Exploring teaching practice to support young children's prosocial behaviour: "What would we tell Pig and Frog to do?"

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Lorna Kathleen Duley

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Abstract

This thesis presents the results of a collaborative action research (CAR) study undertaken with a small group of early childhood education (ECE) teachers to explore teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviour development. Prosocial behaviour is an essential component of children's social-emotional development and has been shown to be a critical factor for children's positive life outcomes. As many children attend early childhood education centres, the ECE teachers in these settings need to have effective strategies to support and enhance children's development of prosocial behaviour. In this study, the teacher participants wanted to make changes to their existing teaching practices and the CAR inquiry process acted as a form of professional learning and development to support teachers to make these changes.

Placed within the theoretical paradigm of social constructivism and pragmatism, qualitative data was gathered using a range of methods. As part of the action research process, the initial research question was refined to form two questions: 1) in what ways did teachers change their teaching practice to support children's prosocial behaviours, and 2) how did the CAR process support the adoption of changed teaching practice. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic coding approach. Findings from question one showed that teachers adopted an integrated and strategic approach, implementing a scenario-based learning strategy using puppets at the group level and supporting this with prompts to children's thinking in the natural context of play. Findings from question two revealed that each of the five stages of the CAR process was instrumental in supporting the teachers to achieve the aims of their inquiry.

Furthermore, an overarching theme of intentionality and intentional teaching emerged from both research questions. As a result of the CAR process teachers developed shared intentions for children's prosocial behaviour that shaped their subsequent teaching strategies. Consistent with previous research in professional learning and development, the CAR process of engaging with research and evidence enabled teachers to make shifts in their teaching theories of practice resulting in teachers embracing more intentional teaching strategies.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Overview

This study uses collaborative action research (CAR) as a form of professional learning and development to support a small group of early childhood education (ECE) teachers to explore and implement teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviour development. Previous research has established that the early years are a critical time for children's social-emotional learning and development (David & Powell, 2014; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Joseph & Strain, 2003; Koglin & Petermann, 2011). During these early years it is important for children to develop strong foundations of social-emotional competence and skills to support them to be successful both in school and their future lives (Denham et al., 2013; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Prosocial behaviour is viewed as a crucial component of social-emotional learning. For children who attend teacher-led ECE services, the teacher plays a significant role in supporting children to develop prosocial behaviours (David & Powell, 2014; Denham et al., 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). However, changing teaching practice to adopt more effective teaching strategies can be a challenging process that requires effective forms of professional learning and development (Borko, 2004; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). To support this change process, CAR will be used as a form of professional learning and development (PLD).

This chapter sets the context for the present study. It begins by providing a brief description of the research setting and outlines the aims of the study. Prosocial behaviour is defined along with an overview of the significant beneficial effects for children with an orientation for prosocial behaviour. The importance of effective teaching strategies to support prosocial learning is introduced and a brief outline of the characteristics of effective PLD is presented. This outline is followed by a short account of my personal interest in the area of children's social-emotional learning and the research methodology of collaborative action research. The chapter concludes by outlining the organisation of the thesis.

Setting for Present Study

The study was conducted at *Mountain Kindergarten* (pseudonym applied) which is located in an urban area of a New Zealand city. As a private kindergarten, it caters for a maximum of 27 children aged 3 and 4 years old, attending 7 hours a day between 8.30am and 3.30pm. The teaching staff consists of five ECE teachers, including the researcher who holds a part-time teaching position working three days per week. The researcher and three other full-time teachers chose to participate in the study. The *Mountain Kindergarten* philosophy reflects a holistic view of children, including the critical contribution of children's social-emotional development and learning.

Aim of Study

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, the teachers and the researcher were keen to explore teaching strategies that effectively support children to demonstrate prosocial behaviour towards others, ensuring that children can enjoy positive and successful interactions with others. Secondly, the team was keen to explore how they could improve their current teaching practices to more effectively support children's development of prosocial behaviours. To achieve these dual aims a CAR methodology was employed. Use of CAR required me to hold the dual roles of both participant and researcher in the study, collaborating with my teaching colleagues in our kindergarten setting.

Definition and Importance of Prosocial Behaviours

As a key component of children's social-emotional learning, prosocial behaviour has been defined as "voluntary behaviour designed to benefit another" (Eisenberg et al., 2006, p. 646) often characterised in the observable behaviours of sharing, helping, cooperating and comforting others. The existing body of research on prosocial behaviour suggests that an orientation for prosocial behaviour can generate significant benefits for children. For example, children with an orientation for prosocial behaviour have been shown to be more academically successful (Capara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Ladd et al., 1999), as well as enjoying meaningful relationships with peers and teachers (Avgitidou, 2001; Sebanc, 2003; Slaughter, Dennis, & Pritchard, 2002). Furthermore, longitudinal research suggests that a prosocial orientation can support positive long term outcomes such as stable employment, participation in tertiary education and reduced risk of mental health issues (Jones,

Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). These significant benefits for children of an orientation for prosocial behaviour, makes this investigation of teaching practices to support prosocial behaviours a worthy focus of research.

Teacher Strategies to Support Prosocial Behaviour

Research has established that the values and cultures of societies shape the level of prosocial responding (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Medina & Martinez, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). As children spend considerable periods of time in ECE settings during a crucial time in their social-emotional development (David & Powell, 2014; Joseph & Strain, 2003; Koglin & Petermann, 2011), teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the values and culture that children experience in that environment. Given the importance of prosocial behaviours, it is therefore critical that ECE teachers have effective strategies to promote prosocial behaviour development and learning. Existing literature offers a variety of strategies to promote social-emotional learning across a variety of social-emotional skills and competencies including pro-social behaviour, emotional literacy, social-problem solving, conflict resolution, making and maintaining friendships and other key skill areas. Teachers participating in the present study were interested in enhancing prosocial behaviour to support a positive learning environment, therefore, this study specifically explored strategies intended to respond to these shared professional interests.

Professional Learning and Development

To achieve the aims of this study, it was necessary for the teacher participants to make changes to their existing teaching practices. However, changing existing teaching practice is often a complex and difficult process (Borko, 2004) requiring teachers to undertake some form of professional learning and development (PLD). Research suggests that the most effective forms of PLD engage teachers in an inquiry approach using evidence of children's learning and evidence from published research (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Sinnema & Aitken, 2014; Timperley et al., 2007). Furthermore, PLD literature confirms that for change to teaching practice to be sustained, PLD needs to involve planning for and taking action (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Therefore, a CAR methodology was selected for this research study as a mechanism for supporting the teacher participants through an effective inquiry process leading to sustained change.

CAR can provide the essential inquiry processes that are necessary for this project: a focus on improvement, the drawing together of theory and problems of practice, the integration of evidence, action and reflection, collaboration within a teaching team, and the desire to generate knowledge with implications beyond the teaching team to the wider ECE community (Reason & Bradbury, 2001).

Researcher Motivation

My interest in teaching strategies to support young children's prosocial behaviours started before my career as an ECE teacher during my experiences as a parent of two sons. My sons were born prior to my retraining as an ECE teacher, so I would consider my parenting in their early years to be fairly consistent. However, I observed that while one son's social-emotional competence seemed to develop almost instinctively, my other son continually struggled with these skills. As I saw how much struggling in this area affected my son's life, I developed an appreciation for the important place of social-emotional competence for children's development. Moreover, when my son moved on to formal schooling, I was struck by the importance of developing social-emotional competence early, to avoid being on a negative trajectory. Later when I retrained as an ECE teacher, I became convinced that supporting children's positive social-emotional development is one of the most critical contributions I can make to the children that I teach.

In addition my interest in action research was sparked by the findings and results of action research projects undertaken as part of a Ministry of Education initiative, called the Centres of Innovation. I was impressed and inspired by the meaningful changes that took place in teachers' practice and knowledge as a result of participating in these action research projects. The imperative to turn theory and knowledge into action as an inherent part of the research process was particularly appealing, and I felt motivated to use my participation in the thesis programme as an opportunity to enhance my daily teaching practice in a way that would be beneficial for children.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter Two provides a review of literature establishing the associations between prosocial behaviour and positive outcomes for children. Attention is then turned to examining the existing research about teaching strategies that are effective in supporting

children to develop prosocial behaviours. In addition, as a key objective of this research was to work with teachers to improve teaching for children's prosocial behaviours, the chapter concludes with an examination of the characteristics of PLD programs that have been shown to be effective in supporting change in teachers' teaching practices.

Chapter Three details the CAR methodology adopted in the research study. A brief overview of the processes and characteristics of action research is presented and selected studies illustrating the effectiveness of CAR as a tool for professional learning and development are discussed. An explanation of the data generation methods employed during the research process follows, along with an overview of how these were incorporated throughout the stages of the action research cycle. The process for data analysis is presented and the chapter concludes with a consideration of relevant ethical issues.

Key findings of the research are presented in Chapter Four. These themes identified in the data are presented in relation to the research questions.

Chapter Five discusses the significance of these key findings and examines them in relation to other relevant research and literature.

The conclusions of this research are presented in Chapter Six. Implications of the key findings are discussed and limitations of this study are presented. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Summary

Prosocial behaviours form a critical part of young children's development in the early years and children who develop an orientation for prosocial behaviour are likely to experience several significant benefits as a result. For children who attend ECE, teachers play a vital role in supporting children's prosocial behaviour development. This study uses a collaborative action research methodology with a small group of ECE teachers to explore how these teachers could improve their current teaching practices to more effectively support children's prosocial behaviour development.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Social-emotional development and learning in the early years is critical to help children gain essential skills that support them to be successful both in school and in their future lives (David & Powell, 2014; Denham et al., 2013; Joseph & Strain, 2003; Koglin & Petermann, 2011; Ladd et al., 1999). The development of prosocial behaviours is a key component of social-emotional learning. Research has shown that teachers can play a vital role in supporting children to develop prosocial behaviours (David & Powell, 2014; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Kemple, 2004). However, to support the implementation of effective social-emotional and prosocial teaching strategies, teachers are likely to need professional learning and development (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007).

The focus of this research is to work with a small group of teachers to explore and change teaching practices to more effectively support children's development of prosocial behaviours. This chapter outlines how prosocial behaviours have been defined in the literature and a definition is proposed for this study. To set the context for the present study, literature that establishes the associations between prosocial behaviour and positive outcomes for children are presented. Attention is then turned to examining what the existing research reveals about teaching strategies that are effective in supporting children to develop prosocial behaviours. In addition, as a key objective of this research is to work with a small team of teachers to change teaching strategies, the chapter concludes with an examination of the characteristics of professional learning and development programmes that have been shown to be effective in supporting pedagogical change. Finally, selected studies that illustrate the effectiveness of action research as a tool for professional learning and development are reviewed.

Prosocial Behaviour Definition

Ladd et al. (1999) suggested that children consistently demonstrate one of two behaviour orientations in their social interactions – either an orientation to move *towards* others, which can be described as prosocial, or an orientation to move *against*

others, described as antisocial. This perspective implies that prosocial behaviour increases the likelihood of successful social connections, while its antithesis, antisocial behaviour, will likely have the opposite effect. Furthermore, the description of these behaviours as orientations suggests that they exist on a continuum, where children may demonstrate a preference for acting in a prosocial or antisocial manner, in most but not necessarily every situation (Fabes, Hanish, Martin, Moss, & Reesing, 2012; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015; Ladd et al., 1999; Slaughter et al., 2002; Spivak & Farran, 2012). An alternative and more specific definition of prosocial behaviour defines it as "voluntary behaviour designed to benefit another" (Eisenberg et al., 2006, p. 646). The use of 'voluntary' in this definition focuses attention on the motivation to act in a prosocial way; however as these authors argue, it is difficult to differentiate between the reasons for prosocial actions in young children as they are not always able to communicate a rationale for their actions. Accordingly, research assessing children's prosocial behaviour tends to instead focus on behaviour that is observable and therefore more easily measured such as instances of: *sharing* (Chernyak & Kushnir, 2013; Hay, Castle, Davies, Demetriou, & Stimson, 1999; Spivak & Farran, 2012; Strayer & Roberts, 2004), *helping* (Baillargeon et al., 2011; Beier, Over, & Carpenter, 2014; Spivak & Farran, 2012; Strayer & Roberts, 2004), *comforting or showing sensitivity to another's distress* (Baillargeon, et al., 2011; Hay et al., 1999), and *cooperating towards a common goal* (Spivak & Farran, 2012; Strayer & Roberts, 2004).

For the purposes of this study, the teaching team, of which I am a member, began with an intentionally wide definition of prosocial behaviours. We defined it as an orientation that leads children to enjoy successful interactions and build positive connections with their peers and teachers. These interactions are frequently characterised by behaviours of sharing, cooperating, helping and demonstrating consideration and kindness towards others.

Prosocial Behaviour and Positive Outcomes for Children

Research has shown that children with prosocial behaviours are more likely to have successful connections with peers and teachers, more meaningful friendships, higher levels of school engagement and achievement, and positive long-term outcomes such as participation in tertiary education, stable employment and reduced risk of medication

for mental health issues. Examples of research that illustrate these findings are discussed below.

Prosocial behaviour and connections with peers

Slaughter, Dennis and Pritchard (2002) undertook research to examine children's social connections with peers using a sample of 87 children aged between 4 years and 6.7 years, attending five different childcare centres in a large Australian city. Children were asked on two separate occasions to complete a socio-metric measure which required them to nominate the three peers that they most liked to play with and the three peers they least liked to play with. Using these data each child was given a social preference score, which placed them in one of five groups – popular, controversial, average, neglected or rejected. In addition, teachers were asked to complete a behavioural questionnaire for children that rated their prosocial behaviour. The results found prosocial behaviour to be a significant predictor of 'popular' status, with the converse being true for children in the 'rejected' group.

Avgitidou (2001) examined prosocial behaviour and peer acceptance by conducting a "contextual study of prosocial behaviour" (p. 147) from the perspective of Greek children. She observed and conducted interviews with children aged 3.9 years to 5.6 years attending a kindergarten and asked them to complete the same socio-metric measure of peer acceptance used by Slaughter et al. (2002). She determined that prosocial behaviour is a prerequisite to friendship, and furthermore that this is a reciprocal association because friendship is a context in which prosocial behaviours develop. Supporting this finding, Sebanc (2003) further argued that prosocial behaviours have an impact on the quality of the friendships that children experience. In her North American study with children aged 3 to 5 years, supportive interactions, as a feature of friendship, were correlated with prosocial behaviours. In contrast, friendship conflict was associated with overt aggression, peer rejection and relational aggression (e.g. threatening to withdraw a birthday invitation if the friend did not agree to demands). Furthermore, exclusive friendships were also correlated with relational aggression and negatively correlated with peer acceptance.

Adding further significance to these findings is the work by Fabes et al. (2012) who found that high exposure to prosocial peers at the beginning of the school year led to a

greater degree of positive peer interactions towards the end of the school year, with consistent results also found a year later. Their results suggested that affiliation with prosocial peers has a cumulative effect, setting a child on a particular pathway. Furthermore, their findings reflect the reciprocal interplay of prosocial behaviours and positive relationships, with prosocial behaviours enhancing the likelihood of a child enjoying positive social relationships – relationships which in turn provide a context for further development of prosocial behaviours. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that prosocial behaviours can lead to children enjoying acceptance of their peers and supportive friendships, as well providing an important context for the further development of prosocial behaviours.

Prosocial behaviour, participation and academic achievement

The relationship between a prosocial or antisocial behavioural style and classroom participation has been examined by Ladd et al. (1999). Across two studies with a combined total sample of 200 children in their first year of formal schooling in North America, these researchers collected information on children's behavioural orientation (i.e. prosocial versus antisocial), their relationship quality with peers and teachers, their level of classroom participation and their academic achievement. Results indicated a positive correlation between children with a tendency for prosocial behaviours and productive classroom participation, which subsequently led to greater academic achievement. Ladd et al. theorised that two dynamics (described subsequently) could be jointly responsible for this effect. Firstly, when children feel accepted by peers and teachers they have a greater sense of connection and belonging giving them confidence to participate fully in the classroom experiences. The second effect is that children with high peer acceptance experience better access to group activities, which provides opportunity for collaborative learning. Therefore, peer acceptance facilitates participation, while peer rejection impedes participation. Furthermore, these prosocial behaviours facilitate classroom participation and greater academic achievement.

Consistent results were also found in studies completed by researchers in an Italian school setting (Capara et al., 2000). Using a longitudinal research design and a sample size of 294 children at age 8.5 years, the researchers found a strong correlation between a prosocial orientation and academic achievement five years later at age 13.5. An additional strength of this Italian study was the staggered cohort design, meaning that

the full sample was made up of four groups of children, staggered over four years, designed to eliminate the possible effects of a particular educational context. Furthermore, additional data about academic ability were gathered for 100 of the children in the sample at age 8.5 years. These additional data enabled the researchers to control for early academic achievement in the results of this sub-group. Their findings revealed that even when controlling for early academic achievement, prosocial orientation was still the strongest predictor of later academic success.

Prosocial behaviour and positive long term outcomes

The long term significance of an orientation for prosocial behaviour has been compellingly demonstrated by longitudinal research conducted in North America. Jones, Greenburg and Crowley (2015) examined data collected in 1991 from 753 children and revisited the children in this sample 19 years later. Jones et al. compared various life outcomes at age 25 with the ratings assigned by teachers on a prosocial communication subscale when these children were aged six. Even when controlling for factors of socio-economic status, family risk status, neighbourhood quality, children's temperament characteristics and early academic ability, the results showed a statistically significant correlation between the prosocial scale measurement and positive learning outcomes. Children with higher prosocial scale measurement at age six were more likely at age 25 to have graduated from high school, completed a college degree and be in stable full time employment. Conversely, these children were less likely to have been involved with the police, to have suffered emotional or behavioural issues through their high school years, and to have undertaken risk behaviours such as alcohol and drug use.

Summary

Taken together, these research studies reinforce the significance of developing children's prosocial behaviours which enhance their enjoyment of peer interactions, classroom participation leading to academic success and long-term positive life outcomes. Given the importance of prosocial behaviour and skills, some researchers have examined the role teachers can play in supporting children's prosocial behaviour learning and development. However, a search of the literature exploring teaching practices and strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours revealed surprisingly few empirical research studies with a specific prosocial behaviour focus, particularly in

ECE settings. The majority of research took a wider focus on social-emotional teaching and learning, which included prosocial behaviours. However, in the following discussion I have endeavoured, as much as possible, to maintain a specific focus on evidence of teaching strategies that have been shown to positively impact children's prosocial behaviours.

Supporting Prosocial Behaviour through Environment and Relationships

Children in New Zealand spend a significant amount of time in ECE settings. New Zealand is ranked in third in the OECD countries for participation in ECE, with 96.2% of children attending an ECE setting for an average of 20.7 hours (Ministry of Education, 2014). Therefore, during their early years most NZ children are spending extended periods of time with peers and in the care of ECE teachers. A social ecology perspective of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) recognizes that "young children experience their world as an environment of relationships" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p. 1) through which they construct their understanding of the world they live in and their place in it. The contribution of a child's social environment is also evident in research which has explored children's prosocial behaviours across varying cultures. Research suggests that the values and cultures of societies shape the level of prosocial responding (Eisenberg et al., 2006) with cultures that privilege collective values showing greater prosocial behaviours than those that place value on individualism and independence (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Medina & Martinez, 2012; Rogoff, 2003). In addition, a social ecological perspective suggests that it is possible to influence children's prosocial behaviours through their surrounding environment and relationships; therefore, teachers, as the adults in ECE settings, play a significant role in influencing children's prosocial learning and development during these periods of sustained interaction with peers (Hestenes & Carroll, 2000; Kemple, 2004).

Multi-tiered approach

Many theorists and researchers have emphasized the importance of organizing teaching strategies to support children's prosocial learning and behaviour development according to a multi-tiered approach (e.g., Benedict, Horner, & Squires, 2007; Boyd & Felgate,

2015; Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001; Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2013; Kemple, 2004; Webster-Stratton, 1999). A multi-tiered approach recognizes that while it is useful to apply some teaching strategies universally across all children in the environment, other teaching strategies should be tailored as guided by the learning needs of specific children and/or as appropriate to the context. Accordingly, the following discussion about teaching strategies is organised according to a framework of two complementary and interwoven tiers: environmental strategies and naturalistic strategies.

Environmental strategies

At the environment level, consideration is given to how the wider environment supports prosocial behaviour development. Considerations of the environment include tangible elements such as the physical room arrangement, the availability of materials and resources, the schedules and routines, group sizes and teacher to child ratio. Additionally environment level considerations also refers to less tangible elements that contribute to the social-emotional climate or affective environment, creating a space in which children feel a sense of belonging, that is caring and where teacher behaviours are consistent, creating a sense of trust and emotional safety (Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Kemple, 2004; Webster-Stratton, 1999).

Evidence about the impact of social climate on children's prosocial development has been found in the research completed by Howes (2000). Howes described social-emotional climate as existing on a continuum from "positive, prosocial environments characterized by close adult-child relationships, intricate pretend play scenarios and little disruptive behaviour - to angry, hostile environments characterized by conflictual child-teacher relationships, angry disruptive children and little constructive peer play" (p. 192). Howes found that an experience of a positive social-emotional climate at age four was a predictor of children's social competence, including a measure of prosocial behaviour, four years later. Furthermore, Howes found "only nine percent of the variance ($r = .30$; [$R^2 = .09$]) in teacher child-teacher relationship quality was explained by problem behaviours, indicating that some teachers form positive relationships with troubled children" (p. 203) and supporting the notion that teachers can and should exert influence on the social-emotional environment.

Moreover, Howes and Ritchie (2002) drew on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) to argue that when "children and teachers are able to construct secure attachment relationships, children become more prosocial in their peer relationships" (p. 133). Their argument about the critical importance of the relationship between teachers and children is supported by findings from other researchers. Ladd et al. (1999) found that children's positive relationship with teachers mediated children's participation in the classroom and was positively associated with prosocial behaviour. Similarly, Pianta and Nimetz (1991) found an association between teacher – child relationships "characterized by warmth, trust and openness" and children's social skills.

Teaching strategies at the environment level can also include group experiences that support children's prosocial behaviours. These experiences take place with the whole group and tend to be teacher-directed such as mat times, circle times or gathering times. Group gathering times can contribute to a sense of community because the children come together at one time and share common experiences (Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Kemple, 2004). Furthermore, gathering times can provide an opportunity for the teacher to ensure all children have an opportunity to take part in group games, songs, literacy experiences and activities that can proactively support the development of prosocial behaviours (Landy, 2002; Webster-Stratton, 2011).

An example of the application of a group teaching strategy to support prosocial behaviour is offered in a case study example from one teacher's experience (Morris, Taylor, & Wilson, 2000). In this study, the teacher used carefully selected literature to provoke discussions about prosocial behaviours of compassion, cooperation, kindness and friendship. These researchers reported positive results in children's prosocial behaviours as a result of these discussions. A further use of a group teaching strategy can be seen in the research of Taaffe (2012) who drew on peer culture research (Corsaro, 2003) to tackle an issue of social conflict among three-year-old children in his preschool setting and encourage prosocial behaviour. Taaffe and his colleagues responded by using puppets as a group teaching strategy to role-play different ways to interact and fostered kinder social speech through a 'friendly or unfriendly' words game. These researchers found an increase in prosocial behaviour in their setting and a reduction in the problem behaviours associated with social conflict. The role play strategy implemented by Taaffe and his colleagues has similarities with scenario-based

learning (SBL) strategies used with older learners to promote insight in to the emotional states and perspectives of others (Pernice, 2003). Furthermore, SBL strategies have been used to support the connection between prior knowledge and the application of that knowledge in context (Errington, 2003).

Research by Vespo, Capece and Behforooz (2006) provided additional evidence of how group teaching and learning experiences can positively support children's prosocial behaviours. These researchers developed 71 lessons designed to teach targeted behaviours of "appropriate expression of feelings, empathy, communication skills, appropriate peer interaction, self-image and self-awareness" (p. 277). Each lesson was designed to be approximately 20 minutes in duration and it was intended that two lessons be taught each week. Assessment of children's behaviour before and after the program was completed by a trained independent assistant. To eliminate the effect of normal developmental changes, results were also gathered from two kindergarten classes who did not receive the program. The group lessons involved role play, followed by discussion. At the conclusion of the programme, children's behaviours were assessed across a range of six subscales including prosocial behaviours. The researchers found that prosocial behaviours showed a statistically significant level of improvement, greater than any of the other subscale measurements and beyond what was found in the cohort who did not receive the curriculum. This finding was evident despite the fact that the teachers only implemented on average 25 of the 71 lessons, based on time constraints as they found the lessons took longer than 20 minutes and the teacher's assessment that the content of specific lessons was too complex for the level of the children in their class.

Collectively, these results support the position that teaching strategies at the environmental level can result in positive impacts on children's prosocial behaviour, where these strategies focus on setting a positive social-emotional climate and communicating messages about desired prosocial behaviours to the whole group of children in the setting. However, as the results also indicate, teachers need to ensure that group teaching opportunities are setting-appropriate in terms of time, structure and content.

Naturalistic strategies

Naturalistic teaching strategies are those embedded in the natural context of children's experiences (Kemple, 2004; Snyder, Hemmeter, McLean, Sandall, & McLaughlin, 2013) They are teaching strategies that take place in the context of real situations, and can also be referred to as on-the-spot, in-the-moment, and/or teachable moments. However, naturalistic teaching strategies are still intentional, as they are used to support specific social goals (Brown et al., 2001; Snyder et al., 2015). In the New Zealand context, it is common for children to spend substantial sustained periods of time engaged in free play with their peers (May, 2009; White et al., 2008) providing frequent opportunities for teachers to utilize naturalistic teaching strategies. Moreover, naturalistic teaching strategies, reflect a social constructivist perspective of children's learning (Vygotsky, 1978), where the teachers' role is to appropriately scaffold children to function at a level higher than they would otherwise be able to achieve on their own.

Naturalistic teaching strategies, embedded in the context of children's interactions and play, take place on a continuum ranging from minimal teacher intervention, through to strategies offering greater teacher support such as encouragement, prompts and cues, to more direct teacher intervention in the form of suggestions or instructions (Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009; Kemple, 2004; Snyder et al., 2015). As part of their research on teachers' role to support successful interactions and play of children aged 3-5 years, Hollingsworth and Buysse (2009) found that teachers used strategies which the authors described as "along a continuum from general, passive strategies to more active and intentional strategies" (p. 301). Their description of general, passive strategies included naturalistic strategies at the passive end of the continuum such as observation such as "I would just keep an eye on them" (p. 297). At the other end of the continuum, teachers reported using more active strategies such as: facilitating play by joining in play and inviting other children to participate, suggesting how or what to play, discussing how to resolve conflicts; coaching children to use social skills; or interpreting for a special needs child. However, while this research by Hollingsworth and Buysse investigated some of the strategies teachers might use, they did not make any assessment of the effectiveness of those strategies.

Some assessment of effective naturalistic teaching strategies is offered by Chandler and Lubeck (1992) who retrospectively examined 51 studies focused on addressing

preschool children's social behaviours towards peers with the goal of identifying the naturalistic teaching strategies that had the greatest impact on the generalization and maintenance of positive social behaviours. From their synthesis, Chandler and Lubeck identified seven strategies for impacting children's social behaviours: positive reinforcement, instructions, prompting, rehearsal, modelling, feedback and discussion. These authors noted that it was not possible to identify one strategy as the most effective, as most strategies were used in combination. Similarly, Snyder, Rakap, Hemmeter, McLaughlin, Sandall and McLean (2015) examined the empirical literature with regard to naturalistic teaching strategy approaches for young children with disabilities in ECE settings. From the 43 studies that met their screening criteria, Snyder et al. found evidence that naturalistic teaching strategies were effective in supporting children's skill acquisition. Furthermore, there was evidence, although evident in a smaller number of the studies, that naturalistic teaching strategies effectively supported children's skill maintenance over time and the generalization of skills to different settings, materials and people.

A research study by Horn, Lieber, Li, Sandall, and Schwartz (2000) examined the feasibility for teachers in implementing naturalistic strategies to support children with special education needs to achieve identified educational goals. Using a multiple case study methodology the authors found that while all the teachers involved expressed a positive perspective about naturalistic strategies at the conclusion of the research, teachers demonstrated significant variability in their consistent implementation of these strategies which was reflected in children's progress. These authors concluded that the effectiveness of naturalistic teaching strategies could be impacted by a teacher's ability and skill for consistent implementation.

The research above suggests that a combination of varied naturalistic teaching strategies can be effective in supporting acquisition, maintenance and generalization of prosocial behaviours, but that the effectiveness of these strategies relies on teachers' skills and ability to implement them consistently. Research that focuses on specific naturalistic teaching strategies are briefly reviewed and discussed below. These research studies were selected because they represent the types of strategies and information about naturalistic teaching strategies considered by the teaching team in the present study.

Furthermore, the participants in these selected studies are typically developing young children, which is representative of the children in the present research setting.

Research has provided support for naturalistic teaching strategies focusing on the use of verbal prompts to encourage prosocial behaviour and empathy. Spivak and Farran (2012) worked with a sample size of 124 first grade classrooms across 39 schools, comprised of 2,098 children in total. The teachers were recorded using several types of verbal prompts to encourage children's prosocial behaviour. Spivak and Farran found a moderate correlation between "observed teacher encouragement of prosocial and empathic behaviour and children's classroom prosocial behaviour" (p. 631). Additionally, they observed and assigned ratings to "teachers' warmth" and their behaviour management strategies, but found no correlation between these measures and children's prosocial behaviours. The researchers concluded that teachers need to use active verbal prompts to guide children to prosocial behaviour. This finding is consistent with the results of earlier work by Ladd, Lange and Stremmel (1983) that found that children are more likely to help peers when an adult encourages them to do so with a specific reference to how that assistance will make the peer feel.

While the work of Spivak and Farran suggests verbal prompts appealing to empathic feelings can promote children's prosocial behaviour, Bryan, Master and Walton (2014) hypothesized that verbal prompts appealing to children's developing self-perception could also be effective in promoting prosocial behaviours. Bryan et al. tested this hypothesis with a sample of 147 children aged three to six years. Children were placed in to one of three groups. Group one received a priming prompt in the noun condition e.g. 'you could be a helper', group two received the prompt in the verb condition e.g. 'you could help' and group three received no prompt at all. The findings revealed that the children in group one who received a prompt in the noun condition subsequently acted to help an adult with tidying significantly more often than children in the other two groups. Bryan et al. argue that this is due to children wanting to take on the valuable identity of being or becoming 'a helper' and suggest that at this young age children are thinking about their own self-identity and what they want it to be.

However, moving beyond verbal prompts to the use of the use of material rewards to support children's prosocial behaviour has been shown to less successful. A research study in Germany examined the use of material rewards versus verbal praise to promote

toddlers' prosocial behaviour (Warneken & Tomasello, 2008). In phase one of their research, the participant children, aged 19 - 20 months, were either given a material reward, verbal praise or no response following their voluntary helping behaviour. The 36 children who displayed prosocial helping behaviour participated in the second phase, where they were again offered the opportunity to engage in voluntary helping behaviour. The researchers found that the children who were offered a material reward in phase one, were less likely to help in phase two, while children who experienced the praise and no response conditions showed no change in their helping behaviour. The material reward appeared to diminish children's helping behaviour while verbal praise made no impact. Warneken and Tomasello suggest that this result could be due to young children's development of intrinsic motivation and self-perceptions which were interrupted by the application of an external reward. While only a limited sample size, the results of this research suggest that naturalistic teaching strategies that offer children material rewards for prosocial behaviour are not as effective and may even have a detrimental impact.

Collectively, the studies discussed provide evidence for the contention that naturalistic strategies can be effective in supporting children's prosocial behaviour development. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that verbal prompts and positive reinforcement such as praise, could be the most effective naturalistic teaching strategy for guiding children to make prosocial behaviour choices, while external rewards may have a detrimental effect. However, it is acknowledged that each teaching team will need to evaluate the appropriateness of the strategy for their specific context.

Professional Learning and Development

In order to achieve the purpose of this research study, which is to explore effective teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours, the teaching participants will need to make some changes in their teaching strategies. Changes to practice are typically supported through participation in professional learning and development (PLD), however, the particular forms of PLD that effectively generate sustained change is a source of ongoing debate (Borko, 2004). New Zealand teachers are fortunate to have a substantial and comprehensive synthesis of local and international research studies identifying characteristics of effective PLD that lead to pedagogical changes that

in turn enhance learning outcomes for students (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Timperley, et al., 2007).

Mitchell and Cubey's work (2003) found that PLD can be effective in achieving shifts and changes in teachers' thinking and practice, when several key conditions are incorporated in the PLD process. The first condition relates to the collection and use of evidence. Mitchell and Cubey identified that PLD is most effective when evidence is gathered directly from the participants' setting and generated from a variety of sources. Secondly, in relation to data analysis, PLD is most effective when critical analysis, discussion and exposure to a range of viewpoints takes place. The third condition identified as a hallmark of effective PLD is the introduction of alternative and evidence-based information and practices to challenge and extend participants' current thinking. The fourth condition relates to action. PLD is most effective in achieving change when "planning and action followed analysis, and this cycle was continued in an ongoing way" (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003, p. x).

Furthermore, the synthesis of research undertaken by Timperley et al (2007) found that the most successful PLD engaged from the outset with teachers existing theories of practice. Theory of practice is defined by these authors as "personal theories that consist of personal beliefs and values; related knowledge, skills and practices; and desired outcomes" (p. 197). By supporting teachers to subject their existing theories of practice to critical scrutiny, through individual and collaborative reflection, and in the light of new information, they were able to challenge their practices that had become routine, and develop new ones.

Timperley, Parr and Bertanees (2009) applied the findings from the Teacher professional learning and development synthesis completed by Timperley et al. (2007) in a later study conducted in 218 New Zealand primary schools with 2440 teachers. With the objective of addressing persistent underachievement in literacy, the project included data collection of both students' achievement and the teaching participants' existing practices. Subsequently, these data were scrutinised in a collaborative and reflective process which included teachers discussing their personal theories of practice. As a result of the critical reflection process, these teachers were able to identify both their students' learning needs and their own professional learning needs required to improve their practice so as to meet their students' learning needs. By using an inquiry

cycle that engaged teachers' existing theories of practice and then subjected these theories to scrutiny in the light of evidence, student achievement in literacy was raised.

Some researchers (e.g., Campbell & Groundswater-Smith, 2010; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Timperley et al., 2007; Wells, 2002) suggest that action research methodology can provide a means of delivering PLD that captures many of the characteristics discussed above. Campbell and Groundswater-Smith (2010) argue that action research goes beyond the knowledge assimilation traditionally offered by PLD. These authors argue that action research can be a transformative process that "helps to contextualize professional knowledge and learning" (p. 20). Accordingly, action research methodology was selected for the present study. While further discussion of CAR methodology is discussed in the methodology chapter, selected studies are discussed below to illustrate the effectiveness of CAR as an inquiry tool to facilitate change in teaching beliefs and practice.

Action Research as an Effective Tool for Professional Learning and Development

Some researchers have demonstrated that action research can be an effective PLD tool as its processes support teachers to examine and challenge their existing beliefs and practices, which can lead to sustained change. Fisher and Wood (2012) undertook a project with ECE practitioners in the UK aiming to "track development of teachers' thinking and practice as they engage in practitioner-led research" (p. 114). These authors concluded that sustained change occurred when the practitioners experienced dissonance between their espoused beliefs and their actual practices through CAR's processes of systematic observation, reflection and dialogue in real-world contexts.

An Irish action research project (Bleach, 2013) provides further support for the contention that action research can be effective in changing teacher beliefs leading to change in teaching practice. In an Irish context, ECE has a 'low-skill status' so most of the practitioners in the research study did not hold a teaching qualification. In the action research project across 14 sites, Bleach reported that practitioners' thinking was moved from a 'task-orientated' approach to one that was 'learning-orientated'. Bleach concluded that these changed teacher beliefs and practices came about as a result of the action research project.

Neimark (2012) used an action research methodology to investigate young children's cooperative play in a North American preschool. Initially, Neimark wanted to investigate how teachers could support children to enter peer group play. However, as he collected data and began to engage with other research, his thinking and perspectives on children's peer culture changed. He was able to recognise the way in which children were negotiating and maintaining a peer culture through resisting traditional adult rules and creating a shared sense of "something goofy" (p. 58). Accordingly, Neimark made changes to his teaching practice in line with these new insights. He concluded that the action research process had enabled him to change his existing personal theory of practice in light of new information and insights. A further example is provided by Taaffe (2012) who undertook a CAR project with colleagues in response to challenging social conflict taking place among children in his setting. He states that "this study had the main effect of changing my thinking about peer interactions of all kinds, which both improved my thinking and my practice" (p. 33).

These research examples illustrate that the action research process has the potential to change teachers' thinking resulting in changes to teaching practice. The synthesis of effective PLD completed by Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) concluded that:

> Professional learning that seeks to change practice needs to help teachers understand their own underpinning theories of action and examine what is tacit and routine so that these theories and practices can be evaluated and decisions made about what should be changed (pp. 198-199).

As the selected studies show, the systematic, iterative and collaborative process of action research can support change at the level of teachers' thinking which in turn generates change in teaching practice.

Summary

This chapter began by offering a definition of prosocial behaviour used for the present study and the context for the study was set by presenting literature establishing the significant associations between prosocial behaviour and positive outcomes for children. Existing research and literature was examined to highlight current teaching strategies that have been found to be effective in supporting children's prosocial behaviour development. Furthermore, as the purpose of the present study is to work with a small team of teachers to change teaching strategies in order to support children's

prosocial behaviours, characteristics of PLD that have been found to be effective in supporting change in teachers' teaching practices have been presented. Finally, literature and selected studies suggesting that action research can be an effective method of PLD have been discussed.

The following chapter presents the research question investigated in this study, outlines the action research methodology and describes the data generation methods. In addition, the process for data analysis is presented and relevant ethical issues are discussed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the collaborative action research (CAR) methodology adopted to explore how the teacher participants could change their teaching practice to support children's prosocial behaviours. A description of the research context is provided before stating the research question and describing the theoretical paradigms of social constructionism and pragmatism that underpin the research approach. A brief history and overview of the processes and characteristics of action research is presented. An explanation of the data generation methods employed during the research process follows, including an overview of how these were incorporated throughout the stages of the action research cycle. The process for data analysis is presented and the chapter concludes with a consideration of relevant ethical issues.

Research Context

Description of the kindergarten

Mountain Kindergarten (pseudonym applied) is a private ECE setting located in an urban area of a New Zealand city. It caters for up to 27 children to attend each day between the hours of 8.30am and 3.30pm. Children attend in two distinct groups organised by age. Children, primarily aged four, attend on Monday, Wednesday and Friday (Group One), and children primarily aged three, attend on Tuesday and Thursday (Group Two). As detailed further below, the changes to teaching strategies were only implemented with the older children in Group One. *Mountain Kindergarten* is located in a socioeconomically advantaged community, as evidenced by the decile ratings of the neighbouring primary schools which range from 8 to 10 (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Teaching staff

At the time of the research project *Mountain Kindergarten* employed five teachers, over four full-time teaching roles. The Head Teacher and two other teachers held full-time teaching positions. The remaining two teachers shared the fourth teaching position as a job share arrangement. As one of the part-time teachers, I took part in the CAR project in the role of participant researcher. The three full-time teachers accepted the invitation

to participate in the research while the remaining part-time teacher, who worked in the capacity of a regular reliever with no responsibilities for planning or documentation of children's learning, declined to participate. All the participants in the research project were qualified and registered ECE teachers, with a range of teaching experience from 5 to 10 years.

Research Question

The selection of the research focus was developed initially in consultation between the Head Teacher and myself. I expressed an interest in undertaking research in the area of children's social and emotional learning, and accordingly we discussed possible areas of focus within this broad domain of learning. Drawing on feedback from a recent parent survey, we identified our current strengths and challenges as a teaching team. The parent survey indicated that our practice was already strong in supporting children's emotional development, so we turned our attention to areas of social competence. In my role as participant researcher, I did some initial reading of literature into the importance of prosocial behaviours for children's positive life outcomes and shared what I had learned with the teaching team. Following this discussion, we agreed that prosocial behaviour was an area worthy of our shared attention and where we could strengthen our knowledge and our practice.

Consequently, we co-constructed the following research question:

> *How can we change our teaching practices to better support children's development of prosocial behaviours?*

This research question reflected our selection of an area of "thematic concern" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 9) and our intention to make improvements to our practice. We deliberately kept our question broad to allow for flexibility as we deepened our understanding of children's prosocial behaviours as a team.

Theoretical Paradigm

This CAR project used a qualitative approach. Within the qualitative research tradition there is an array of theoretical paradigms which inform research design, some of which exist in tension with each other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is essential to make explicit the theoretical paradigm that informs the research design and methodology. My research project is framed within two theoretical paradigms - social constructionism and

pragmatism. The first of these paradigms, social constructionism, recognises that each individual constructs his or her own reality through their social interactions, relationships and experiences (Creswell, 2014b; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014). Sitting alongside this social constructivist lens is pragmatism, which also recognises the pluralistic and contextual nature of reality but focuses on applications and solutions to problems (Creswell, 2014b). In this paradigm, attention centres on fully understanding the research problem before moving on to solutions and applying these solutions, with the freedom to use the method best suited to this purpose.

These two theoretical paradigms represent the philosophical elements of my research, which in turn informs the methodology (Leavy, 2014). Accordingly, an action research methodology has been chosen because action research is a collaborative endeavour where the participants and researcher work together to explore the research meaning for them in relation to their specific context, consistent with a social constructivist view. Furthermore, as CAR focuses participants to search for improvement, and enact a change, it is consistent with the problem-solving approach of pragmatism.

Action Research Methodology

Many definitions of action research have been offered by researchers and authors, albeit with common features. For the purposes of this project, the following definition, offered by Reason and Bradbury (2001) was used:

> Action research seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 1).

This definition reflects the essential qualities of action research that were evident in this project: the focus on improvement, the drawing together of theory and practice, the integration of action and reflection, the collaboration of a teaching team, the application of the research process to practical problems, and the desire to generate knowledge with implications beyond the teaching team to the wider ECE community.

The origins of action research are generally attributed to Kurt Lewin in the 1940's (Johnson & Christensen, 2014) who used it in a range of social contexts in post World War II. The use of this methodology in education was advanced in the 1970's by Stenhouse, who proposed that the work of teachers should be researched by teachers

themselves, although working alongside a research professional who would retain control of the research focus. Later in the 1970's, Elliot challenged Stenhouse's view that an external researcher should maintain control of the research focus. Elliot maintained that the research should be driven by the teacher's concerns, rather than those of an external researcher (Elliot, 1978 as cited in McAteer, 2013). Elliot's view recognized the essential role of the teacher as 'insider' and active participant in the research process and supported the stance that lies at the heart of the action research methodology - that theory and action are inextricably linked.

The action research process typically involves the participants in the research group working through four fundamental steps, described by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, p. 10) as:

1. develop a *plan* of critically informed action to improve what is already happening,
2. *act* to implement the plan,
3. *observe* the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs, and
4. *reflect* on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of cycles.

Participants move through these four steps systematically, rigorously and collaboratively in order to improve practice and generate new knowledge. Kemmis and McTaggart argue that action research should always be a collaborative process, benefitting from the critical dynamic of the group. As a collaborative endeavour, each participant can benefit from the combined experiences, perspectives, interpretations and insight that every participant brings to the social situation under investigation (Timperley, et al., 2009). However, the centrality of collaboration in action research is not universally accepted as some authors suggest there are forms of action research that can be undertaken as an individual endeavour (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Mills, 2014). As teachers in ECE settings in New Zealand work in teams, sharing teaching responsibility for all children in the setting, this research project followed a collaborative action research (CAR) design.

In the next section, four characteristics of action research that further support the selection of a collaborative action research methodology for this research project, are described in greater depth.

Characteristics of collaborative action research

Authentic and democratic

Action research offers a methodology that is authentic because it is concerned with exploring and solving problems that arise from real situations. As the research questions and solutions are generated by the insider participants, they represent meaningful, relevant and genuine issues of concern for them. The locus of control for both the research question and the generation of solutions rests with the insider participants, in contrast to traditional research models where this control resides with an external researcher with the participants cast in the role of research subjects. Accordingly, action research is often described as a democratic or emancipatory process of inquiry - completed "*by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3).

Integration of theory and practice

Action research acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice. Teaching is a complex process of using theory to guide action (Saunders, 2004). The way each teacher goes about their teaching practice is based on their individual theories, beliefs and values (Timperley, et al., 2007). The issue, therefore, is not whether teachers use theory to guide action but the quality and validity of that theory; whether it has been scrutinised and critically examined (Timperley, et al., 2007). The process of action research involves teachers working through a systematic process of subjecting their practice and theories to critical scrutiny and consideration in the light of evidence. Through the mechanism of action research methodology teachers learn through making meaning from their own experiences and finding their own "path to understanding" (Spahn, 2012, p. 41).

Iterative process

The iterative nature of action research makes it possible for participants to incrementally improve their current practice through a series of action research cycles. Taking incremental steps allows time to assess the outcomes of each intervention and the flexibility to respond and adapt accordingly, reflecting the reality of research in real social situations where it is difficult to anticipate and control all the possible outcomes of an intervention (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Therefore, action research can result in teachers becoming more deliberate, mindful and intentional in their teaching practice

as they pause to examine the effects of changes in practice at each incremental stage (Stremmel, 2012).

Collaborative process

An action research methodology offers the participants in this research project an opportunity to work collaboratively on a project that is authentically connected to concerns relevant for all the group members. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) strongly advocate for the critical role of collaboration in action research, stating that "*action research is not individualistic* [italics original]. To lapse into individualism is to destroy the critical dynamic of the group" (p. 15). These authors argue that for action research to effect meaningful sustained change, that it has to take place at both the level of the individual and at the level of the group. Action research cannot, therefore, be an individual endeavour. Moreover, Wells and Claxton (2002) argue that collaboration as part of action research offers the "voicing of alternative ideas, experiences and opinions" (p. 7) thereby enhancing the opportunity for individual participants to reach "genuine understanding" (p.7).

These four characteristics of CAR make it a meaningful methodology for this study. Firstly, CAR offers an authentic and democratic process where control of the research process rests with all the teacher participants. Secondly, CAR offers the opportunity to integrate teachers' theories and practice as teachers constantly use theory to guide their actions. Thirdly, CAR is iterative by nature, supporting small and incremental changes in practice and the opportunity to pause for reflection of these changes. Finally, the fourth characteristic of collaboration supports meaningful sustained change at both a group and individual level.

The next section provides an overview of the research process, briefly outlining the steps taken at each stage of the action research cycle. The description refers to data generation methods that were used, including interviews, journals, written reflections and researcher notes. These data generation methods will be further described in the subsequent section.

Action Research Cycle

Starting with our research question, we followed a simple five step action research cycle to guide our research process, as depicted below:
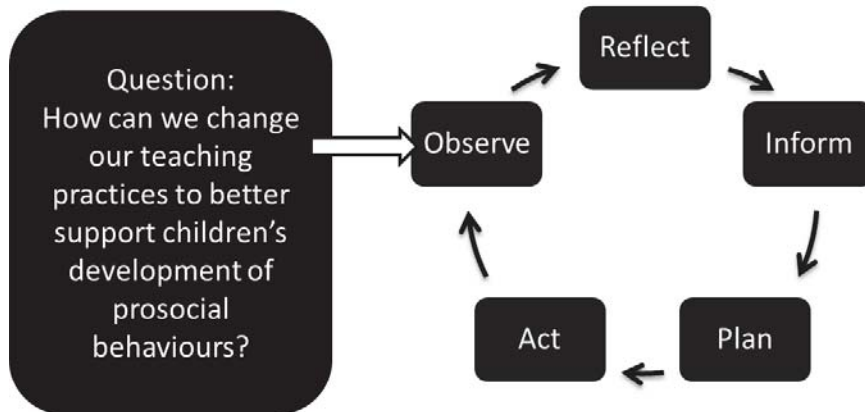
Figure 1: Depiction of our collaborative action research cycle

Observation

My three teaching colleagues and I began by collecting data about our current teaching strategies to support children's prosocial behaviour development and the effectiveness of these strategies. For this purpose, each teacher completed an individual interview with me (the participant researcher). In addition, data were collected about teaching practice in the form of a personal journal over a two week period.

Reflection

We reflected individually and collectively on our current teaching practice and guiding theory, values and beliefs. Each teacher reflected individually in the form of two written reflections informed by data collected in their personal research journal. In addition, to aid our collective reflection, I collated and summarised data from the individual interviews organised around the following headings:

- Values

- Guiding principles

- Desirable behaviours

- Current teaching strategies

- Challenges

Each teacher, including myself, shared their personal reflections with the group and I shared the collated interview data. Collectively, this shared information informed teachers' reflective group discussions about current teaching practices and the values

and principles supporting these strategies. Subsequently, attention and discussion turned to focus on situations regarded as challenges where teachers had identified that their current teaching strategies were problematic and/or appeared to be ineffective.

Information

Guided by the issues identified as challenges, I continued to review literature and introduced the research participants to an article about one teaching team's response to social conflict among 3 year old children by Christopher Taaffe (2012), which was informed by work around children's friendships by William Corsaro (2003). Each teacher read this literature and shared their response with the group, facilitating further discussion and collective reflection. I was an active participant in this group reflection.

Plan

Inspired by the literature, the teachers decided to develop a group-wide teaching strategy intended to provoke children's thinking about prosocial behaviours and to encourage group discussions with them. It was decided that this strategy would be implemented with the older children in Group One who attend three times a week. Puppets were selected as the mechanism to provide the necessary provocation for group discussion. Puppetry was selected as it was considered a means to provide freedom to generate scripts reflecting real scenarios observed in the kindergarten as well as to enable an interactive experience where children could contribute their ideas and guide the puppets' behaviours. We called these sessions 'hui', reflecting the Māori process of coming together as a group to discuss issues that concern everyone, in a setting where everyone has the opportunity to contribute their opinion (Salmond, 2004). Furthermore, this served to differentiate the purpose of these sessions from the daily mat times already in existence. As the teachers were not confident in the use of puppetry, considerable time and attention was given to planning how these puppet scenarios might play out. A script to guide the first puppet hui was prepared and practiced (see Appendix A).

Action

The first puppet hui took place early in the year introducing two puppets – 'pig' and 'frog' – who were preparing to start kindergarten for the first time and needed to know more about this thing called 'sharing' that they knew they had to do at kindergarten. The children were asked to help pig and frog by telling them how to share.

Subsequently, four more huifollowed over the next six weeks featuring pig and frog and sometimes other animal puppets. In each hui, the puppets were engaged in scenarios involving social problems that teachers had created based on real scenarios observed at the kindergarten. On each occasion, the children were asked to help the puppets to solve the social problem. Each hui had an initial script, presenting a social problem but without a predetermined solution as this was dependent on the children's contributions. The teachers had a shared goal to ensure each social problem was resolved using prosocial behaviours, such as acting fairly, being inclusive and ensuring a positive resolution for all parties.

Each hui was video recorded, focusing on the reactions, participation and contributions of the children. At the conclusion of each hui, we collectively reflected on its implementation, including reviewing the digital recording. This reflection, along with continued observations of children's play and social interactions, were used to plan the script for the next hui. The video recordings were not used as data for the research study.

Observe and Reflect again

During the implementation period we wrote notes in our 'teacher journals' (see below for further detail) about the process of integrating the solutions generated in the puppet hui huihui into our daily naturalistic 'in-the-moment' teaching strategies. We also included other relevant observations of the impact of using these strategies on children's prosocial behaviours. Discussion continued at team meetings reflecting on these observations, enabling teachers to share their learning and insights. At the conclusion of each hui, further data were captured through individual semi-structured interviews about each individual teacher's professional learning and the development of their teaching strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours.

Exit strategy

The final individual interviews marked the conclusion of the research on site. As I was not physically exiting the research site, it was considered important to mark the end of the research process. To this end, each participant received a thank you letter and a small gift of appreciation to acknowledge their invaluable contribution to this research.

Data Generation Methods

The selection of data generation methods is informed by two significant considerations. Firstly the methods of data generation need to be aligned with the theoretical paradigms underpinning the research project and consistent with the research methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). Furthermore, they need to be fit for purpose which means considering the effectiveness of these methods as the means of gathering the data necessary to answer the research question (Bold, 2012). Accordingly, qualitative methods of data generation have been selected for this project as the qualitative methods used are aligned with the theoretical paradigm and will address our research question. Methods selected include semi-structured interviews, teacher journals, researcher notes, written reflections and audio recorded team meetings.

Semi-structured interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) liken a semi-structured interview to the metaphor of a traveller seeking to understand the interviewee's "story of their lived world" (p. 58). As a research instrument, the semi-structured interview can provide rich, high quality data in situations where personalised and contextual information is required (Drever, 1995), allowing the researcher to gain an understanding and insight in to the interviewees thinking. In addition, taking a semi-structured approach to the interview allows for the researcher to maintain the interview focus while still ensuring there is flexibility to explore and clarify any points raised (Bold, 2012).

At the beginning and at the conclusion of the research process, I completed individual interviews with each participant. This provided an insight into the thinking and professional learning of each participant and any subsequent improvements in their practice making it possible to evaluate progress towards our research question (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Broad questions were deliberately designed to ensure the participants could lead the discussion in the direction that was most relevant for them and in doing so, express what they considered to be most significant. The participants were given these questions beforehand to support recall of specific incidents and to enable them to feel prepared and empowered in the interview process. However, I also explained that as these interviews were to be semi-structured, the questions were a starting point only for our discussion. The interviews were completed individually to ensure each participant had the chance to express what was important to them without being influenced by the thinking of others. There are differences in power within this

group, which could have led to some participants feeling pressured to agree with others rather than to share their personal views. I also wanted to ensure each participant had the opportunity to freely ask questions or raise concerns without being concerned about the reactions of other teachers.

Thirty minutes was allocated for each interview and took place in the kindergarten office. At the beginning of each interview, I checked that participants were comfortable with the interview being recorded and while this initially created some awkwardness, by focusing on the first question we were able to move on. The interviews were completed on my non-work days to minimise the disruption for both the participants and the kindergarten children. The first three interviews ranged from 11 minutes to 32 minutes, while the second set of three interviews ranged from 14 minutes to 39 minutes.

Teacher journals

Journals, also referred to as logs or diaries, can provide a timeline and a means of charting research progress. Perhaps more significantly, as they ideally involve timely documenting of events, journal entries can capture the 'thick' descriptions that reveal the complexity of situations and the accompanying thinking and emotions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Journals can provide a means of capturing the 'messiness' of action research; the effects of action, both intended and unintended, and the unforeseen constraints that can limit action, that occur in real situations (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Bold (2012) suggests journals can become a place for sustained reflection providing a space for "deep exploration of emerging issues" (p. 83). As they provide a mechanism to look back and see what you though and felt at an earlier time, journal entries can provide an opportunity to interrogate your own thinking, encourage metacognition and become aware of shifts in thinking and practice (McAteer, 2013). However, using journals in the way described above, can make journals deeply personal documents and as such they are often used to provide support for other data generation methods such as recorded team discussions or interviews.

In this research project, journals were used by the participants in two phases of the research. Firstly, we agreed to use journal entries in the observation stage of the research cycle. During this phase we used the journal as a tool to focus our attention on current teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviour and to identify situations proving problematic and/or emerging issues that we wanted to explore

further. Secondly, we returned to the use of journals during the implementation phase when we wanted to observe and personally document how we were implementing new practices. Journals were purchased for the purpose and given to each participant. An explanation was also given that these journals were personal documents, intended entirely for their own records with no obligation to share verbatim this unedited document with the group. Instead journal entries could be used as memory prompts to support our ongoing discussions and to provide the basis for completion of the critical incident templates as discussed below.

Researcher journal

A researcher journal can serve several important functions. It can support the researcher to maintain reflexivity throughout the research process. As such, the research journal can promote awareness of how personal values, beliefs and thinking can interact with the privileged position of the researcher and influence the research situation (Finlay & Gough, 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Furthermore, the research journal can provide a mechanism for the researcher to reflect on the research process and their learning during the process, distinct from the subject content of the study (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Lyngsnes, 2016). The research journal can also serve the practical function of being a place for the researcher to document additional relevant data that would not be captured in any other way such as impromptu conversations with participants.

In addition to the purpose of the teacher journal entries described above, I kept a research journal throughout the research process. My researcher journal provided a tool for recording information about the research process including what occurred at different phases, important teacher conversations, and observations of team experiences. The journal also supported my own "sustained self-reflection" (Bold, 2012, p. 81) about the research topic, the research process and my dual role as a participant and a researcher. I used this journal to draw together different strands of my thinking whether prompted by an incident at work, a challenge in the research process or an insight gained through reading literature. The journal became a place to document and interrogate thoughts, ideas and experiences generated through the research process, supporting me to deepen and enrich my learning both about the research process and the research subject.

Written reflections

Reflection is central to action research because it is the process that draws together theory and practice. During the CAR process reflection occurred at an individual level in written form (teachers' journals) and collaboratively as a group during our project team meetings (discussed in the next section).

Through the narrative process of reflective writing, the tacit knowledge held by practitioners can become evident (Schon, 1983). Additionally, written reflection can provide a process to identify and deconstruct the sometimes unconscious beliefs, theories, assumptions and values that guide practice actions and decisions. Once the thinking underpinning practice decisions are made explicit, it is possible to scrutinise, interrogate and challenge them in light of current evidence (Bold, 2012; Moon, 2004; Wells, 2001). Wells (2001) suggests that in the process of writing the "writer engages with …dialogue with himself" (p. 186) which facilitates a deeper and clearer understanding.

As previously described, the teacher journals were personal documents and therefore it was each participant's individual decision whether or not they used this format for sustained reflection. However, in accordance with the essential place of reflection as part of the action research and learning process, it was considered essential that each participant did undertake some critical reflection about their own teaching practice that they were able to share with the group. For this purpose, we used a critical incident reflections based on a template suggested by McAteer (2013) (see pre-implementation template Appendix B). This reflection template is designed to take a recent incident that the participants defined as critical, and subject it to sustained scrutiny in retrospect.

Each participant completed two critical incident reflections during the initial phase of the research, and later shared one of these incidents with the group during a team meeting. Additionally, in the implementation and evaluation phase each participant completed one further post-implementation critical incident reflection (see Appendix C) which again was subsequently shared and discussed with the group. The hard copy of these documents was also submitted as part of the research project data for further analysis.

Team meetings

Collaborative reflection took place during project team meetings in the form of dialogue. Wells (2001) argues that when we listen to others, we are seeking to interpret and understand what they are saying, enabling us to respond with our own contribution that extends, questions or qualifies what they have said. He suggests that through this dialogic process of seeking to understand and making ourselves understood, we are able to reach a "fuller and clearer understanding for ourselves" (p.186).

Throughout the research process, we held eight project team meetings focused on our evolving understanding and practice for prosocial behaviours. Our collaborative reflections during these meetings were audio-recorded with each participant's permission and transcribed to create written data for analysis. Unfortunately, there were two occasions where portions of this recorded data were lost before transcriptions were complete. In these instances additional notes were made to retain the overall intent of these discussions in the absence of the exact dialogue.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves synthesising large volumes of data to facilitate interpretation and provide meaningful responses to the research question. Thematic coding of data entails the application of codes or labels to chunks of data as a means of clustering data relating to the same idea or category. Miles, Hubermann and Saldaña (2014) state that "coding is analysis" (p. 72). These qualitative researchers maintain that while coding serves the purpose of condensing data, it is also a "method of discovery" (p. 73) as the creation of codes necessitates the detailed reading and reflection necessary to capture and interpret meaning as conveyed in the data. Coding is often identified as deductive or inductive. Deductive codes (elsewhere called a priori or open coding) are used where the researcher predetermines the codes they want to identify in the data as determined by the requirements of the research question, researcher's hypothesis or protocols. An inductive coding approach (elsewhere called selective coding), in contrast, involves the researcher creating codes as suggested by the data with no predetermined expectations (Miles et al., 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013).

The qualitative data in the present study were analysed to identify categories, themes, patterns and relationships. As the initial data informed subsequent phases of the research, data analysis was interwoven and ongoing with data collection from the

outset. The audio records of interviews and team meetings were prepared for analysis by transcribing audio to text. Where time permitted, I completed this transcription process myself to allow for immersion in the details of the data and accurate recording of contextual information. However, due to time constraints the services of a transcription service were used in some instances.

Data sources from the project included transcriptions of the interviews, teachers' written reflections, transcriptions of the team meetings, my personal researcher notes and journal. Each data record was read (or re-read in the case of my notes and journal) initially in its entirety to get a general sense of the data as a whole (Creswell, 2014a).

Subsequently, thematic coding of the data was undertaken using a combination of deductive and inductive coding. A first coding cycle identified categories using a descriptive coding approach and provided an inventory of topics (Miles, et al., 2014), and was followed by a second coding cycle that identified themes, patterns and constructs within the categories generated in the first cycle, allowing for further analysis and interpretation (see Appendix D). Furthermore, as much as possible in vivo coding, where codes reflect the words or short phrases used by the participants (Miles, et al., 2014), was applied to prioritise and honour the participant's voice and to reflect the language relevant to the context. The following table provides details of the data sources for ease of identification.

Table 1: Data source codes

Method	Example code	Description
Interview	RoseINT:05.2016	Teacher pseudonym/data type/month.year
Team Meeting	PoppyMTG:12.2015	Teacher pseudonym/data type/month.year
Reflection	LilyREF:11.2015	Teacher pseudonym/data type/month.year

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are necessary to protect participants and ensure they are not put at risk of harm through their participation in the research project. CAR demands researchers pay extra attention to ethical considerations as it inherently involves a goal of influencing participants' thinking and subsequent practice (McNiff & Whitehead,

2010). As these action researchers further suggest, influence, if done with deception or manipulation, harms participants as it robs them of the chance to make wise choices about their own learning. Accordingly, ethical considerations were considered carefully in discussion with my research supervisors and were incorporated throughout the research design.

This research project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Southern B, application 15/49) as adhering to the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (2015).

Avoidance of conflict of role/interest

In preparing for this research project, particular consideration was given to the potential ethical issue of a conflict of interest as the project involved completing research in my own work setting and inviting my teaching colleagues to join me as co-participants in the research project. Two potential issues arise from this situation. Firstly, it could be argued that my activities as a researcher could conflict with my professional responsibilities as a teacher in this setting. This risk was minimised by ensuring that the research focus and research question were consistent with the philosophy and strategic direction of the kindergarten setting. In addition, particular care was paid to the allocation of time to the research activities to ensure these activities did not disrupt the daily operations of the kindergarten.

A second potential conflict of interest arose from inviting my work colleagues to join the research project as co-participants as this could create a situation where they felt pressured or obligated to participate. This risk was minimised in several ways. Full written documentation was provided to each potential participant detailing relevant information about the project and what participation was likely to involve. This documentation also stressed the voluntary nature of participation and the ability to freely withdraw from participation at any point (see Appendix E). Additionally, the documentation and invitation to participate was made to each participant privately by the head teacher. Subsequently, three of my teaching colleagues accepted the invitation to be involved in the research project, while a fourth teacher declined. Furthermore, throughout the research process participants were reminded that their continued participation was voluntary and they could choose to withdraw at any time.

Privacy and confidentiality

Care was also taken throughout the research process to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and the wider kindergarten community including the children and their families. The protection of pseudonyms was applied in all written documentation where participants and/or children were referred to by name. Electronic data was stored on password protected devices and hardcopy data was kept in locked filing cabinets. When audio files were transcribed by an external transcriber, confidentially agreements were signed and the participants were given the opportunity to read and amend if necessary the written records of these transcriptions.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research context, theoretical paradigms and research methodology. A brief outline of the research progress at each stage of the collaborative action research cycle was described. The data generation methods and analysis process utilized during the research process have also been presented. Finally, ethical considerations were explored. The following chapter presents key findings in relation to the two research questions.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

This project used a collaborative action research (CAR) methodology to explore the following research question:

- "How can we change our teaching practices to better support children's prosocial behaviour development?"

The teaching team selected the area of prosocial behaviour because of the importance of children developing these skills during the preschool years and to support frequent and positive interactions with peers in the kindergarten environment. Furthermore, we felt that our current teaching practices were not always effective in supporting children to act in prosocial ways during their peer interactions and we wanted to explore ways we could improve.

The process of coding and analysing the data collated throughout the research project, suggested a further refinement of the initial research question. It became apparent that some data revealed findings about the actual changes teachers made in their practice and some data revealed how the collaborative action research process (CAR) supported these changes. Consequently, the initial question has been refined to two sub-questions:

1. In what ways did the teaching team change teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours?

2. How did the CAR process support the adoption of changed teaching practices?

The findings in this chapter are reported against these two questions.

In relation to question one, key findings suggest that practices changed in two significant ways:

1) A scenario-based learning strategy was implemented using puppets. The findings suggest the teaching team found this strategy to be an effective means of communicating expectations for prosocial behaviour, ensuring children's

engagement, empowering children and supporting participation through positioning them as the experts and creating an opportunity for children to learn from more experienced peers.

2) Children's thinking about prosocial behaviours was prompted in the natural context of play, encouraging them to revisit the learning that took place during the scenario-based learning experience. The teaching team found this strategy was an effective means to support children to apply their learning about prosocial behaviours in the context of their play and interactions.

Following on from these changed practices, particular features of these strategies were shown to support the teachers' objectives to improve their teaching practices to support prosocial behaviour. Furthermore, the teachers were excited to talk about the differences they were observing in children's behaviour as a result of their intervention. These findings are integrated within each practice change.

In response to question two, findings suggest that each of the five stages of the CAR process supported the adoption of improved teaching practices. Therefore, the findings are reported and discussed according to each stage of the research cycle as follows:

Stage one: Observe

- o   Inquiry was grounded in teachers' concerns and experiences
- o   Improvements in teaching practice were made visible

Stage two: Reflect

- o   Teachers asked questions and exploring thinking
- o   Teachers developed shared intentions

Stage three: Inform

- o   New information supported shifts in teachers' thinking

Stage four: Plan

- o   Teachers identified and resolved concerns about implementation

Stage five: Act

- o   Gained insight about children's prior knowledge
- o   Gained fresh appreciation of children's emotions

As discussed, I held the dual roles of participant and researcher. Therefore, the findings include data gathered through my own personal observations and my contributions to team discussions in my role as a teacher. However, to avoid my personal data being privileged, I have only reported on findings evident in my data that were corroborated with at least two other participants. All the teaching team participants have been afforded the protection of a pseudonym, including myself, to avoid identification of individual contributions. Throughout this chapter the teaching team participants are referred to as 'we', as opposed to 'they'.

Question 1: In what ways did the teaching team change teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours?

Strategy One: Using scenario-based learning with puppets

The teaching team developed and implemented a scenario-based learning (SBL) strategy known as the puppet hui. During the puppet hui, we presented the children with social scenarios using puppets, based on real social scenarios that teachers had observed. In each puppet hui the puppets were involved in a social scenario that required the application of prosocial behaviours to solve a social dilemma. The children were asked to help the puppets by making suggestions about how they could solve their social dilemma. During the course of the research, five puppet hui were implemented. The first two hui focused on sharing behaviours, while the remaining three introduced the prosocial behaviour of communicating a 'considerate declinal' – i.e. using friendly and/or kind words when one puppet wants to decline another puppet's request to play together.

During the puppet hui, one teacher acted as a facilitator of the discussion, two teachers acted as the puppets and one teacher video recorded it. Thus the hui involved all four teaching team participants. The facilitator of the hui began by explaining that as the puppets were still learning, they needed the children's help to solve social problems and subsequently mediated the discussion to ensure all contributions were heard. The puppets responded according to intentions previously agreed by the teaching team and consistent with the ways the teachers had observed children previously responding. At times, the puppet responses resulted in children's initial suggestions not being accepted by the puppets, provoking further discussions and suggestions from the children. An

extract from the fifth puppet hui provides an illustration of the process. In this scenario, two puppets, Pig and Panda were engaged in a game of 'ninjas', when Frog arrived and suggested they all be puppies instead resulting in social conflict. The extract begins at the point where the puppets are responding to the first suggestion that the game could be changed to include both puppies and ninjas:

> *Pig: but I just want to play ninjas*
> *Panda: yeah me too*
> *Frog: but why don't we all play puppies?*
> *Pig: but I have powers*
> *Children laughing*
> *Facilitator (teacher): okay, so Frog wants to play puppies, Piggy and Panda, they just want to play ninjas. Okay so what other ideas have we got. Sara?*
> *Sara (child): maybe they could swap over to the other and then to the other, and play later*
> *Facilitator (teacher): okay, so is this right, is this what you're saying? They play the ninja game now maybe and then swap over and play the puppy game later? Is that what you think they should do?*
> *Sara (child): yes*
> *Frog: I don't really want to play ninjas, I just wanna play puppies, I just want someone to play puppies with me, just puppies that's all*
> *Pig: I just want to play ninjas*
> *Panda: me too*
> *Pig: yeah we just want play ninjas*
>
> *...*
> *Jenny (child): what if Piggy and Panda, and, and, and, play puppies after ninjas*
> *Facilitator (teacher): after the ninjas? So they get to finish their game of ninjas, and then they could play with Frog later? Yes? So what could Frog do right now?*
> *...*
> *Jim (child): maybe they could play the game (pointing to Pig and Panda) and Koala could play puppies with Frog*
> *Facilitator (teacher): did you guys hear what Jim suggested? Maybe Frog could ask Koala to play puppies, because we know that Koala loves to play puppies, don't we from last time and then Pig and Panda can finish playing their game of ninjas*
> *Frog: okay, that's right Koala does like puppies, oh, I'm gonna go and see if I can find Koala, I'll be right back okay*

As each scenario was played out in response to the children's suggestions, it provided children with an opportunity to see how the puppet characters responded to certain suggestions. We reasoned that being able to see the scenario had helped the children to learn about the impact of various solutions, as well as to see how others might respond in those situations. As one teacher commented, watching a scenario is a more powerful way to engage in learning than simply being told what to do: *"what a way to engage with it, to watch it playing out in front of you through characters that you actually*

respond to…rather than a teacher saying "now what you do here is"
(VioletMTG:05.2016).

Examination of the data revealed several key features of the SBL strategy to be particularly useful in supporting the team's objectives for enhancing children's prosocial behaviours. The teachers found the strategy was an effective means of communicating expectations for prosocial behaviour and engaging children's attention on the topic of prosocial behaviours. The findings show the SBL strategy supported teacher's intentions to empower children and encourage their participation by positioning them as the experts. Finally, the findings reveal the SBL strategy created opportunities for children to learn from more experienced peers. Each of these findings associated with the SBL strategy are discussed in greater detail below.

Teachers communicated consistent expectations for prosocial behaviour

During the observation and reflection phases, the teaching team developed shared intentions for prosocial behaviours that we wanted to consistently communicate to children and to encourage their use. We wanted to communicate key messages about: i) consideration for others, ii) using friendly words and iii) showing respect. Initially, we discussed working with the children to develop a set of expectations or rules to reflect these intentions in the form of a treaty document. However, some of the teaching team expressed concern about how the process of developing a set of expectations would work in practice. This concern was based on past experience where children's answers tended to focus on what *not* to do rather than what *to* do. In addition, we discussed the difficulty of prescribing rules for social situations where it is important to take the specific context in to account. Moreover, we considered our intention of empowering children to develop their own solutions to resolve social conflicts rather than having these solutions imposed by a teacher. As a consequence of these discussions and inspired by an article by Christopher Taaffe (2012) we moved away from the idea of developing a prescribed set of expectations, and focused on the way the puppet hui could provoke discussion and provide an opportunity for key messages to be introduced and reinforced. One way the teaching team remained focused on these key messages as agreed in team discussions, was to include them as objectives at the beginning of each puppet script. The following objectives at the beginning of the script for puppet hui three, illustrate this process:

- *To introduce use of 'friendly words' to tell someone you don't want to play with them right now*

- *Begin to raise the idea of respectful communication that is considerate of other people's feelings*

As the puppet hui progressed, the teaching team expressed their pleasure with the consistency of communication around prosocial behaviours as exemplified in the following quote: *"we can 'wing' it because we are all on the same page with it…we all know what our overall objective is…we've had these conversations" (VioletMTG:05.2016)*. In addition, the teachers described the benefits of having all the children and teachers present at the puppet hui, so everyone shared the experience and heard the same messages. As one teacher explained it: *"it feels like…it's a real collective" (JasmineMTG:05.2016).* The teachers further reflected that they were starting to see evidence of the consistent key message around the need to consider the feelings of others, having an impact on how children were interacting with each other in the natural context of play. Teachers reported their observations of children proactively demonstrating greater consideration towards each other as exemplified in the following extract: *"…more considerate in how they are talking to each other and how they are considering each other's feelings...just a bit more aware (LilyMTG:05.2016)*

Teachers ensured engagement

An intention of the puppet hui was to provide a mechanism for supporting children to learn about prosocial behaviours in a way that ensured children's engagement in them. The video recordings were made primarily to allow the whole teaching team to review and reflect on the SBL experience, so the video focussed on capturing the children's responses – both visual and verbal – rather than recording the puppets. Accordingly, the video recordings provided evidence to the teachers about the level of engagement demonstrated by the children during the hui; we were able to watch again the looks on children's faces, their attentive body language and the way they maintained their attention. The extent to which children were engaged, showing focussed attention on the puppets and maintaining that engagement throughout all five of the hui, still came as surprise to the teaching team, as exemplified in the following comment made during a team meeting: *"they were more engaged in it than I expected them to be, ongoing, continuously so, they didn't get to week five and go, huh, pig and frog*

(JasmineMTG:05.2016). In addition, the teaching team observed children re-enacting the scenarios using the puppets themselves which we saw as further evidence that children found the experience engaging. Moreover, in one instance a teacher observed a child getting a puppet and using it as a way of expressing herself and ensuring that her perspective was heard in an actual social conflict situation. Accordingly, the teachers reflected that the SBL strategy using puppets was an effective means to engage children's attention on prosocial behaviours.

Teachers positioned children as experts

During the observation and reflection cycles of the CAR process, we agreed that we wanted to empower children with the knowledge and the confidence to solve their own social problems in prosocial ways. Moreover, we wanted to communicate to children that they can learn skills to solve social problems in the same way as it is possible to learn other skills. In accordance with this intention, the SBL strategy was designed to empower children by positioning them as the experts who could help the less-skilled puppets. Each hui began with a reminder that the puppets were still learning and needed the children to help them to think what to do. This strategy was intended to communicate to children that they could apply the same process when faced with their own social problems.

The strategy of positioning children as experts who needed to make suggestions to help the puppets was also intended to ensure every child had the opportunity to actively participate in the puppet hui. Accordingly, the teacher in the role of facilitator ensured that every child who wanted to contribute to the discussion had a chance to be heard by the group. The findings suggest that the puppet hui supported this intention for participation with over half of the children making contributions to the discussions during the puppet hui. Furthermore, the teaching team noted that the puppet hui were effective in supporting participation from children who would not normally contribute during a group mat time. One teacher shared this observation after reviewing the puppet hui video recordings:

> *There has been a high level of engagement across the board, it's not just been, your 'high contributors', there have been other children who've got involved in saying things (LilyMTG:05.2016)*

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Teachers supported peer learning

The teachers found that the puppet hui provided an opportunity for children to learn from more experienced peers. One particular example serves to highlight the impact of learning from a more experienced peer. During the third hui, two puppets were wanting to do different activities and one child suggested they could compromise by doing one of the activities first and the other activity second. For many children, the word 'compromise' was a new word, but subsequently it was repeated by several children as a problem-solving suggestion in a later puppet hui. In addition, the teachers reported discussions with children in the natural context of play where the word 'compromise' was used by the children when working through the problem-solving process. For example, a teacher reported an interaction with a child following a puppet hui involving a social conflict in the context of play. When she asked the child what she thought the puppets might do to solve the problem, the child responded that they would need to compromise. Furthermore, the child then demonstrated her understanding of compromise by returning to her friend and suggesting they could think up a new game that they both wanted to play rather than continuing their current conflict. In team meetings, the teachers reflected that the group discussions provoked by the puppet scenarios were making it possible for children with less developed prosocial behaviours to learn from their more experienced peers. This peer learning was resulting in greater prosocial behaviours being evident in the natural context of play.

Summary

The findings show that the first significant way teachers changed our teaching practice to support children's development of prosocial behaviours was to develop and implement a scenario-based learning strategy using puppets. The findings suggest that the teaching team found this puppetry strategy was an effective means of communicating expectations for prosocial behaviour, ensuring children's engagement, empowering and supporting participation through positioning children as the experts, and creating an opportunity for children to learn from more experienced peers.

Strategy Two: Prompting children's thinking in the natural context of play

The second significant way we changed our teaching practice to support the development of prosocial behaviour was to prompt children's thinking in the natural

context of play. These prompts encouraged children to revisit the learning that took place during the puppet hui about resolving social problems using prosocial behaviours. The way in which the teaching team might prompt children's thinking in the natural context of play was not specifically planned, rather left to each teacher's individual discretion. Subsequently, three teachers referred directly to Pig and Frog, as the main characters in the puppet hui, with references and questions such as:

> *I spoke to them about what Pig and Frog did in a similar situation…I asked "how did Pig and Frog resolve this problem?" (JasmineREF:05.2016)*

> *I decided to refer to the puppet scenarios to help resolve the problem… I said "what would we tell Pig and Frog to do?" (LilyREF:03.2016)*

The fourth teacher chose not to refer to the puppets directly but to the prosocial behaviours that had been demonstrated in the scenarios – such as taking turns as a means of sharing. However, all the teachers consistently reported the effectiveness of prompting children's thinking in the natural context of play as a means of revisiting their learning, which resulted in the application of prosocial behaviours to resolve social conflict. With the scenarios on hand to revisit, we found that children were much more likely to think of a prosocial way to solve the current social conflict than they had been before we started implementing the puppet hui. One teacher summed up the strategy of referring to the puppet hui to prompt thinking and encourage prosocial behaviour by suggesting it was an effective way of saying to children *"think about how to solve this social problem in a way that is fair and just" (VioletINT:05.2016).*

The findings suggest that the teaching team found the strategy of revisiting the puppet hui was an effective means of prompting children's thinking and supporting them to apply their learning about prosocial behaviours in the context of their play. Several key themes were revealed in the data to contribute significantly to the positive effect of this strategy. The teachers found the strategy to prompt thinking was supportive of our intention to *empower children* with the knowledge and confidence to resolve their own social dilemmas in prosocial ways. Furthermore, we found that prompting thinking to revisit the puppet hui in the natural context of play served to *diffuse tension and reduce emotions*, *encouraged peer mediation* and supported the *development of a shared language* around prosocial behaviours. Each of these key themes is discussed below in more detail.

Teachers empowered children to act

We found that prompting thinking supported our intentions to empower children with the knowledge and confidence to resolve their own social problems in prosocial ways, as outlined previously. When using the puppet hui as prompts for thinking, teachers were not providing solutions to social problems, or in most cases even making suggestions, but instead simply prompting children to make connections to and access the knowledge already gained through their participation in the puppet hui. The effectiveness of the process of prompting thinking was highlighted for the teaching team participants as only Group One (children aged 4) were participants in the puppets hui while the younger children in Group Two did not experience the puppet hui. Subsequently, the difference in supporting empowerment to enact prosocial behaviour between these two groups became increasingly apparent. We increasingly found it was significantly easier to support the children in Group One to use prosocial behaviours in context as they had knowledge to access from the puppet hui. As a consequence we agreed to implement the puppet hui with the younger children at the conclusion of the research period.

Teachers diffused tension and reduced emotion

The teachers reported that a reference to the puppet hui had the effect of diffusing tension and reducing the intensity of children's emotions in the context of naturally occurring social conflict. An example from a teacher's reflection illustrates how we found this to work in practice:

> *There seems to be an instant reduction in emotion, it feels calmer and there are thoughtful faces staring at me instead of angry or upset ones...they are more engaged in thought (JasmineREF:05.2016)*

We found that prompting children to revisit the puppet hui seemed to support children to move beyond responding to their emotions, so they could start thinking through potential options for solving the problem. During our team discussions we wondered if the reduction in emotion and ability to move forward to thinking through solutions was the result of having seen similar scenarios resolved when you are not emotionally involved. As one teacher explained it, it is easier to think clearly through potential solutions when you are not involved and perhaps having had this experience it is easier to also think clearly in a real social conflict.

Teachers encouraged and observed peer mediation

As discussed previously, the puppet hui provided children with an opportunity to learn from more experienced peers about prosocial way to resolve social conflicts. The findings also suggest that the opportunity to learn from more experienced peers extended beyond the puppet hui situation and in to the natural context of play. Initially, this was initiated by teachers inviting peers who were not involved in a conflict to suggest possible solutions, effectively mirroring the process used during the puppet hui. The following extract exemplifies the process. In this instance, the teacher decided to direct her question to a peer, Dave, who was standing nearby and watching: *"I asked the question again specifically to Dave, "what would we tell pig and frog to do Dave?" He came closer and replied that one of them would have to go first and one go next" (LilyREF:03.2016).* As the hui progressed, however, the teachers reported that they were increasingly observing situations where peers were proactively supporting the mediation process without teacher-initiation. We reflected that the puppet hui had modelled a mediation process, as children had mediated for the puppets, so it seemed natural for children to continue to use that process in the natural context of play.

The teachers encouraged a shared language

The teaching team reported that they were observing children using the language that had been introduced in the puppet hui. For example, the children were heard using the language that the puppets had earlier used to communicate a 'considerate declinal' in response to a request to play, e.g. saying "not right now, maybe later" and "you're still my friend, but I want to do this right now." Additionally, when teaching team participants did get involved in mediating a social conflict, they found that it was easier to reach a prosocial solution as the children involved shared the same understanding about what was being discussed. As one teacher explained, both children involved in the situation had access to the same information about prosocial behaviours, so it was easier for them to communicate and find an acceptable solution – *"just sort of internalising all that stuff that we've done…they have now got all that to access as a resource…both of them have that" (VioletINT:05.2016).*

Summary

The second significant way we improved our teaching practice to support children's development of prosocial behaviours was to prompt their thinking about prosocial behaviours in the natural context of play, by revisiting the learning that took place during the puppet hui. The teachers found this strategy to be an effective means of supporting children to apply their learning about prosocial behaviours in the context of their play, supporting our intention to empower them with the knowledge and confidence to resolve their own social dilemmas in prosocial ways. Furthermore, we found that prompting thinking to revisit the puppet hui in the natural context of play served to diffuse tension and reduce emotions, encouraged peer mediation and supported the development of a shared language around prosocial behaviours.

Question one summary

In summary, the teachers made two significant changes to their teaching practice: they introduced a SBL experience in the form of puppet hui, and they prompted children's thinking in the natural context of play to revisit learning about prosocial behaviours gained during the hui. We found both of these strategies to be improvements to our current teaching practice and effective in working towards achieving our intentions for children's prosocial behaviour and learning. Consequently, we agreed to continue using these strategies following the conclusion of the research project.

Question two: How did the collaborative action research (CAR) process support the adoption of improved teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviour?

In response to question two, findings suggest that each of the five stages of the CAR process supported the adoption of improved teaching practices. Therefore, the findings are reported and discussed according to each stage of the research cycle as follows:

Stage one: Observe

- o Inquiry was grounded in teachers' concerns and experiences
- o Improvements in teaching practice were made visible

Stage two: Reflect

- o Teachers asked questions and explored thinking
- o Teachers developed shared intentions

Stage three: Inform

- o New information supported shifts in teachers' thinking

Stage four: Plan

- o Teachers identified and resolved concerns about implementation

Stage five: Act

- o Gained insight about children's prior knowledge
- o Gained fresh appreciation of children's emotions

Stage One: Observation

During the observation stage of the CAR cycle, the teaching team participants systematically observed and recorded observations of their teaching practice to support children's prosocial behaviour development. The findings show this stage supported the adoption of improved teaching practice by 1) ensuring the research focus was grounded in the concerns of the teaching team participants, and 2) by making improvements in teaching practice visible, both to the teaching team participants and others. Each of these findings is discussed in the following sections.

Inquiry was grounded in teachers' concerns and experiences

During the initial observation stage each member of the teaching team systematically collected data based on observations of their own teaching practices. These observations focused on exploring firstly, how they currently encouraged prosocial behaviour and secondly identifying challenging situations where current practices are problematic and/or ineffective. The observations revealed that teachers were experiencing consistent challenges, including:

- dealing with situations where there was a conflict between potential exclusion and the rights of children to choose who they want to play with and/or what they want to play at a particular time;
- supporting children to consider the perspectives and feelings of others;
- supporting children to generate their own solutions to social dilemmas especially in situations of heightened emotions.

CAR enabled to the teachers to identify their concerns and set the focus for discussion in the reflection stage, and later became integrated in the information, planning and action stages. These observations grounded the teacher inquiry in the genuine concerns and experiences of the teachers and the identified needs of the children. Furthermore, reference to the challenges identified in these initial observations ensured the ongoing inquiry process continued to be aligned to the teachers' initial concerns. This alignment is demonstrated by an incident during a hui that focused on sharing, and agreement was needed on the objective for the next hui. One teacher suggested the idea of respect for other objects and resources, for example by helping to tidy up, and taking care of the wider kindergarten environment. However, this idea was usurped by another teacher who, referring back to the observations made the following comment: *"the issues that we originally identified that were difficult and we wanted to work on were more of that exclusive play...those were the things that were challenging us" (LilyMTG:03.2016).*

Being able to refer to the systematically gathered and shared observation data supported the teaching team to maintain their inquiry focus on the issues that were identified as being of greatest concern in their teaching practice. Accordingly, the teaching team were able to stay focused on tackling the issues that were the most problematic in their teaching practice. Consequently. three further hui were developed where prosocial strategies such as compromise, consideration for the feelings and perspectives of others and 'considerate declinal' were necessary for positive resolution.

Improvements in teaching practice were made visible

CAR enabled the teachers to see their improvements. As the teaching team continued to observe and document changes to their teaching practice, they became more aware of the ways in which their teaching had improved. Our professional learning was made visible. Making improvements visible was encouraged by asking each teacher to identify one observation to explore and document systematically using a post-implementation critical incident reflection (see Appendix C). We reflected on an incident that indicated an improvement in our practice as a result of the inquiry process. Jasmine recognized that her intentions to approach a social conflict situation had changed from a focus on getting the conflict resolved to empowering the children with tools to find their own compromise. Moreover, she realized that one way her changed intention translated in practice, was making sure each child involved in the conflict had

an equal opportunity to express their perspective before moving on to thinking about solutions.

in the past I think I would have tried to solve the problem directly which means that I was imposing my ideas… My intention has shifted as a result of having the Hui…I now notice that my response to children's disagreements is to get both sides to speak…provide an opportunity for them both to be heard (JasmineREF:05.2016)

Another teacher, Rose, noticed that she had started to respond to situations of exclusion in different ways. For instance, she saw a shift in her practice away from solving the problem for the excluded child by telling her peers that they must include her. Instead she began to focus on strategies to encourage friendly and considerate communication that supported the excluded child to develop alternative strategies and resilience when faced with exclusion situations.

Before undertaking this research on prosocial behaviour I would have asked Adie to include Karen… [now] I have different strategies…that they are still friends with that person, they are just choosing to do something different at this moment…allows the [excluded] child to seek out other children…further develop their relationships with other children instead (RoseREF:05.2016)

As the above two examples show, systematic observations are a means to support individual reflection, enabling teachers to make visible, both to themselves and to others, the improvements they were making to support children's prosocial behaviours.

Stage Two: Reflection

The reflection stage of the CAR process engaged the teachers in sustained, systematic collaborative and individual reflection. As already discussed, systematic individual reflection was supported by each teacher completing at least three written reflections during the course of their inquiry. Systematic and sustained collaborative reflection was supported both by sharing these individual reflections and by allocating time for ongoing discussion and sharing of insights. The findings reveal that reflection processes of CAR challenged the teachers to ask questions and to explore their thinking before moving on to consider possible solutions. Moreover, the findings show that the collaborative reflection supported the teachers to develop *shared* intentions for children's prosocial behaviour. These shared intentions enabled the teaching team to achieve their objectives during the puppet hui and resulted in greater consistency in their interactions with children. These findings are discussed in the following sections.

Teachers asked questions and explored thinking

As outlined above, to support the initial reflection stage, each teacher completed two written reflections using the pre-implementation critical incident reflection (Appendix C) and shared these reflections with the rest of the team during a team meeting. These individual reflections were intended to provoke thinking and to discover underlying reasons for current practices to support children's prosocial behaviour. Unlike other formats for reflection that the teachers had used previously, the pre-implementation critical incident reflection did not end with a question about future action, instead it asked participants "*Is there something you would like to address or to learn about as a result of this incident?*" The objective was to prompt further learning and investigation at the reflection stage rather than to move the participant forward to action. However, when individual reflections were shared, the teachers expressed their discomfort at allowing the questions raised by teachers in their individual reflections unresolved at this stage. We agreed that our instinctive urge was to immediately suggest changes to teaching practice that might address these questions. However, deciding to trust the CAR process, we resisted the urge to make decisions about action during this reflection stage. Instead, we focused our discussion on reaching agreement about our shared intentions and objectives for children's prosocial behaviour by considering the question posed by one teacher: *"what do we want our end game to look like?"* (VioletMTG:09.2015).

Teachers developed shared intentions

The individual and collaborative reflective processes of CAR enabled the teaching team to decide on one overarching shared intention: to empower children to resolve their own social problems fairly and in ways that were considerate of the perspectives and feelings of others. Subsequently, we saw the potential of the puppet hui as a means to support our shared intention, in particular the empowerment of children to solve their own social problems. The following quote illustrates how the puppet hui were regarded as a means to support empowerment of children to solve their own social problems using prosocial behaviours:

> *We don't just want to use the puppets as a way to dictate what is the right thing to do…we want them to actually be thinking about it so they can relate it to another context (VioletMTG:02.2016).*

In addition, specific objectives were developed for each puppet hui scenario to ensure that all the teachers were clear about the shared intention. From the third hui forward, we found it useful to document these shared intentions at the top of the script. For example, one objective stated for the third puppet hui was to *"introduce the use of 'friendly words' to tell someone you don't want to play with them right now"* (see Appendix F). By spending time reflecting collaboratively and clarifying intentions, the teachers were able to deal effectively with the uncertainty of children's responses during the puppet hui and to ensure that intentions were achieved through consistent communication. As one teacher explained it, she was confident in the role of the puppet because she was clear about our shared intention:

> *we can 'wing it because we are all on the same page with it, so it wouldn't matter who you sat down with behind the curtain, with whatever puppets, we all know what our overall objective is…we've had these conversations (VioletMTG:05.2016)*

The teachers also reported that clarifying their shared intentions enabled them to feel confident about the consistency of messages to children in the natural context of play: *"I know that I am promoting a value that we all share" (VioletINT:05.2016).*

Stage Three: Informing

The informing stage of the CAR cycle involved the introduction of relevant literature to provoke the teachers' thinking and to provide information about alternative teaching strategies to support children's prosocial development. The findings show that the process of engaging with literature during the inform stage, supported the teachers to shift their thinking and their practice from using exclusively naturalistic strategies embedded in the context of play, to adopting a SBL strategy using puppets, supported by prompts to children's thinking during the natural context of play. The following section provides details about how this shift in teachers' thinking and practice occurred.

New information supported shifts in teachers' thinking

Initially, the teachers were asked about current teaching strategies to support children's prosocial behaviour development. All of their responses referred to the sole use of naturalistic strategies integrated in the natural context of children's play. These responses implied that they did not use teaching strategies outside the context of natural play. One teacher, however, made the distinction between her use of naturalistic

strategies, versus an alternative of planned group teaching strategies with her response as follows:

> *I don't take an overt approach to how I'm going to teach about sharing [for example] ...it's not something I will necessarily plan to approach, it will be something that will come up and I try and address it in the moment (VioletINT:11.2015)*

Although the reasons and/or beliefs that led to a focus on naturalistic strategies were not explored in the data, a possible explanation could be a belief that teaching children about prosocial behaviours outside the context of natural play would not be effective.

At the informing stage, each teacher was asked to read a book chapter (Taaffe, 2012) which was later discussed at a team meeting. This reading outlined an action research project undertaken to address issues of social conflict and exclusion with young children. One of the strategies adopted by Taaffe and his colleagues was the use of puppets during group time. The puppet characters engaged in exclusion behaviours with subsequent negative emotions, which prompted the teachers to ask the children to suggest better ways for the puppets to talk to each other as a way to model the use of friendly language. Within ten days of the second puppet show, Taaffe recorded instances of children using the suggested friendly language phrases.

During our team discussion about the Taaffe reading, the teachers expressed surprise that a strategy using puppets at a group time could be so effective in making a change in children's behaviour. Despite reservations about lack of experience and confidence using puppets, we decided to try a similar approach. Accordingly we planned and implemented what became known as the puppet hui as a way to improve teaching to support children's prosocial behaviour. In addition, children were prompted to revisit the discussions and learning experiences about prosocial behaviours presented in the hui during the natural context of play. The Taaffe reading had served to provoke teachers' thinking and inspired the trial of something that was outside of current teaching practice. Our intervention led to new insights about children's learning as previously discussed.

During later reflection on the effectiveness of the puppet hui, Violet, who had initially defined her teaching strategies as being exclusively naturalistic and unplanned, expressed her new insights about the value of teaching prosocial behaviours out of context. She reflected that perhaps teaching approaches that are out of context provided

an opportunity for the child to engage with their thinking more effectively because they are not emotionally involved: "*that scenario is playing out when they are not personally invested in it, it's probably a little bit clearer, it's not personal" (VioletMTG:05.2016).* This excerpt illustrates the shift in this teacher's thinking from previously rejecting the possibility of teaching strategies used outside of context, to appreciating the unique value that such strategies can present.

Stage Four: Planning

In the planning stage of the CAR process, implementation of the puppet hui were considered. The findings show that the teachers were not confident to use puppets as a teaching strategy. Time was considered important in this planning stage to discuss how to use puppetry and to identify potential barriers so as to gain confidence.

Teachers identified and resolved concerns about implementation

During the planning stage, the details about implementation of the puppet hui were discussed thoroughly to ensure potential problems and/or concerns were raised and solutions identified. For example, we considered the possible purchase of puppets specifically for the hui. A decision was made to use existing resources as this would be more likely to encourage children to use them afterwards. Furthermore, we decided to use animal puppets with no obvious gender to minimise the possibility of gender-bias. Discussion also focused on the use of 'fake' voices in our puppet roles as the following excerpt shows:

> *Do we do voices? Or just use our normal voice… are children going to be saying "that's not a penguin that's Jasmine"…is that going to detract from it? (JasmineMTG:02.2106)*

A decision was made against altering our voices as it would be hard to maintain and an expectation that children would still engage with the puppets even though they realised teachers were acting as the puppets. A sustained discussion focused on the best time to fit the puppet hui into the weekly schedule. Considerations ranged from: wanting all the teaching team participants to be present, to separating the puppet hui from our existing group mat times and honouring our shared philosophy about minimising interruptions to children's play. These details and many others were discussed during two lengthy team meetings. In addition, we practiced the first two puppet hui prior to enacting it. A puppet theatre was created using an existing wooden frame.

Figure 2: Puppet theatre and two main puppet characters used in puppet hui

Following the implementation of the puppet hui, the teachers expressed how valuable those discussions had been to build their confidence as puppeteers. As one teacher said, *"all those little details are the worrying things!" (JasmineMTG:05.2016)*. By taking time in this planning stage to thoroughly prepare, the teachers had the opportunity to discuss and resolve their concerns, so overcoming potential barriers to implementation.

Subsequently, the teachers have been confident to implement puppetry in other areas of the curriculum such as the introduction of the 'Letter Monster' puppet who goes home with children to find items beginning with a certain letter and 'Clarence the clean-up cat' who signals and supports clean up time at the end of the day. When asked how she felt about using puppets at the conclusion of the research period, Jasmine responded: *"so confident" (JasmineMTG:05.2016).*

Stage Five: Action

The CAR processes supported action in the form of two teaching strategies: SBL using puppets and promoting thinking in the natural context of play. The findings revealed that for some teachers, this stage of taking action prompted new insights and changes in thinking and practice to support children's development of prosocial behaviours. Two individual examples illustrate the ways in which taking action led to changes in thinking and teaching practice: i) appreciating children's prior knowledge, and ii) understanding children's emotions. These two examples are discussed in more detail in the section below.

Gained insight about children's prior knowledge

During the final interviews each teacher was asked if there were moments in their inquiry that provided particular insight and which led to changes in their teaching

strategies to support children's prosocial behaviour. One teacher, Rose, identified the action stage as a moment of insight for her. She commented that: *"seeing it acted out in the puppet scenarios…actually seeing it…and seeing the suggestions come from the children and what they are thinking" (RoseINT:05.2016)*. Seeing the children's responses gave Rose a new appreciation of children's prior knowledge of and thinking about prosocial behaviours. She further explained that this insight enhanced her teaching practice so she took more time to support children to think through different options they could apply in the context of real play. Rose explained that this insight enhanced her teaching practice as she was able to confidently support children through resolving social conflicts by drawing on their relevant prior knowledge.

Gained fresh appreciation of children's emotions

Another teacher, Violet, identified that acting as the puppet during hui had helped her to gain a fresh appreciation of children's emotions when they were involved in a social conflict scenario. She explained that when she was adlibbing in the role of a puppet, that she needed to think about how a child would be feeling in that scenario and how a child would genuinely respond based on those feelings. She commented that: *"it really got me thinking about how the child would respond to that and why" (VioletINT:05.2016)*. Through that process Violet gained a new appreciation of just how deeply frustrating it could be for a child to have a teacher dictate a resolution such as deciding who would have the first turn with a resource and who would go second. She gained a new insight into how powerless a child could feel in that situation and how they could potentially be left with unresolved emotions. As a result she became more aware in her teaching strategies of the need to take time to facilitate the resolution process so that children could genuinely reach a solution themselves.

Question two summary

The findings show that each stage of the CAR cycle contributed to the adoption of improved teaching strategies to support the development of children's prosocial behaviour. The *observation* stage ensured the research focus was grounded in teachers' real concerns and issues, and supported the teaching team participants to make their learning visible to both themselves and others. The *reflection* stage supported the teachers to spend time asking questions, exploring our thinking and developing shared intentions for children's prosocial behaviour. The *informing* stage introduced alternative

strategies and new information that enabled teachers to adopt an alternative SBL strategy using puppets, supported by prompting children's thinking in the natural context of play. The *planning* stage supported the teachers to gain confidence with the new teaching strategies and provided the opportunity to address potential barriers to effective implementation. Finally, the *acting* stage of the CAR cycle prompted additional insights for some teachers, resulting in further changes in their thinking and teaching practice to support children's prosocial behaviours. Each of these five stages in the CAR process contributed to the teachers' professional learning to develop children's prosocial behaviours.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the research study in relation to the two research questions. The first question explored the ways in which the teachers' practice changed to support children's prosocial behaviour. Findings showed that the teachers adopted two changed practices: a SBL strategy using puppets and a complementary strategy to prompt thinking in the natural context of play. The second question explored how the CAR process supported pedagogical change. Findings were presented showing that each of the five stages of the CAR process contributed to teachers' professional learning. The next chapter discusses the most significant findings in relation to literature and research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

The present study set out to explore how teachers could improve their teaching practices to support the development of children's prosocial behaviour using a collaborative action research (CAR) methodology. The teacher participants in this study began with an objective to improve their current strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours. This chapter discusses the key findings from the study that relate to each of the two research questions. Question one examines the changed teaching strategies developed by the teachers, including the scenario-based learning (SBL) strategy using puppets and a naturalistic teaching (NT) strategy that prompted children's thinking about prosocial behaviours in the natural context of play. The key findings in relation to question two are then discussed to highlight how the CAR process supported the teachers to make changes in their teaching practice. In addition, a key theme of intentionality is evident in the findings from both questions and this is discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Changes in teachers

The findings show that the teachers adopted two teaching strategies with the intention to support children's prosocial behaviours. Firstly, the teachers implemented a scenario-based strategy (SBL) which became known in the kindergarten as our 'puppet hui'. The teachers found this SBL strategy effective in achieving their intention to encourage children to consider the feelings and perspectives of others. The use of puppets was a particularly valuable mechanism for delivering the SBL strategy. The teachers came to realise its value in providing opportunities to communicate consistent messages about prosocial behaviours, as well as to develop a positive social-emotional climate.

The second teaching strategy adopted by the teachers was a naturalistic teaching (NT) strategy to prompt the children's thinking in the context of their everyday play. While teachers were previously using NT strategies to support children's prosocial behaviour, the strategy of prompting thinking was specifically focused on the prosocial behaviours discussed during the SBL strategy. The strategy was designed to provoke children to reflect on and revisit this earlier learning experience. Although these two strategies were

used separately and achieved different goals, the teachers considered that they were interdependent and complementary as the SBL strategy supported learning acquisition while the NT strategy supported the application and generalization of learning to natural contexts.

Scenario-Based Learning (SBL) Strategy

Errington (2003) defines SBL as "any educational approach that involves the use of, or is dependent on, scenarios to bring about desired learning intentions" (p. 10), although as he points out SBL strategies are also referred to by other names such as role play, goal-based learning, critical incidents and/or triggers. In the present study, the puppet hui were consistent with Errington's definition as the teachers' learning intentions for children were realized through the implementation of scenarios that drew their attention to prosocial behaviours. Errington (2003) states that SBL strategies support learners to bridge the gap between abstract ideas and practice through an 'acted out' scenario simulating a genuine experience, that requires the learner to apply their prior knowledge to resolve the scenario. He further suggests that there are four types of scenarios each focused on a different overall purpose: skill-based, problem-based, issues-based and speculative-based. The scenarios used in the present study align primarily with the last of these four types - the speculative-based approach.

Speculative-based approach: Insight in to feelings and perspectives of others

A speculative-based SBL approach aims to promote insight in to the emotional states and perspectives of others, providing an opportunity to step into another's shoes. Developing children's understanding of and consideration for, the feelings and perspectives of others was a key intention identified by the teachers in the present study. The SBL strategy was found to be an effective way to achieve this intention. During the puppet hui the teachers were able to ensure that the feelings and perspectives of the puppet characters were clearly demonstrated and included in the discussion. The teachers were encouraged and excited to observe children proactively demonstrating greater consideration for each other following the puppet hui, reflecting that this consideration could be due to increased awareness of the feelings and perspectives of others as a result of the puppet hui. This outcome is consistent with the contention that SBL strategies can promote not only learning acquisition but an awareness of how to apply that knowledge in action in real situations (Errington, 2003).

The results from the implementation of the SBL strategy in this study were consistent with the findings from the research study by Taaffe (2012) who observed three year old children. His study showed that SBL supported children to demonstrate more considerate behaviours towards others. Just as Taaffe and his colleagues, did, in the present study, puppets were used to present children with social conflict situations, requiring the use of prosocial behaviours for positive resolutions. These puppet scenarios generated suggestions from children and created discussion. However, in Taaffe's research the intention was to encourage 'friendly language' and accordingly the puppet scenarios were focused on this goal, while in the present study the intentions for the SBL strategy were widened to support a greater range of prosocial behaviours.

The findings from the implementation of the SBL strategy in the present study are also aligned with the research undertaken by Vespo et al. (2006). These researchers developed a series of lessons designed to support children's social-emotional development, using a format of role plays followed by discussion. While the results from Vespo et al.'s study showed a statistically significant improvement in prosocial behaviours, the teachers who implemented the lessons modified the program based on their concerns that the content was too complex for the level of children in their class. In the present study, the CAR methodology supported the teachers to overcome this concern, as the creation of the puppet hui was an iterative process. Accordingly, each hui was generated following implementation and review of the previous one. Teachers could therefore ensure the level of complexity was appropriate for children in their context and was connected to discussions that took place in the previous hui.

Value of using puppets

The findings from the present study show that teachers realised the value of using puppets as a method to use SBL strategy. The teachers were surprised at the level of children's engagement throughout the puppet hui and the strong connection made with the puppet characters. Following the successful implementation of puppets in the SBL, the teachers were convinced about the benefits of puppets as a teaching strategy which led the teachers introducing puppets in other areas of the curriculum. Despite the strong support for puppets from children and teachers found in the present study, and the tradition of using puppets for education and entertainment in many cultures (Belfiore, 2013), Salmon and Sainato (2005) suggest there is limited empirical research validating the effectiveness of puppets and puppetry as instructional materials promoting learning

for preschool aged children as most research uses puppets in combination with other strategies.

However, the limited body of research that exists, suggests that puppets can be effective tools for learning in the early childhood and early childhood special education literature for several reasons. For example, it is argued that puppets sustain young children's interest and attention, and therefore can be a useful mechanism for the acquisition and reinforcing of key concepts (Matson, Fee, Coe, & Smith, 1991; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Salmon & Sainato, 2005; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). It has been suggested that puppets can help children explore a different perspective and gain an insight in to the thinking and feelings of others (Landy, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). Furthermore, it is proposed that puppets can provide a safe context for children to express ideas and engage with thinking about social conflicts while not emotionally involved (Kemple, 2004; Webster-Stratton, 1999).

In the present study teachers found puppets to be valuable for all the reasons suggested above. Interestingly, the teaching team had little or no experience of using puppets as a teaching strategy before taking part in the CAR process and some experienced initial hesitation about using the puppets. However, after using puppets to deliver the SBL strategy, teachers were convinced that puppets could be a valuable and useful teaching tool. Thus, the present study contributes to the literature base for using puppets as part of SBL with young children.

Importance of creating a positive social-emotional environment

Communicating clear expectations for prosocial behaviour creates a positive social-emotional climate that is predictable and safe for children (Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Kemple, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2013). Early experiences in a positive social-emotional climate have been demonstrated in research to be a predictor of children's positive prosocial behaviour five years later (Howes, 2000). Similarly, Hamre and Pianta (2005) found that children identified as 'at-risk' of school failure, can keep pace with peers when they are learning in positive, emotionally-supportive environments. New Zealand research (Ulloa, 2011) conducted in ECE settings adds to this picture with the finding that teachers who use positive, emotionally aware strategies with children create environments characterised by greater positive interactions and reduced conflict compared to teachers who do not use such strategies.

Howes and Ritchie (2002) hold the view that classrooms are communities that become characterised by a shared culture of expectations and values. These authors insist that teachers need to be proactive in creating a positive social-emotional culture by communicating clear and consistent expectations for prosocial behaviour. In the context of the present study, the teachers developed consistent messages to communicate to children about expectations for prosocial behaviour which in turn helped to further develop a positive social-emotional learning environment. The findings show that teachers found it was easier to prompt children towards prosocial solutions to social conflicts and dilemmas because all children in the group had received the same messages about prosocial behaviours during the puppet hui. Furthermore, the teachers observed children demonstrating more effective prosocial behaviours towards each other following the communication of consistent expectations for prosocial behaviour. Consistent with the view of Howes and Ritche, these teachers shared their sense that the kindergarten social-emotional climate had a greater 'collective' feeling, with consistent values and expectations.

Naturalistic Teaching

The effectiveness of using naturalistic teaching (NT) strategies, embedded in the natural context of children's play as means of supporting children's peer interactions, has been established in the research literature (Brown et al., 2001; Chandler & Lubeck, 1992; Snyder et al., 2015). Specific to prosocial behaviour, Spivak and Farran (2012) concluded that deliberate and intentional verbal prompts, when combined with teacher empathy, were the more effective NT strategies for encouraging prosocial behaviour than passive strategies (e.g. modelling). This position is consistent with current messages related to intentional teaching which emphasise the critical role of the adult in actively supporting the child's learning through teachers' use of planned and purposeful actions to organise and support children's learning experiences (Epstein, 2009; Greishaber, 2010). The use of more planful and purposeful actions to support child learning are consistent with the results from the present study where the teachers noticed the effectiveness of using a NT strategy to prompt children's thinking about prosocial behaviours in the context of their play.

While the teachers in the present study reported earlier use of NT strategies, the implementation of their strategies changed as a result of the inquiry process. Instead of a sole reliance on NT strategies used in a variety of different ways and for different

purposes across the context of play, the use of NT strategies became specific to prompting children to revisit the learning and knowledge acquired during the puppet hui SBL strategy. Thus the teachers' use of NT strategies was more deliberate and purposeful, consistent with an intentional teaching approach. The prompts to children's thinking acted to encourage children to reflect and revisit their earlier learning experiences, in order to connect and draw on the learning from those experiences to inform responses in the current situation.

Integration of strategies

The pairing and integration of teaching and learning strategies, similar with the present study, is recommended in the literature (Sandall & Schwartz, 2008). Several researchers have proposed integrated approaches that are often presented in a multi-tiered model (Benedict et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2001; Fox & Little, 2001; Hemmeter et al., 2016; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2013). Hence, strategies supporting acquisition of learning are presented first in a group setting and the application and/or generalisation of learning is supported by NT strategies embedded in the natural context of play. Brown, Odom and Conroy (2001) working in the area of early childhood special education, support this approach by asserting that consistent expectations for social behaviours should be clearly communicated with the whole group of children, followed by supporting and reinforcing of these desired behaviours using NT strategies. These researchers suggest that the NT strategies act as a 'bridge' to ensure children can generalise the desired social behaviours in real contexts. Stormont, Lewis and Beckner (2005) go further when they suggest that teachers need to not only define expectations for social behaviours, but explicitly teach these behaviours as planned group learning experiences. Only then, these authors claim, can teachers support the transfer of children's learning to real contexts with the use of prompts and cues.

In a similar vein, Marquez et al., (2014) argue that teachers need to approach children's social skill learning in the same way as other academic learning by first providing instruction to enable acquisition of skills followed by opportunities to practice and build fluency. In the context of children's social behaviour development, this process entails providing explicit instruction to the whole group of children, followed by the support of prompts in real contexts where children are practicing and building fluency in their social skill development. Notably, explicit instruction does not have to mean a didactic style of teaching, explicit teaching, even in a group context can be supported in

developmentally appropriate ways, as illustrated by the present study. An alternative view is presented by Rosenthal and Gatt (2010) who contend that teachers should avoid planned lessons or structured curriculum to teach about social behaviours with young children, and instead focus on NT strategies in the moment to facilitate, guide and mediate children's interactions. The view of these researchers is based on the premise that "whatever is learned during moments of heightened emotions is retained well in one's memory" (p. 228).

However, the above premise was not evident in the present study where teachers observed children being able to think through resolutions to social conflict more effectively when emotions were reduced. Moreover, the findings in the present study are consistent with the contributions from neuroscience that suggest it is hard for learning to take place when emotions are heightened (Rushton, Juola-Rushton, & Larkin, 2010). The teachers found it was effective to integrate the teaching strategies so that expectations and learning about prosocial behaviours were communicated in the SBL puppet hui to the whole group of children and then supported and reinforced by the NT strategy of prompting thinking in the natural context of play. As noted earlier, the integration of strategies helped teachers to be more intentional and planful about the supports provided to children in the context of play.

Summary

This section has discussed key findings in relation to research question one which examined the ways in which teachers changed their teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours. The teachers adopted two new and improved teaching strategies which were found to be interdependent and complementary. Despite limited empirical research literature but consistent with recommendations in ECE, implementation of an SBL strategy using puppets was effective in achieving learning intentions to encourage children to consider the perspectives and feelings of others. Furthermore, the SBL strategy was found to support the creation of a positive social-emotional climate and a sense of community through the consistent communication of expectations for prosocial behaviours. The second strategy was an improvement in the way the teachers used NT strategies in the natural context of play by prompting children's thinking to revisit the SBL learning experience. As advocated by other researchers, these two strategies worked effectively in conjunction with each other as the SBL strategy focused on learning and the NT strategy supported the application and

generalisation of learning in context. Used together, the newly adopted strategies supported teachers' intentional teaching, consistent with increasing trends in ECE.

Collaborative action research as a means to support the adoption of new teaching practice

The findings from this study revealed that the inquiring processes of CAR supported the teachers to make improvements in their teaching practices. The time given to sustained questioning and discussion at the reflection stage supported the teachers to deepen their understandings, resulting in the opportunity to examine existing theories of practice and to develop shared understandings and intentions for developing children's prosocial behaviours. During the 'informing stage', the teachers engaged with literature that suggested alternative teaching strategies, supporting them to make shifts in their thinking about effective strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours. The 'observation stage' of the CAR cycle ensured that the inquiry was aligned to teachers' genuine experiences and concerns, resulting in an inquiry focus that was meaningful and relevant for the teaching team participants. These key findings are discussed in the following section.

Asking Questions and Exploring Thinking

Several researchers suggest that one of the benefits of systematic teacher inquiry is the allocation of time for questioning and discussion (Henderson, 2012; Mitchell & Cubey, 2003; Murphy, Bryant, & Ingram, 2014). A key aspect of inquiry involves teachers engaging in ongoing reflection of the changes being made in their practice. The findings from this study reveal that the teachers found it challenging to remain in the reflection stage, asking and exploring questions being raised. The teachers expressed how uncomfortable it felt as their instinctive urge was to move quickly to making suggestions for possible solutions and answers to the questions raised. Timperley et al. (2007) suggest that this reflective stage can be more challenging for experienced teachers who have a large repertoire of strategies and experiences to draw on and it can be challenging for these teachers to be comfortable with 'not knowing'. However, it is only when teachers are prepared to admit that they don't have all the answers that they are receptive to new information and ideas (Sinnema & Aitken, 2014). By staying with the dissonance created in the reflection stage, teachers can engage in a deeper examination of the tacit knowledge and assumptions underpinning their practice. Moon

(2004) contends reflection takes place on a continuum from superficial noticing, through making sense, to making meaning, working with meaning and finally to transformative learning. By staying with the uncomfortable stage of reflection, the teachers in the present study were able to slow the pace of their learning and achieve greater depth in their reflections, working towards the transformative learning stage of the continuum.

Engaging with Existing Theories of Practice

The teachers found a way to sustain their collaborative reflection, even though it was uncomfortable, by focusing reflective discussions around their ideals for children's prosocial behaviour and what that would look like in everyday interactions. These discussions led to an uncovering and examination of the values, theories, intentions, desired outcomes and beliefs underpinning current teaching strategies, which are collectively referred to by Timperley et al. (2007) as teachers' existing theories of practice. These researchers found that the most successful professional learning and development (PLD) studies were able to engage with teachers existing theories of practice from the outset. They argue that by supporting teachers to subject their existing theories of practice to critical scrutiny, through individual and collaborative reflection, teachers are able to examine tacit and routine practices. This scrutiny ensures practices can then be evaluated in light of new information and changes made accordingly.

Similarly, Fisher and Wood (2012) in their study tracking teachers' thinking and practice as they engaged in action research found that teachers characteristically moved through two stages as a result of the research process. At the first stage, teachers displayed what the authors refer to as *unconscious* competence and incompetence, where they were not fully aware of all they did or, did not do, to support children's learning, as it was habitual and unexamined. However, after the teachers reviewed the video-recorded data, and engaged in critical reflection they shifted to demonstrate a second stage of *conscious* awareness where their new awareness combined with new information led to more deliberate and intentional practices. In the present study, the findings are consistent with those of Timperley et al. (2007) and Fisher and Wood (2012), as the reflective discussions enabled previously unconscious practices, values and beliefs to be shared and examined. As a result, the teaching team developed clarity, cohesion and shared understandings about their values and goals for children's prosocial behaviours. Sergiovanni (2005) suggests that with shared understandings comes a sense

of community. In this study the sense of community was evident as the teachers worked together with their shared understandings, to develop new strategies that were more consistent, conscious and intentional.

Shifts in Thinking

The significance of introducing the teachers to alternative strategies and thinking has been highlighted as a characteristic of effective professional learning and development (PLD) in a synthesis by Mitchell and Cubey (2003). The findings in the present study reveal that the introduction of relevant literature at the informing stage was instrumental in achieving a shift in the teachers' thinking about possible teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours. Initially, the teachers expressed a preference for incidental teaching of prosocial behaviours in the natural context of play, with one teacher explicitly expressing her reluctance to teaching prosocial behaviours as a planned teaching experience. However, the introduction of literature served to provoke and inspire a shift in teachers' thinking leading to development of a scenario based learning strategy using puppets which was implemented at a total group level and outside the natural context of play as a planned group experience. Likewise, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) concluded that the introduction of alternative practices and information, aligned to teachers' learning needs was a characteristic of effective PLD following their synthesis of research. As a consequence these researchers included the investigation of new evidence and knowledge as a key component in their cyclical model for "teacher inquiry and knowledge-building to promote valued student outcomes" (p. 232).

Timperley, Parr and Bertanees (2009) used this inquiry model in a study to build teachers' pedagogical content knowledge through the introduction of new information and knowledge. These researchers assert that the positive outcomes are related to the teachers' content and knowledge-building being clearly linked to teachers' learning needs, as identified by earlier processes of observation and reflection. Making this link, ensured the new information, knowledge and evidence was relevant both to individual teacher's learning needs and to the specific demands of their context. Moreover, Aitken and Sinnema (2008) found that when teachers were given the opportunity to engage with research to support teaching inquiry, they not only relished the experience but made shifts in their thinking and practices as a result. Certainly in the present study, teachers were excited to engage with selected literature specifially chosen to extend

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their current thinking about teaching strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours. Identifying teachers' learning needs first, through the observation and reflections processes, ensured that the literature introduced at the informing stage was relevant and meaningful; enabling the teachers to connect with the information provided and make shifts in their teaching practice as a result.

Inquiry Focus Emerging from Observations

The data gathered by teachers in the observation stage was used to identify areas where teachers' current teaching practice was proving ineffective to support children's prosocial behaviours. The findings show that this use of observation data ensured that the inquiry focus emerged from the genuine concerns of the participants and was relevant to their context. For example, a common issue among the teaching team participants was a concern that their current practices were ineffective when dealing with situations initially defined as exclusion which led to the inquiry process developing three puppet hui specifically addressing this concern and introducing the concept of 'considerate declinal'. Mitchell and Cubey's (2003) research synthesis examining the most effective forms of PLD for ECE teachers, found that PLD was most effective when teachers actively identified issues they wanted to address from their own context. The researchers concluded that this characteristic ensured that the participants were engaged in PLD that was authentic and meaningful for them.

Connecting inquiry to the genuine concerns of participants is also consistent with the position of Stremmel (2012) who argues that in order to be legitimate, teacher inquiry must be relevant to the practice-based problems of the teacher participants. He contends that making this connection ensures that teachers have ownership of the inquiry process, building their own grounded theory of teaching as generators of knowledge rather than passive recipients or consumers of knowledge (Stremmel, 2015). Furthermore, the view that the inquiry focus should emerge from the genuine concerns of the participants, is reflective of many action research proponents who view action research as a democratic and authentic research approach where the locus of control should reside with the participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Elliot, 1978, as cited in McAteer, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). Additionally, further evidence of the importance of connecting to learners' lives and experiences to ensure relevant, meaningful and sustained learning, is evident in the synthesis of effective teaching practices completed by Aitken and Sinnema (2008). In the context of the present study, beginning by

engaging teachers in observations of their existing practice, ensured the focus and direction of the inquiry was grounded in teachers' genuine experiences and concerns about their teaching practice and the children's learning needs. Moreover, as the inquiry focus emerged from these initial observations the subsequent learning and action that developed in the following stages was relevant, meaningful and useful for the teachers and responsive to the needs of the children, in this specific context.

Summary

Question two explored the ways in which the CAR process supported teachers to make improvements in their teaching practice to support children's prosocial behaviours. Key processes that support change have also been well documented in the PLD literature. These included sustained reflection which supported teachers to examine their existing theories of practice, deepening their understanding and reaching collaborative understandings and intentions for children's prosocial behaviour. The informing stage of the CAR cycle, presented opportunities to consider alternative practices and information that extended the teachers' thinking about possible teaching strategies and resulted in their trying new strategies. Initial observations ensured the focus on the inquiry emerged from and was grounded in teachers' concerns and experiences, resulting in the development of teaching strategies that were meaningful, relevant and useful.

Intentional Teaching

The findings discussed previously have shown that the stages of the CAR process supported the teachers in this study to develop shared intentions for children's prosocial behaviour and learning. Establishing these shared intentions ensured teachers were able to be more intentional, deliberate and conscious about their teaching strategies with children. Moreover, these findings show that not only did teachers make their intentions for children more explicit (e.g. documented at the beginning of each hui script) but teachers were able to embrace teaching strategies that were more intentional.

At the outset of the research the teachers were *unconsiously* using naturalistic strategies as opportunities to introduce learning about prosocial behaviours in the context of children's play. By implication the teachers, although one teacher made the distinction clear, were rejecting the possibility of using more teacher-led strategies to support children's prosocial behaviour development and learning. However, by moving through

the stages of CAR cycle, including reflections on existing theories of practice and engaging with research evidence, teachers became conscious and intentional about their practice. The SBL strategy was a way to deliberately and planfully introduce learning opportunities about prosocial behaviours outside the context of children's play.

The processes related to gaining clarity and transparency of practice, values, and beliefs though CAR is likely to compliment the growing focus on the importance of intentional teaching to ensure children experience high quality early childhood education environments in ECE (Greishaber, 2010; McLaughlin, Aspden, & Snyder, 2016). Epstein (2009) argues that balance needs to be maintained between child-initiated and teacher-guided learning experiences and that there is a place for both. She contends that teacher-guided experiences can present children with "materials and experiences that they were less likely to encounter on their own and systems of knowledge they cannot create on their own" (p. 46). In the present study teachers intentionally presented children with an opportunity to connect their ideas about prosocial behaviours such as 'sharing' with the application of those ideas in real situations, which is not always obvious to all children.

Wells (2001) contends the knowledge only becomes truly known when it is connected and applied to solve real problems. The intentional and planned SBL strategy developed through CAR cycle made the connection between knowledge and its application possible. Furthermore, the consistent and intentional NT strategy of prompting thinking to revisit the puppet hui, further strengthened the connection between the knowledge acquired and its application. Taken together, the integrated findings from the present study suggest that PLD approaches such as CAR, does enable teachers to develop clarity and transparency about their teaching practice and to become more conscious, deliberate and intentional in their teaching.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the key findings from the research study in relation to the two research questions and concluded with a discussion about intentional teaching that sits across both questions. The following chapter provides concluding statements about the findings from the research study and explores limitations and delimitations. In addition, implications for practice are explored and suggestions for further research are presented.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how teachers might change their current teaching practices to more effectively support children's development of prosocial behaviours. To achieve these purposes, a small group of four early childhood education (ECE) teachers, including the researcher, participated in a collaborative action research (CAR) inquiry exploring how they could improve their current teaching practices to support children's prosocial behaviours. As a team, the teachers worked through the five stages of the action research cycle. Data were gathered from individual interviews with the teacher participants, individual reflections and group reflective discussions. Subsequently, the collated data was analysed using a thematic analysis and as a result the initial research question was refined to form two questions. The first question explored the ways in which teachers changed their teaching practices, while the second question explored how the CAR inquiry process supported the teachers to make these changes. Findings were then presented and discussed in relation to these two questions. This final chapter begins with a discussion of implications from this study followed by a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the research design. Some directions for future research are identified and the chapter concludes with some final thoughts about leadership in a collaborative learning situation.

Implications

Intentional group learning experiences

The findings from this research suggest that there could be an important role for intentional group learning experiences, to promote children's prosocial behaviour in early childhood settings. Intentional, planned group learning experiences have not traditionally been popular teaching strategies in the New Zealand ECE sector as historically the emphasis has been on "free play" with the control and direction of play and learning resting with the child (Stover, 2016). Concern about overly explicit teaching strategies, delivered out of context was a concern and tension for the teachers participating in this study. However, the findings indicate that intentional group learning experiences can be effective in promoting children's acquisition of skills when a

scenario-based learning approach is used. The use of a scenario-based learning strategy enabled the intentional group teaching experience to build on children's existing knowledge thus respecting children's contribution and participation in the learning process. Children's learning from the planned group learning experience was further enhanced when the strategy was used in combination with naturalistic strategies throughout the day.

Another potential benefit of the planned group learning experience, as enacted in the present study, was that the teaching team established consensus on key messages delivered to children. Consensus from shared planning and implementing of the group learning experience in turn resulted in more consistency in the ways individual teachers supported children using naturalistic strategies. Taken together, the findings from the present study suggest that it is possible to use intentional planned group teaching experiences to support children's learning. However, key features such as scenario-based experience and shared planning and implementation may be important for the creation of a community with shared values, while still respecting children's meaningful contribution to the process.

Te Whāriki, New Zealand's early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) emphasizes the importance of children's active contribution to the learning process through the inclusion of *empowerment* as one of the four key principles woven throughout the Te Whāriki curriculum document. The principle of empowerment, expressed as Whakamana in Te Reo Māori, reflects a cultural value to support children's growing independence, ensuring that children are "respected and valued as individuals" (p. 40). The use of carefully planned scenario-based learning experiences paired with complementary naturalistic strategies, may provide a means of balancing an intentional teaching approach with the principle of empowerment and the rich history of free play that is valued in the New Zealand context (Stover, 2016).

Sustained inquiry process

The findings from this research add support for the contention that being able to work through a sustained inquiry process makes a critical contribution to teachers' professional learning and development. Although it was initially challenging and uncomfortable for the teachers to focus on the stage of reflection, the inquiry process compelled the teachers to sustain this effort and provided time for focused attention. As

a result the teachers were able to engage more deeply with existing theories of practice and examine them in light of the evidence gathered from their own context. Furthermore, this examination also meant teachers were able to develop both the 'open-mindedness' and 'discernment' that Sinnema and Aitken (2014) argue is necessary when teachers engage with external research and evidence. These researchers assert teachers need to be open to alternative practices and possibilities suggested by external research and evidence, but also able to discern how this fits with the evidence from their own context. The sustained process of inquiry in this study supported the teachers to reach this stage of open-mindedness and discernment, leading to meaningful professional learning and development.

Collaborative inquiry

The findings from this research suggest that collaborative inquiry can be a significant contributor to meaningful change. Being able to create a sense of community with shared intentions was only possible because this inquiry process was collaborative. As Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) state, to effect change at the level of group culture, action research needs to be a collaborative endeavor. Furthermore, the teachers in this study found the opportunity for deep and focused dialogue about children's prosocial behaviours to be instrumental in lifting their practice to a new place. As pointed out, Wells (2001) argues that by trying to make ourselves understood in the process of dialogue we come to understand and moreover, by trying to understand others, we gain further understanding. Reaching new levels of understanding through dialogue and making change at the level of group culture only became a possibility because this research was collaborative.

Intentional teaching and social-emotional competence

The evidence suggests that social-emotional learning and development plays a crucial role in children's positive life experiences and outcomes (Jones et al., 2015; Ladd, et al., 1999; Sebanc, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2002). The focus of this study, developing prosocial behaviours, is one key component of children's social-emotional learning and development. However, as my personal observation of my two sons suggest, not all children seamlessly acquire social-emotional skills and behaviours. For children who need greater support, it is incumbent on ECE teachers to have a range of effective strategies that will enhance their learning. Intentional teaching strategies, particularly in the form of the SBL strategy employed in this study, could provide a way for teachers to

provide this more deliberate, specific and explicit help. In addition, as found in this study, intentional teaching strategies can provide a mechanism for children to benefit from the learning of their more experienced peers.

Using a more intentional approach to support children's prosocial learning and development may require teachers to make shifts in their thinking, particularly where intentional teaching comes in to conflict with existing theories of practice as it did for the teachers in this study. As this study has demonstrated, it is possible to make such shifts in thinking and practice through the implementation of effective and systematic PLD that supports teachers to scrutinize current practices in light of current evidence and research. In light of the importance of social-emotional learning for children's positive life outcomes, it is considered that PLD to encourage teachers to consider intentional teaching strategies as a means to support children's SEL development could be worthwhile.

Limitations and Delimitations

Data collection

Data in this project were collected using interviews with individual teachers at the beginning and conclusion of the project, teacher written reflections and reflective discussions during team meetings. However, the range of perspectives in the data is limited as each teacher only reported on their own teaching practice. Gathering data from only one perspective risks the possibility of the direction or outcomes of the inquiry will be restricted, while data from multiple sources can add depth and rigor (Stringer, 2008). Therefore, it is considered that the data could have been strengthened and enriched by observations of teaching practice by an external observer. In addition it may also have been useful for teachers to video-record episodes of their own teaching practice for later scrutiny and reflection. Gathering data using video and/or audio recording, can support accurate data collection rather than relying on a teacher's written notes, especially as there can be a time delay before teachers have the opportunity to make written notes about an event, given the busy and demanding nature of the ECE environment.

Dual role: researcher and participant

My dual role as a researcher and a participant created a complexity that is considered both a limitation and strength of this project. From a strength perspective, the project

benefited from the strong collaborative relationship I already had with the other participants and my position as an insider in the research setting. However, my dual role also created the risk of my personal perspective, values and beliefs privileging the research direction and outcome. For example, as the researcher I designed the interview and reflection questions, decided on the agenda for team group discussions, and sourced literature for the other participants to read. My control over these aspects of the research would have introduced elements of personal influence.

The tensions created through being an insider in an action research situation is widely explored in the research literature (e.g. Finlay & Gough, 2003; McAteer, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). To minimise the risk of my dual role being a significant limitation to the collaborative nature of the study, I engaged in meta-reflection in my research journal about my influences on the research process. By reflecting on the tensions I was experiencing and the potential influence of my dual role, I sought to increase my awareness and diminish the influence of my personal perspective.

Contribution of action research

It is important in the interpretation of the findings from this research, to bear in mind that action research is inherently contextualised and does not make any claims to be generalized to broader populations. However, as suggested by McAteer (2013) one of the strengths of action research is that it can uncover ways that the "particular speaks to the general" (p. 156). It is considered that the findings in this research may resonate with other ECE teachers and suggest ways they can address similar issues in their own contexts.

Further Research

While this research study explored two teaching practices to support prosocial behaviours, further research could explore the impact of different teaching strategies on the children's prosocial behaviour. A comparative study would be needed to determine the effect of teaching strategies targeted to support prosocial behaviour against the naturally occurring development in children's prosocial behaviour without a targeted intervention. Furthermore, such a study would also need to include measures of children's prosocial behaviour.

While this study found puppets to be an effective tool for delivering a SBL strategy, further research would be needed to determine if puppets were a key factor in the

success of this strategy, in comparison to other group delivery methods such as role play. A comparative study would be needed to determine the effect of different SBL delivery methods.

An additional direction for future research would be to investigate longer term impacts for teachers who participate in CAR inquiries some years after their participation. It would be interesting to establish if participation in CAR inquiry projects contributes to a sustained and/or significant change in teaching practice both related to the content of the CAR and in a wider sense to a teacher's approach to inquiry and critical reflection. Given the increasing number of teachers participating in such research and the current direction of the Ministry of Education to fund and support such inquiry initiatives, it could be valuable to establish if these inquiries have an impact over a longer term.

Thoughts about Leadership in a Collaborative Inquiry

From the outset of the research inquiry, I keenly felt a responsibility to provide leadership through the research process. I felt my colleagues were looking to me as the 'expert' to guide them through the CAR process of inquiry, and to ensure they felt confident, I needed to be confident about the process even though it was a new experience for me too. I felt the need to always be one step ahead, with a clear idea of where we would be going next. However, the following extract from my personal journal records the moment when there was a shift in this dynamic and the inquiry became more genuinely collaborative:

> *I felt like it was a weight lifted when I shared with the team that I was feeling really unclear about how we wanted to proceed and they responded by talking through the process and working out what might actually be the best way for it to work in practice. I think this shows a real development in our collaborative relationship as an action research project team, as earlier on I felt very much like I needed to have all the answers and feel very confident about the process to make sure everyone else did too. But now I was able to be honest about not knowing the best way to move forward and really turn it over to the team to see what they thought. (JNL:02.2016)*

As a result of this insight, I reflected that perhaps genuine leadership doesn't have to mean having all the answers. In fact, perhaps leadership that genuinely seeks to support collaboration is about being prepared to ask the questions without preconceptions of the answers but with a determination to truly listen and find an answer together.

Final Comments

Participation in this inquiry process has supported my teaching colleagues and I to move beyond our existing teaching practices and find new strategies to support children's prosocial behaviours. As a result of challenging ourselves through the inquiry process we have been open to new ideas and to find ways to make them work for us and the children in our context. Furthermore, we have developed a greater sense of professional community through our shared intentions for children's prosocial behaviours and we have been able to embrace the use of more intentional, planned and conscious teaching strategies. The benefits from our participation in this CAR inquiry extend beyond the specific content of prosocial behaviours, to strengthening our capacity for collaboration, reflection and relating theory to practice. Ultimately, these benefits will make us better placed to effectively meet the learning needs of the children in our care.

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Appendix A

Puppet script

Hui number one: Introducing sharing

Pig: Hey guess what, I'm starting kindy next week!

Frog: Me too!

Pig: Do you think kindy will be fun?

Frog: Yes, because my brother went there-he loved it!

Pig: My mum says at kindy you have to share

Frog: What's that?

Pig: I'm not sure, but I've heard that the children at flying start are good at sharing - let's ask them.

Narrator: okay, it looks like the puppets need our help, so what can we tell them about sharing?

[Leads children through discussion with the aim to see what children understand around the behavioural expectations for sharing].

Additional prompt questions could be - what sort of things do we share? Who can we share with? How can we share?

At the end, sum up contributions for puppets.

Pig: but why do you have to share?

Frog: yeah, why?

Narrator: Leads discussion about the reasons for sharing and again provides a summary for the puppets.

Pig: But what if I really want to play with something and someone else wants it? What do I do then?

Narrator: again facilitates the discussion around the strategies you might use in this situation and sums up for the puppets. Then tells puppets I hope that helps. I know you will have a great time at kindy, it's an amazing place. Please come back next week and tell us how you are getting on.

P1: okay bye

P2: Bye, see you next week!

Appendix B

Pre-implementation Critical Incident Reflection

1. Describe an incident from your recent professional experience that relates to your thinking about prosocial behaviours. Choose something that stood out to you as interesting, annoying thought-provoking or typical. The important thing is that it caused you to reflect, and to an extent, 'troubled' you.

2. How did you think about the incident when it happened? Include your emotional response and any initial reflection.

3. Now as you reflect on the incident, is there anything else that adds to your thinking? Maybe it involves thinking about why do you think you acted as you did? What in your experience or learning in educational theory made you act as you did.

4. Why do you think you have picked out this incident as 'critical'? What does it reveal to you about your practice? Is there something you would like to learn or address as a result of this incident?

Appendix C

Post-implementation Critical Incident Reflection

Name:

Date:

Notice/Describe:

Describe a recent incident where you got involved to support children through a social problem-solving situation, **but** where you noticed that your response was different in some way than it would have been before we started the research process. (Might only be a small difference, e.g. using different language, referring to the puppets etc.)

Analyse:

Think about questions like: What was your intention with the way you responded? What was your thinking about the incident when it happened? Was your response successful and/or effective?

Theorise:

Why did you respond in this way? Expand further on the theoretical ideas, beliefs or thinking that you were drawing on to inform your response and intentions in the moment.

Reflect for future:

What does this incident reveal to you about your teaching strategies and/or what do you think this means for your overall teaching practice in the future?

Appendix D

Nodes

- Nodes
- Cases
- Relationships
- Node Matrices

Sources

Nodes

- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports

Look for   ▼   Search In   ▼   Nodes

Nodes

Name	Sources	References
Additional outcomes	1	1
Areas of challenge	10	21
Desirable behaviours	12	34
Guiding principles	13	81
How	13	362
Appreciating child's perspect	1	1
Asking questions	5	13
Changes in practice	6	20
Clarifying process	8	54
Details and Logistics	6	36
How - reaching shared unde	12	64
Nervous about trying puppet	1	1
Sharing challenges	6	12
Sharing examples	7	35
Sharing results and insights	4	47
Suggestions	4	7
What - shared understandin	11	71
Motivation and acquisition	12	55
Reflecting data	1	6

Find Now   Clear   Advanced Find

What - shared understandings

10.02.2016Team MTG5   15.03.2016Team MTG7   16.12.2015Team MTG3   24.02.2016Team MTG6   27.01.2016Team MTG4   28.10.2015Team MTG1

<Internals\\16.12.2015T eamMTG3> - § 9 references coded [51.44% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.07% Coverage

when you were talking about, you know, what you had seen in valuing another's child's feelings or another, that got me thinking about actually who I am to go in and referee what's happening and actually, [instead] to try to sit back and say to the child well here's a strategy,

Reference 2 - 3.19% Coverage

and after talking with Lily about what you (to V) had brought in and you had brought in (to R), maybe it's about getting them to be resilient with those feelings and being able to cope with those overwhelming feelings,

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Appendix E

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MĀTAURANGA

Exploring teaching practices to support children's development of prosocial behaviours

My name is Lorna Duley and I am an early childhood education teacher. I have been working in the early childhood education sector for seven years and six months, and have been fully qualified for four years and six months. I am undertaking this research project entitled, *Exploring teaching practice to support children's development of prosocial behaviours*, to fulfil the requirements for my Master of Education (Early Years) with Massey University.

This project aims to explore how early childhood teachers might improve the way they support children to develop prosocial behaviours. Prosocial behaviours can be defined as acts of helpfulness, kindness, sharing and cooperation that demonstrate consideration for and awareness of, the needs of others. I have chosen to focus on prosocial behaviours, because the research shows that children who demonstrate these behaviours are more likely to form and maintain reciprocal friendships with their peers. Furthermore, as much of our learning is socially constructed through relationships with others, children who demonstrate prosocial behaviours have the opportunity to participate more effectively in learning opportunities, with the advantages this provides also being demonstrated in other research.

The action research methodology to be used for this project will provide an opportunity for all the participants to work together in a collaborative manner. This means that while I will contribute new information and knowledge from my review of the literature, all the participants will be able to contribute their experiences and expertise effectively forming a professional community of inquiry.

There are three phases to the research plan and an overview of this plan with timings is attached.

Phase one reviews current practices. During this phase teacher participants will gather data about their own practice. There will be various options for this data collection process with the choice of data collection method being selected by each individual participant to best meet their needs and preferences. Participants will have extra non-contact time on Mondays or Tuesdays to work on this data collection process, as I will provide cover. In addition, this phase will also involve participation in one interview and one team discussion, each scheduled to take one hour.

Phase two focuses on introducing potential new strategies, ideas and information, based on the information emerging in the review phase. This will involve participation in two team discussions, with one scheduled for mid-December and one in mid-January, again with each one scheduled for one hour.

Phase three focuses on implementation of new practices and approaches, based on what we have learned. In this phase teacher participants will again gather some data and accordingly extra non-contact time will be provided. In addition there will be three team discussions spread over this 11 week phase, each scheduled for one hour. Following the conclusion of this phase teacher participants will participate in one further interview as a final evaluation of the research project.

The names of the kindergarten and teachers who participate will not be used in my thesis. In the event that children are referred to in any of the data collected, the protection of pseudonyms will be applied. However as I will be declaring myself as a participant teacher who is also the author of the final report, it is possible that a determined reader could identify the kindergarten by investigating my employment.

All data collected for this purpose of this project will be handled with the utmost care and concern for privacy and confidentiality. Written data and consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet on site at the kindergarten. Digital data will be stored on my computer at home and protected by password only access. In the event that a teacher participant creates personal data such as a reflective research journal, this will remain the personal property of that teacher participant unless they give permission for excerpts from this record to be used as data for the research project.

I would like to invite you to participate in this project however 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 study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off an any time during an interview or team discussion;
- 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 findings when it is concluded.

For further information about the research project, please contact:

Lorna Duley
Email: llxduley@gmail.com

The supervisors for this study may also be contacted:

Dr Tara McLaughin
Senior Lecturer in Early Years
Institute of Education
Massey University
Telephone: (06) 3569099 ext. 84312
Email: T.W.McLaughlin@massey.ac.nz

Dr Alison Sewell
Senior Lecturer
Institute of Education
Massey University
Telephone: (06) 3569099 ext. 84456
Email: A.M.Sewell@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/49). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contactDr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz
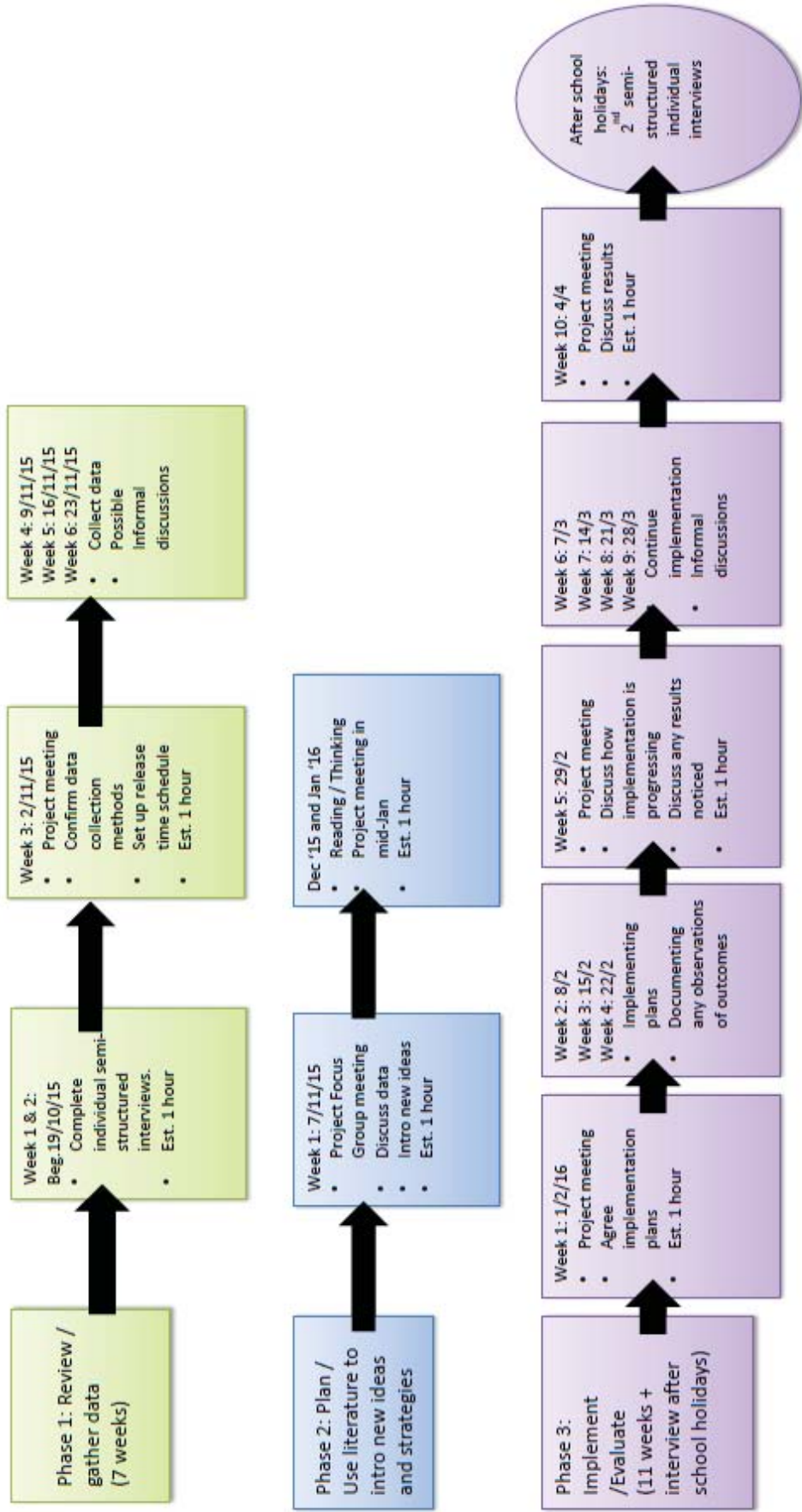
Thank you for taking the time to consider your involvement in this research project, however can I please reiterate again that you are under no obligation to accept this invitation.
Please complete the attached consent form to indicate your agreement or non-agreement to participate and return to me by the _____ of October.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Duley.

Research Plan

Phase 1: Review / gather data (7 weeks)

Week 1 & 2: Beg. 19/10/15
- Complete individual semi-structured interviews.
- Est. 1 hour

Week 3: 2/11/15
- Project meeting
- Confirm data collection methods
- Set up release time schedule
- Est. 1 hour

Week 4: 9/11/15
Week 5: 16/11/15
Week 6: 23/11/15
- Collect data
- Possible Informal discussions

Phase 2: Plan / Use literature to intro new ideas and strategies

Week 1: 7/11/15
- Project Focus Group meeting
- Discuss data
- Intro new ideas
- Est. 1 hour

Dec '15 and Jan '16
- Reading / Thinking
- Project meeting in mid-Jan
- Est. 1 hour

Phase 3: Implement /Evaluate (11 weeks + interview after school holidays)

Week 1: 1/2/16
- Project meeting
- Agree implementation plans
- Est. 1 hour

Week 2: 8/2
Week 3: 15/2
Week 4: 22/2
- Implementing plans
- Documenting any observations of outcomes

Week 5: 29/2
- Project meeting
- Discuss how implementation is progressing
- Discuss any results noticed
- Est. 1 hour

Week 6: 7/3
Week 7: 14/3
Week 8: 21/3
Week 9: 28/3
- Continue implementation
- Informal discussions

Week 10: 4/4
- Project meeting
- Discuss results
- Est. 1 hour

After school holidays: 2nd semi-structured individual interviews

Note: Dates are all Mondays to note the beginning of the week in which that event will occur, but do not necessarily represent the date of the meeting/interview.

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Appendix F

Puppet Script 3 – 18 March 2016

Scenario – "Are we still friends?"

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Objectives:

   1) To introduce the idea that you can still be friends even
      though you are not playing together at that moment
   2) To introduce use of 'friendly words' to tell someone you
      don't want to play with them right now
   3) Begin to raise the idea of respectful communication that
      is considerate of other people's feelings
   4) To discuss what you can do if someone doesn't want to play
      with you right now
```

Pig is playing with playdough.

Koala comes over

Koala: Hey Piggie, do you want to play mums and dads?

Pig: No, I'm playing with the playdough

Koala: Oh (looks sad) But are you still my friend?

Pauses there

Narrator asks children: What do you think? Is Piggie still Koala's friend? If children respond that Piggie is still Koala's friend, have the Piggie tell the Koala that. If not, take them through a discussion about why not.

Pig: I am your friend but I don't want to play mums and dads, I want to do playdough

Narrator: Ask children about how Koala is feeling. Encourage children to think about something kind that Pig could say – e.g. I will play Mums and Dads with you later. What should Koala do now?