.

Secondly, a reminder that tonight's discussion will be audio recorded and the recording has started now.

This research is an exploratory study to learn about teachers' views of peer conflict. Our aim tonight is to talk about what you do, and why, when the toddlers in your centre have peer conflicts.

You will all be sent a transcript of the recording, and each of you may review and amend your own transcript. All the data will be stored securely and used solely for the purpose of my research. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the research.

Here are some guidelines and ground rules: [Display these guidelines and be prepared to add any others that the group thinks of]

Confidentiality - this discussion must stay within your centre and within the research.

Act with integrity and respect.

Aim to give everyone an opportunity to speak, please.

Have a dynamic discussion but with just one person speaking at a time. I need to be able to decipher the recording.

Don't be afraid to disagree. I hope to hear different ideas ...

We will finish within 1 ½ hours. Sometimes I may need to move the discussion on so that we have time to cover every question. Please don't be offended if I ask you to move on. If you have more to say, or think of something else, you may contact me later. You also have pens and paper if you would like to make any notes, either to share later or simply to help you think.

Are there any other ground rules you would like to add before you all introduce yourselves?
Let's start with introductions...

Questions	Rationale and <i>my actions</i>	Maximum Timing	Actual Time
Let's start with introductions. Could each of you please state your name and your role at this centre. Who would like to begin?	Give everyone a chance to speak and facilitate comfort and belonging within the group. <i>Record the actual time as we go.</i>	4	
Thank you. That's the only time we will speak in formal turns. From now on please speak whenever you have something to say, as long as no one else is speaking at the same time.			
Here's my definition of toddlers' peer conflict: an event when one toddler resists, opposes or retaliates against another. How would you define toddlers' peer conflicts in your centre?	Identify what a peer conflict is and also start/warm-up the discussion about conflicts. <i>Display the definitions.</i>	5	
Thank you. Our combined definitions are... For now our definition is... For our purposes we will work with both. Aggression – a deliberate act of harm.			
Let's talk about the reasons for conflict: Why do toddlers have peer conflicts? (Do conflicts tend to happen more often at different times of the day?) (What else do you think is going on for the toddlers?) (Do you think there are developmental reasons for toddlers' conflicts?)	Gather data about what teachers think motivates toddlers' conflicts. <i>Use the follow-up questions as prompts if these topics aren't covered.</i>	5	
Thanks. You have talked about reasons for toddlers' conflicts, [including developmental reasons and structural reasons such as transitions.]			
Now, I want to hear about your decisions to intervene (or not) in a conflict. Think about your initial reaction, when a conflict starts: When you see a conflict start, what do you think and what is your first	What do teachers think and do when a conflict starts? <i>Ask the follow-up questions if they are not covered in discussion, or as prompts.</i>	6	

<p>reaction?</p> <p>(Tell me more about the decision to intervene).</p> <p>(What else goes through your mind?)</p> <p>(The question is, "When you see a conflict start, what do you think and what is your first reaction?)</p>			
Thank you. You have given me lots of information about when and why you would intervene and why you might wait.			
<p>When you intervene, what do you typically do?</p> <p>(What do you say?)</p> <p>(Tell me about the non-verbal and body language you use?)</p>	Gather data about the strategies teachers employ during toddlers' conflicts.	6	
Thanks. I have plenty of information about what you typically do and say during a peer conflict.			
How does your response change based on different children?	Gather data regarding how teachers' perception' of children influence their reactions.	6	
Thank you. It seems that teachers' responses depend on many factors, [including the child and your relationship with the child.]			
What do you hope to teach the toddlers during their peer conflicts?	Gather data about teaching intentions.	6	
Is there anything else you you hope to achieve, in general, when you work with toddlers during their peer conflicts?		4	
Thank you. That gives me lots to think about regarding your teaching goals and intentions.			
How important are toddlers' peer conflicts?	What sort of learning opportunities do teachers identify?	6	
As we pass around these images of toddlers' peer conflicts, I would like to shift gears and talk about how we feel when toddlers are in conflict. [Allow time to look at images].	<p><i>I might introduce the pics sooner...just depends on how it feels.</i></p> <p>Gather data from an</p>	13	

Bring to mind a toddlers' peer conflict that affected you on an emotional level. In the conflict you are thinking of, perhaps there is something about the conflict that triggers an emotional response. Maybe a sense of repetition... hurt... targeting or intent... Try to recollect your emotions during that conflict. Now, please, can you share these feelings you have just recollected and what triggered your emotions.	<p>emotional perspective, about how teachers feel about conflicts. Also, how teachers cope with their initial reactions and perhaps whether teachers consciously regulate their own emotions.</p> <p><i>Distribute the images.</i> <i>Set the emotional scene.</i></p> <p><i>If someone doesn't acknowledge emotions or says "I keep emotions out of it" ask Can you tell me why that is important for you? Can you explain how you do that?</i></p>		
<p>Thank you for acknowledging that there is an emotional side and thank you for having the courage and generosity to share your feelings. or Thank you for sharing your perspectives.</p>			
Teaching can be emotional. It involves our hearts as much as our heads! Please, talk about the things that support you (emotionally or in any way) to work with children when they have peer conflicts?	Bring the participants back from the emotional discussion – finishing on a positive note.	7	
<p>READING:</p> <p>There has never been a single day when you have been anything other than magnificent Give this to yourself. Every day you move mountains You touch lives And you perform miracles Every day you are a hero A success and an example And every day you change the world for the better Simply by being You! (Maya Angelou)</p>			
Finally, if you had one minute to tell the most important thing teachers should do during toddlers' peer conflicts, what would you say?	Closing question that hones in on what is most important to teachers.	5	

9 minutes total introduction, 78 minutes discussion, 4 minutes to finish

Appendix Seven: Photographs



Appendix Eight: Web-Based Questionnaire

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Welcome to the *Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts* questionnaire

Thank you for your participation.

The aim of this questionnaire is to explore your teaching practices within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts and to explore the conditions that might affect those teaching practices. The intention is to explore your personal knowledge, values and teaching strategies, rather than what happens in general at your centre. This questionnaire is anonymous.

There are 11 questions and opportunity to make comments. This should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Background information

The first four questions are intended to provide background information for descriptive purposes.

1. How many years have you been employed as an early childhood teacher?

2. How many years have you been teaching toddlers?

3. How many years have you been teaching at the centre/kindergarten where you currently work?

4. What teaching qualification do you hold?

- ☐ Early childhood teaching degree
- ☐ Early childhood teaching diploma
- ☐ Other teaching qualification
- ☐ No teaching qualification
- ☐ I am currently studying toward a teaching qualification

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Definition

For this questionnaire, a toddlers' peer conflict is defined as **an event when a toddler resists, opposes or retaliates against another toddler.**

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

My role in peer conflict

5. Within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts it is important to me to:

(Please rate the level of importance)

	Not important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Protect the toddlers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stop the conflict	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mediate and teach the toddlers conflict resolution skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Give toddlers time and space to work things out for themselves	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Identify, acknowledge and discuss emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Maintain a peaceful centre/kindergarten environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensure the toddlers' physical safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encourage the toddlers' involvement in the social problem solving process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please provide any additional comments about your role:

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

My teaching strategies

6. Please rate the extent to which you value and use (frequency) the following teaching strategies in toddlers' peer conflict situations:

	Value	Frequency
Direct the toddlers by giving an instruction e.g. <i>"Tommy, give it to Max."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Give the toddlers a closed set of choices e.g. <i>"You can do it together or find somewhere else to play."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Call out to the toddlers e.g. <i>"Stop."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Offer an explanation e.g. <i>"Tommy wants to sit by himself."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Ask the toddlers questions e.g. <i>"Mia, what do you want?"</i> or <i>"What is wrong?"</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Use techniques that encourage toddlers to communicate and solve problems e.g. <i>"Max, tell Mia to stop."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Tell toddlers how to behave e.g. <i>"Gentle hands."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Tell toddlers how not to behave e.g. <i>"No hitting."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Offer feedback and verbal commentary during or immediately after the conflict e.g. <i>"Max said stop and you stopped. Great listening."</i> or <i>"You are waiting for a turn."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Acknowledge and label toddlers' emotions e.g. <i>"You are frustrated."</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Encourage the toddlers to say sorry.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Seek restitution e.g. <i>"Sit with her till she feels better"</i> or <i>"Come with me to get the icepack"</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Support the toddlers until a resolution is reached i.e. <i>until a solution is offered and accepted.</i>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Would you like to make additional comments about your teaching strategies?

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Influences on practice

7. Please rate how much the following influence your responses to toddlers' peer conflicts:

	Not influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Highly influential	Extremely influential
My personal thoughts and perspectives about conflict (positive or negative)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My concerns for the toddlers' physical safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My desire to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the centre/kindergarten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any negative feelings I have e.g. <i>having a headache or feeling stressed</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any positive feelings I have e.g. <i>feeling calm or empowered</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of each toddler's temperament	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of each toddler's skills and abilities e.g. <i>language skills</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of toddlers in general	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you like to make any comments about factors that influence your practice?

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Professional learning

8. Please list any professional learning courses that have supported your practice in regards to toddlers' peer conflicts:

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

The framework that supports your practice

9. Please rate the following in terms of how much each indirect factor helps you achieve your best practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts:

	Not helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful	N/A
Role models within my centre/kindergarten or throughout my teaching career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An environment where I don't feel rushed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective support and guidance from colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sufficient and appropriate resources and space for the toddlers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective self review processes that respond to and support toddlers' needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policies and procedures that support toddlers' needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Well managed transitions for teachers e.g. <i>effective management of teachers' lunch times and other breaks</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Well managed transitions for toddlers e.g. <i>effectively preparing for toddlers' meal times</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please rate the following in terms of how much each personal factor helps you achieve your best practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts:

	Not helpful	Slightly helpful	Helpful	Very helpful	Extremely helpful	N/A
My positive, responsive relationships with toddlers' families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My positive, responsive relationships with toddlers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My initial teacher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My belief that toddlers can resolve conflicts without hurting each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher education courses that I have attended	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent education courses that I have attended	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My ability to effectively regulate my emotions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My confidence to intervene (or to choose not to intervene) in toddlers' conflicts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My parenting skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My personal skills and dispositions e.g. <i>patience or ability to communicate with toddlers</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My knowledge of various strategies that support toddlers' social problem solving skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experiences and the relationships I develop with toddlers through attuned, attentive caregiving moments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you like to make any comments about factors that help you work effectively with toddlers during their peer conflicts?

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Obstacles and challenges

11. In no particular order, please list up to four obstacles or challenges that impede your effective practice within the context of toddlers' peer conflicts.

Investigating Toddlers' Peer Conflicts

Thank you

Thank you for answering the questionnaire and being part of the *investigating toddlers' peer conflicts* research project. Your contribution is valued.