Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Food for Thought

"Conflict is open and sometimes raucous but always communal, a public encounter in which it is possible for everyone to win by learning and growing…conflict is the dynamic by which we test ideas in the open, in a communal effort to stretch each other and make better sense of the world."

(Palmer, 1998, p. 103)

As a young child, visiting my grandparents, I remember witnessing an argument between my mother and her sisters. At the end of which I remember my mother saying, "Sorry, I didn't know you felt that way". Since then I have gone on to have numerous arguments and conflicts of my own which have ended in different variations of the above apology. When there is conflict, there is a need to restore balance; a need to change and accommodate the other person's view; a desire to be understood and to understand; and a need for consensus (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). As well, there is sometimes a need to maintain certain conflicts whether for continuation of a theme in play or to sustain relationships forged by and through conflicts.

As a researcher and a teacher in a preschool classroom I was intrigued by children's ability to quickly seek out friends and become one with the culture of the classroom – a culture that appeared to be constantly changing and moving

along with the interactive dynamics of the class. The more the children got to know each other, the more complex their interactions became and relational processes such as conflict started taking on a new meaning. The children were constantly negotiating their personal understanding of each other. Some of this understanding appeared to have arrived through conflict. A dispute over an orange marker resulted in a later declaration, "We are friends, her favorite color is orange also."

Conflicts are a common occurrence, whether in the social or the mental realm. Where there is interaction, disagreements and opposition are inevitable. Opposition establishes a relationship between combatants, which in turn directs interaction (Ross & Conant, 1992). Thus conflict creates its own social process and has implications for the social order of the entire classroom culture that extends beyond the boundaries of any particular dispute. Conflict, then, holds great potential for not only individual development but also for the organization of relationships and social structures.

The dialectic theory of development derives from Hegel's (Kojeve, Queneau, & Nicholas, 1980) view of dialectic and refers to the logical method of his philosophy, which proceeds from thesis, through antithesis to synthesis. This view emphasizes the role of contradiction and conflict in the process of change. According to Hegel's principle of dialectic change, all phenomena constantly undergo change and move towards a synthesis of conflicting and contradictory elements. These conflicts and contradictions range from the intrapsychic to the

interpersonal. Conflict is seen as necessary for causing a change in thinking. Human beings live in a social environment and this by itself offers a multitude of contradictory forces with which one must interact. For example there is the need to fit in and yet maintain one's own identity and individuality, the need to interact and share, and yet the need to maintain privacy. The resolution or synthesis of these contradictions is seen as dialectical change (Kojeve, Queneau, & Nicholas, 1980). The process resulting from change is dynamic.

Developmental change emerges because of the dialectic between the individual and society (i.e., other people) as well as conflicts within people – and is an essential part of life and as such must be regarded as intrinsic to the human condition (Shantz & Hartup, 1992). While they are unavoidable they also have a tendency to be unpredictable. Not only do emotions and mental states vary between individuals, but they also can vary within an individual at various stages during the same conflict. Moreover, individual reaction to conflicts is dependent on the context. For example a minor conflict may evoke stronger reactions if the individual is tired or hungry.

Despite the theoretical significance of conflict, only recently has any effort been devoted directly to the developmental analysis of social conflict. Researchers have paid more attention to behaviors that arise within the context of conflict, such as conflict resolution strategies, aggression, anxiety, and disciplining techniques. The few studies that have explored the phenomena of social conflict directly have focussed on the basic motivational and cognitive

features of the interaction. The questions of who, what, when, where, and how have been examined. They have studied the nature and context of conflicts by studying the kinds of issues over which children fight (Corsaro, 1985; Shantz & Shantz, 1985; Smith, Inder, & Ratcliff, 1995), the kind of behavioral tactics they use while in dispute (verbal or physical aggression), the degree of success in conflicts, and the rate of occurrence of conflicts (Shantz & Shantz, 1985). Very little effort has been made to understand the meaning that the children make of their conflicts with each other.

Conflict as a social phenomenon has also been studied in fragments, with special attention being given to the initiation, maintenance, and resolution of disputes (see Verbeek, Hartup, & Collins, 2000), and the maturational effects on antecedents and outcomes of peer conflict (Kinoshita, Saito, & Matsunaga, 1993). In most of the above-mentioned studies, conflict has been examined as an isolated episode instead of as a part of a continuum in a relational process. In the light of the theoretical importance placed upon the role of conflict in development there is a need to go beyond examining the surface causes and enactment of conflict. A need to examine in depth the larger picture of what the conflict stands for in the organization of a child's understanding of the world. Or, to put it more profoundly in the words of Valsiner and Cairns (1992), "Development takes place under conditions of interpersonal relationships that are both harmonious and conflictual. How these two masters of development are simultaneously served remains a compelling yet incomplete story" (p. 33). While there are numerous studies that

demonstrate the developmental significance of close relationships and prosocial behaviors there is a paucity of studies that look at the developmental aspects of conflict. This study takes a step towards trying to understand the conflictual process and the meaning children make of it.

The Need to Know

The main purpose of this study was to understand the meaning of children's conflict as it unfolded within a social and cultural context. Recent studies have forsaken the experimental and manipulated scenarios for studying conflict and moved on to observing children in more naturalistic settings. Yet, there are only a handful of studies that have examined conflict using ethnographic methods (Rizzo, 1989; Verbeek, 1997). The length of time spent in the midst of young children observing and learning about their culture helps in giving a more in-depth picture of what the role of conflict really is in the children's understanding of their own culture and relationships.

Conflicts thus far has been viewed as episodes in a child's daily functioning with little consideration to either the antecedents or the ongoing dynamics of the classroom as a whole. In this study conflict is looked upon as a relational process that needs to be observed and analyzed within the multiple contexts within which it takes place. It is necessary to expand our understanding of children's disputes and the meanings they make of them through contextually relevant methods that include natural observations and dialogic interviews.

In the present study children's disputes are seen as situated within the multiple realities of classroom culture, friendships, and other peer relationships and an interpretative approach is used to explore the meaning making process that has been found to be implicit in such disputes (see Ross & Conant, 1992). Or to put it more strongly, in Hay's (1984) words, "we must face the fact that young humans will invariably be engaging in conflict, and that they may be learning important things about the social world while arguing and fighting" (p. 40).

Making Meaning

It has been long known that conflicts provide a critical context for the development of social and cognitive competencies (Arsenio & Cooperman, 1996; Damon & Killen, 1982; Hartup 1996). As a teacher, I believe that even the youngest of our children are capable of constructing meaning of and about their world. In working with children, I could not help but notice the dissonance between what we espouse as constructivist educators and what we do in practice. While children are thought capable and competent of negotiating their own curriculum, the model and the implementation of it seems to dither when it comes to seeing them as capable of handling peer conflicts. I believe that children learn from their conflict experiences, and as they build on this knowledge they get to develop schemas for handling other similar experiences.

It is now known that conflict plays a key role in child's understanding of relationships (Sims, Hutchins, & Taylor, 1997). For better or for worse, the majority of studies on children's conflict have focussed either on individual

differences and conflict occurrence or on studying and identifying the best resolution technique used by children. Even though major human development theories have stressed the importance of conflict in social and cognitive development, it is surprising that more researchers have not tried to identify and highlight the positive aspects of conflict in children's interaction. Generally the term conflict has gone from being viewed as a possible mechanism for development to being viewed as an anomaly that needs to be eliminated or remedied (Valsiner & Cairns, 1992). Valsiner and Cairns proposed that, since the scientific literature is not free from "socially defined constraints," the focus on children's conflict has been rather narrow. They posit that we need to widen our understanding of conflicts.

In reviewing the literature on conflict one finds that most studies have examined conflict as an isolated episode in children's activity, with no or little consideration being given to the antecedents or outcomes of their conflict. There seems to be an overwhelming concern with the need to resolve conflict even though numerous studies (see chapter two for discussion) have now indicated that conflict resolution does not appear to be necessary for continued interaction. Opponent interactions that extend beyond immediate conflict outcome have largely been ignored in the developmental literature.

The few studies that have examined at conflict as a relational process have focused mainly on conflicts that take place in dyads. I believe that we have moved beyond seeing meaning and culture creation solely as an individual process or in

fact even as a product of a one-on-one interaction. When a conflict occurs between two or more people in the classroom, it often has the potential to change the social dynamics of the entire class. There is a pressing need to move beyond dyads and to look at conflict as a social process that has the potential to effect and transform others around the protagonists. Rizzo (1992), in studying the detailed case histories he generated from ethnographic observations was able to develop a deeper understanding regarding the nature and purpose of conflicts in friendship dyads. I wish to expand this understanding to include an entire classroom and to examine the meaning making process that the classroom shares as a community as individuals within that culture begin making meaning of their relationships with each other and their relationship to the culture.

The purpose of this study was not to fit conflict into a linear or a cyclical model that assumes a certain amount of predictability between interaction and development or presumes any other causality. In looking for a metaphor that best describes my model I borrow from Susan Kaplan (1987) and propose a "kaleidoscope." The kaleidoscope metaphor is appealing and appropriate for a variety of reasons. It fits my notion of culture, which I believe is neither bestowed on children nor absorbed by them. Rather meaning is inherent in culture like the pieces in a kaleidoscope, and a child may use or arrange them as he/she chooses. Similarly, Kaplan describes the model as "bits that are stored internally interacting with each other . . . set in motion by an observer . . . it is a reflective process . . . emergent patterns sometimes fade and then come into focus. The

basic elements are finite and always the same (though all are not always used), but the results are new connections and transformation into different . . . shapes" (p. 53). There is a certain amount of randomness in the process that is appealing and appropriate.

In order to examine the kaleidoscopic variety and intricacies of preschooler's conflict I conducted this research in two settings and used the following five questions to guide my research:

Guiding Questions

✓ How are the social dynamics of the peer culture of the classroom reflected in conflict processes?

✓ How are understandings of relationships played out in conflicts?

✓ How do conflicts evolve and what maintains conflicts?

✓ In what way, if any, do conflict scenarios carry over to other activities once the conflict is seemingly over?

✓ What role does the teacher play in the meaning-creation process that conflict offers?

In order to answer these questions, it was not enough to be able to tally the number of conflicts taking place in the classroom or to even attend to all of them. It was necessary to get close to the disputing children to listen to what they had to say and to observe how what they said affected the other/s. As a qualitative researcher I wanted to capture what the children said and did as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world (Sevigny, 1981). Conflict is a social

exchange and as such it requires the involvement of more than one person. Each

protagonist in a conflict brings a developmental history, attributes, and

capabilities (Hay, 1984). Therefore, it is necessary to be able to piece together the

multiple contexts that ultimately inform a single exchange between children.

While this sounds like a forbidding task it becomes more manageable when the

researcher is able to spend a longer period of time in the midst of the children as

well as be able to gather additional information from the teachers and other

resources around the room (documents, portfolios, cubbies etc.,).

Chapter 2

PARADIGMS AND PERSPECTIVES

This chapter reviews relevant literature that guides this exploration of children's conflict. Most of the research studies cited here have been conducted in the United States using western measurements and guided by western theories of human development. I have deliberately limited my review to studies that involve children between the ages of three and seven. I believe that the preschool years provide an ideal setting for the study of social interactions such as conflict since the curriculum in many preschools allows for large periods of time when the children can interact freely with each other. I will briefly differentiate between aggression and conflict and then move on to some of the pertinent research carried out over the past twenty years. I will also briefly touch on the theories that have influenced my choice of topic and the theoretical framework that guided my endeavor to study the complex process of children's conflict.

Aggression and Conflict

Conflict is a necessary part of the early socialization process of children and it can fulfill both a prosocial and an antisocial role in human development and cultural evolution (Strayer & Noel, 1986). Conflicts can serve as extremely useful learning opportunities as they provide the motivation for children to question their assumptions and to attempt to see others' perspectives (Erwin, 1993). The notion

of conflict is at the heart of almost all major theories of human development.

Many theorists have perceived the role of social conflict in development as a

stimulus for change and adaptation. However, in spite of the importance of

conflict in development, interpersonal conflict generally has been understood as

antisocial and aggressive (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1985). This uneasiness with

conflict could be attributed to the fact that studies in the past have often used the

terms "aggression" and "conflict" synonymously. The failure to distinguish

aggression from conflict is unfortunate for many reasons. First, studies that have

managed to keep the rates of aggression and conflict distinct have found that the

two variables do not relate to each other. D. W. Shantz (1986) found that peer

rejection is better predicted by children's participation in peer conflict than by

aggressiveness. Second, treating the two constructs alike hides the fact that

conflict often serves as a broader context in which aggression occurs. Last, but

not least, keeping conflict and aggression distinct helps one look more closely at

the individual differences in children and the way they deal with conflicts;

aggressive children differ in the extent to which their aggression is embedded in

conflict (Perry, Perry, & Kennedy, 1992).

It is necessary at this point to differentiate between aggression and

conflict. Though aggression often arises out of situations of social conflict, it is

different from conflict. Hence, aggression is often a symptom of conflict, i.e.,

while aggression may lead to conflicts all conflicts are not aggressive. Aggression

has been defined as "intentional behavior which causes distress or harm to another

person" (Smith, 1989, p. 75), while conflict involves incompatible goals and overt opposition of the actions or statements of one person by another (Shantz, 1987). It is also important to distinguish between serious and playful aggression or "rough and tumble." While rough and tumble play is friendly and sociable (Smith, 1989), aggressive behavior usually ends in the termination of play.

Research and Findings

Though children use both violent and non-violent ways of coping with conflict situations, most eventually learn how to cooperate, take turns, share, and enjoy different roles in a game (Smith, Inder, & Ratcliff, 1995). Most research on children's conflict has focused on the content, incidence, duration, strategies, and outcomes (see Shantz, 1987; Smith, 1989). Most conflicts have been found to be short in duration and lacking in physical aggression (Laursen & Hartup, 1989: Shantz, 1987). The largest percentage of conflict amongst toddlers and preschoolers is reported to involve possession or use of objects, followed by the actions or inaction of another child (Hay, 1984; Killen & Turiel, 1991). Corsaro (1985) found that children's desire to maintain participation and protect interactive space was a major cause of conflict. Other major causes of conflict have been listed as social intrusiveness, breaking of rules, disagreement in fantasy role enactment, and unprovoked physical attacks (Killen & Smetana, 1999; Ross & Conant 1992; Turiel, 1983, 1998). Increased awareness of others, development of shared understanding among peers, and an increased sense of moral autonomy

have been found to be most effective in resolving conflicts (Dunn, 1987;Turiel, 1998). Even though there are studies that show preschool conflicts are usually settled without adult intervention, and result in a clear win/loss situation followed by a cheerful resumption of play (e.g., Laursen & Hartup, 1989; Shantz, 1987; Smith 1989), there is a cultural tendency in professional practice towards adult or teacher intervention in classrooms.

A large body of research studies suggests that conflict is a normal part of most spontaneous social interaction between children. It occurs rather frequently and briefly, is quickly resolved and lacking in aggression, with play interactions resuming quickly (Laursen & Hartup, 1989; Shantz, 1987; Smith, Inder, & Ratcliff, 1995; Vespo, Penderson, & Hay, 1995). In contrast, aggression is usually associated with high affect and usually resulted in termination of interaction (Laursen & Hartup, 1989). In one study, a small number of children who indulged in chronic aggressive modes of peer interaction developed lifelong patterns of antisocial behavior (Katz & McCellan, 1991; Patterson, DeBarsyhe, & Ramsey, 1989). While some studies found that disputes over possession of objects were a predominant cause of conflict (Kinoshita, Saito, & Matsunaga, 1993; Shantz, 1987; Vespo et al., 1995), others found that human interaction and relationship was the primary focus of most conflicts (Corsaro, 1985; Laursen & Hartup, 1989; Rizzo, 1992; Sims, Hutchins, & Taylor, 1997; Smith, Inder, & Ratcliff, 1995).

Individual and Gender Effects

In trying to understand conflict a number of studies have focused on the causality of conflicts. Towards this end researchers have examined individual and gender differences. Some of the findings are presented below. Studies of both aggression and conflict indicate that males are involved in all kinds of disputes more than females (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987; Shantz & Shantz, 1985). Hartup (1974) found that boys 4-7 years old showed more aggression overall, but that the difference was primarily due to hostile aggression rather than instrumental aggression. While boys indulged in more rough-and-tumble play (Humphreys & Smith, 1987), Laursen and Hartup (1989) found that there were no gender differences in issues regarding what the children disagreed on, the total amount of conflict, or the use of aggression. People's expectation and societal attitude, Klama (1988) points out, is what exaggerates the distinction between gender and aggression, rather than what is actually observed.

Miller, Danaher, and Forbes (1986) explored differences in the ways that young children coped with conflict. Consistent with other findings, boys were involved in more conflicts than girls and once involved they used threat and physical force significantly more often. Girls tended to defuse conflict and attempt to restore social harmony. Boys behaved quite similarly when interacting with either sex, but girls appeared to use more heavy handed strategies when dealing with boys. Smith et al. (1995) found that boys' conflicts arose mostly out

of rough and tumble activity, whereas girl's conflicts arose out of assertive behavior or hostile aggression. They also found that girl's conflicts were more verbal than boys.

Arsenio and Killen (1996) undertook a study of the relationships among preschoolers' emotion, conflict, and aggression. Their goal was to examine whether children's emotions were connected differentially with their aggressive and non-aggressive conflicts and to examine the different contexts in which their emotions emerged. A previous study (Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990) had found that children's general moods were among the strongest predictors of their prosocial reasoning and behavior. Arsenio and Killen (1996) found that children's moods were unrelated to their conflict behavior, but actual conflict related emotions had multiple connections with their participation in non-aggressive conflicts. Almost 90% of the time during non-conflict times they were happy and few emotions (except anger) were displayed during conflict. Children frequently expressed happiness during aggression, and those who expressed such aggression-related happiness were more likely to initiate violence.

Several studies have established a link between sociometric status and conflict resolution. Bryant (1992) found that their peers viewed popular children as more reconciliatory than their rejected peers. Studies using children's responses to hypothetical conflict scenarios and to limited-resource conditions provide convergent evidence (Chung & Asher, 1996; French & Waas, 1987; Putallaz & Sheppard, 1990).

Related Behaviors

Following Kohlberg's (1969) constructivist theory of moral development a number of theorists have proposed that the development of moral reasoning could be facilitated by cognitive conflict (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1985; Turiel, 1974). Turiel (1983) differentiated the nature of social interactions into two domains - morality and social convention. Nucci (1985) pointed out that the forms of peer conflict within the moral domain are qualitatively different from those associated with social conventions. In three observational studies (Nucci, 1985; Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Nucci & Turiel, 1978) child observers were interviewed about transgressions they had witnessed. They were asked whether these acts would have been right or wrong if there were no rules about them. In the case of conventional events, 80% of the children thought it would be alright to continue that very act. On the other hand, over 80 % of the children felt it would be wrong to engage in actions observed in a moral event even if there were no rules about it. Thus, moral systems can be looked at as an elaborate form of conflict resolution, seeking fairness, and social integration in a competitive world (Alexander, 1987; deWaal, 1996).

Much effort has been put into the study of conflict resolution. Verbeek, Hartup, and Collins (2000) pointed out that strategies aimed at ending conflict can be unilateral (power assertion or coercion) or bilateral (negotiation or conciliation). They classified the immediate outcome or resolution in two categories: distributive and variable. A distributive outcome referred to a situation

where one child's gain is another's loss. A variable outcome suggested a situation where both benefit from the resolution. A variation of the latter outcome can also be integrative in that a shared interest in social interaction provides the basis for a mutually beneficial resolution. Sometimes too, children sharing long term relationships may reconcile their differences to preserve the integrity of the relationship (de Waal, 2000). Much of the literature focuses on conflict taking place in dyads of close peers.

Conflict Management

Recently, Laursen et al (1989) used a meta-analytic approach to take an overall look at developmental differences in peer conflict management. They analyzed 25 studies dealing with dyadic conflict among peers who had been classified as acquaintances, friends, romantic partners, and siblings. The meta-analysis showed that on average peers managed conflicts more often with negotiation than with coercion or disengagement. There were significant developmental contrasts. Children (aged 2-10) commonly employed coercion, whereas adolescents (aged 11-18) frequently employed negotiation as well as coercion, and young adults (aged 19-25) more often resorted to either negotiation or disengagement. This meta-analysis did not consider the aftermath of peer conflict. Recent cross-cultural findings show that young children transformed a significant amount of distributive outcomes into integrative resolutions after a "cooling off" period (Butovskaya, Verbeek, Ljungberg, & Lunardini, 2000;

Verbeek, 1997). Considering such post conflict reconciliation implies that young children are considerably more constructive in their approach to conflict than one would infer from the meta-analysis.

Cultural Effects

Most cross cultural studies on conflict (Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990; see Lewis, 1996; Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996) have been influenced by the assumption that variations in social practices can be explained by essential features of cultures, such as individualism and collectivism or autonomy and interdependence (Triandis, 1989, 1990). Zahn-Waxler and colleagues (1996) investigated Japanese and American preschool children's response to hypothetical interpersonal dilemmas as a function of culture, gender, and socialization. They found that U. S. children showed more anger, more aggressive behavior and language, and less regulation of emotions than did their Japanese counterparts, across different contexts of measurement. Japanese children were less likely to acknowledge negative emotion in a forced-choice situation. While American children enacted a broader range of both positive and negative behaviors they also showed a "readiness to solve problems through force, easy access to aggressive solutions, and finely honed capacities to create diverse, complex scripts for coping with problems" (p. 2473). They attributed the relatively high levels of aggression in U. S. children to "ingrained cultural values that condone the use of force." While this may very well be true, it is impossible

to confirm this without direct observations of children in real life dilemmas. The suggestion (Zahn-Waxler, et al., 1996) that Japanese children appear to have a strong internalized sanctions regarding issues of harming others seems to contradict Tobin, Wu, and Ericson's (1989) observations that in Japanese culture young children's negative behaviors are viewed as age appropriate during the preschool years and are more often tolerated and indulged than for children in Western cultures. The findings are provocative in that they suggest that at a very young age (the study involved preschool children), children from Japanese and American cultures, normatively, have different scripts for responding to interpersonal dilemmas. However, one must be cautious so as not to represent the Eastern and Western cultures as either monolithic or homogeneous.

While differences in the conflicts of children from different cultures may provide interesting insight into the relational processes of meaning making in those cultures, most of the studies thus far have focused on comparing cultural differences in conflict behavior even though their use of Western theories and Western measurements does not lend itself to direct cross-cultural comparisons.

In a longitudinal study (Kinoshita, et al, 1993) conducted over a period of three years Kinoshito et al. (1993) found that the developmental changes in the antecedents and outcomes of peer conflict among preschool children in Japan were consistent with those of children in America. The results indicated that there are age-related developmental changes in peer conflict and these are supported by socio-cognitive developments, such as communication skills, a sense of justice,

and social interaction skills that in turn were accelerated by social interactions among peers.

In a study of disputes among Italian and American children, Corsaro and Rizzo (1990) found that in both cultures the nature and types of conflict were tied to the features of ongoing interactions within the context of peer culture. The major difference in their disputes was found to be the over all pervasiveness and importance of language and verbal routines in the peer culture of the Italian children. They found that disputes (discussione) were valued as a skill and enjoyed as an end in itself. Corsaro and Rizzo (1990) commented that disputes and arguments served the purpose of developing children's communicative competence and social knowledge.

Other Influences

The study that has most influenced my study is Rizzo's (1989) interpretive analysis of the role of conflict in friendship development among a group of American first-grade children. He used ethnographic methods combined with an interpretative approach and argued that these are particularly appropriate for research of relational processes and aid the researcher in embedding interactive events in their historical and sociocultural contexts. Using such methods, Rizzo compiled detailed interactive histories of friendship dyads. Analyzing these case histories improved Rizzo's understanding of the individual events and aided him in identifying more pervasive developmental processes of relationship building.

The results suggest that children often instigate disputes with friends in an effort to bring about positive changes in the friend's behavior. These disputes also often lead to careful reflection by both members of the dyad and thus provide the pair with opportunity to work out the terms of their relationships and gain insight into the rights and obligations of friendship. While the focus of my study goes beyond dyadic relationships, the generation of interactive histories will help me explore the broader context within which meanings and peer cultures are created.

The literature on conflict is as broad in its scope as it is in sheer volume. I will not spend time discussing conflict resolution strategies and intervention techniques except to echo Bryant's (1992) comment that "the best approach to conflict resolution has not been determined." While popular children may be more skilled at resolving conflicts their conflict resolution skills are not always perfectly honed (Bryant, 1992). Also, although calm discussions may sound like the proper way to resolve conflicts, it has not been empirically verified as the best strategy for all situations, especially in light of the finding that controversial children have frequently been identified as leaders (Coie, Dodge, & Coppetelli, 1982).

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The dialectic theory (Riegel, 1976) emphasizes the role of contradiction and conflict in the process of change. According to Hegel's principle of dialectic change, all phenomena constantly undergo change and move towards a synthesis of conflicting and contradictory elements. These conflicts and contradictions range from intrapsychic conflict to interpersonal, from nature and nurture to cultural and sociological.

Riegel (1976) characterized dialectic as a process whereby the world is comprehended as a complex of processes, in which things go through a continuous process of "coming into being and passing away" and in this seemingly incidental change a progressive development is seen as taking place. Context was very important to this way of thinking. An organism existed within a socio-historic context and as such the past experiences informed and influenced the present interactions and the cumulative experience of the past and present would work at shaping the future. Development, however, was seen as being embedded in the need to synthesize contradictory forces and influences in the environment. Conflict was seen as necessary for causing a movement in thinking. The resolution or synthesis of these contradictions is seen as dialectical change.

Riegel (1976) identified four sources of developmental change in a dialectical process: a) inner biological, b) individual psychological, c) cultural-sociological, and d) outer physical. He believes that conflict can occur within each

dimension and that a change in one of these dimensions is capable of affecting and being affected by change in any of the other dimensions (Wapner & Demick, 1998). They also interact with each other, in that, if one undergoes an inner biological change such as an illness it can affect the outer physical (disfigurement) or even cultural-social (losing a job) dimensions. Life is seen as a sequence of interacting events within a sociohistorical context. The four factors are rarely in complete synchrony. Development then is seen as a lifelong process of trying to resolve these conflicting forces.

Hegel's principle of dialectic change was appropriated by Karl Marx and Engel's in their philosophy of dialectical materialism. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) extended Marx's and Engel's view on politics and economics to psychology. He extended to human development their idea that human beings transform themselves and their environment through labor and tool use and that the social environment influences the conditions and nature of social interaction, which in turn influences cognitive styles as reflected in attitudes, beliefs, perception of reality etc., that use of "psychological tools" such as language shape children's thinking. He too believed that human thought can be understood only within the context of its history and that it can be understood only by studying how it develops.

The dialectic approach to development is organismic in nature. It views human beings as active organism in constant interaction with the contradictory forces of its environment. Development is seen as continuous and lifelong and

constantly evolving (Wapner & Demick, 1998). As such the emphasis is on the

process of becoming and not on the being. This approach emphasizes the whole as

being greater than the sum of its parts. In fact the dialectic approach grew out of a

reaction against the scientists' preoccupation with the particular instead of the

whole. It emphasizes that since development is always in a state of flux, the

context cannot be ignored. It sees development as inherent in humans

 Unlike Erikson's theory (Miller, 1993) where physical maturation takes

one on to the next stage and crisis, here the movement is neither strictly upward

nor forward.   Like Erikson, however, the dialectic approach posits that nature and

nurture are inextricably intertwined. In fact the very nature of development is

rooted in the conflict that arises out of the contradictions within the organism as

well as between the organism and environment. Like proponents of chaos theory,

believers in the dialectic approach believe that both innate and environmental

factors influence the outcome of an interaction, meaning that even a minute

degree of difference in either one can result in a person having a very different

experience and outcome. One's subjective experience of reality is the nexus of

social motivation; everyone constructs his or her own world with the self at the

center, but this reality construction is done primarily through interaction with the

environment. Hence one's identity is intertwined with one's environment. This

approach focuses on process. It is not concerned with a goal for development but

purports that the key to understanding development is in studying the process

itself. The belief is that the organism is in a constant state of change and that this

change is dynamic not linear and that at best it is unpredictable.

On rereading some of the development theories, I was surprised to see how many of them actually mention conflict as promoting development. Freud's (Miller, 1993) psychoanalytical theory proposes that unconscious forces or drives act to determine personality and behavior. Satisfaction of drives inevitably leads to conflict as they are modified into socially acceptable forms. The ways of coping with these frustrations and contradictions form the basis of personality. He claims that maturation, external frustrations, internal conflicts, personal inadequacies all initiate change. Internal conflicts arise from the battle among the id, ego, and superego, or between drives and the forces of suppression. Whether children are inherently active and self-regulated (Piaget) or forced into action by their drives (Freud), they, like the dialectical theory suggests, are a sum of their experiences and constantly battle the contradictions/disequilibrations of interacting with a growing environment. In Freud's theory, conflict is most remarkable in the id's need for instant gratification. While the ego often intervenes, the constant threat of the conflict of the id and the environment creates anxiety. When these anxieties get too strong, defense mechanisms in the form of repression, projection, fixation etc., come into play. These in turn influence subsequent experiences. Though the dialectic theory does not get into the particulars of development it does, unlike the psychoanalytical theory, define it as a lifelong process. Though Freud wrote extensively about maturation and biological drives, like proponents of the dialectic theory he was an interactionist.

He believed that even though drives derived from a person's biology they were modified by social expectations (Tyson & Tyson, 1990).

Erikson built on Freud's psychoanalytical theory to include development over a life span. He proposed that development encompasses changes in our interactions with and understandings of one another, as well as in our knowledge and understanding of ourselves as members of society. Like the dialecticians, he believed that development occurred throughout one's life. Though he believed that these happened in stages that occurred in a fixed pattern, he emphasized the role of conflict and the resolution of these conflicts in the process of development. Erikson was also of the opinion that many of these conflicts did not get fully resolved and this resulted in an increasingly complex person. The subscribers to the dialectical approach too feel that the continuing synthesis of contradictions adds to the cognitively more complex synthesis of future conflicts.

Piaget's (1965) idea of equilibration as a directing principle in development is very intuitive. He viewed equilibration as a process that was fueled by conflict or "disequilibrium," either between organism and environment or within the organism. Children's encounters with perspectives that were different from their own were viewed as one cause in the development of rational thinking. While he laid emphasis on intrapsychic disequilibria involving children's action schemes and external realities, he did not discount the same in interpersonal exchange. His theory was truly dialectical in its emphasis on the tendency toward equilibrium coupled with incessant disequilibrating influences.

However, Chapman and McBride (1992) opined that he did not describe in much detail how social interaction and cognitive development may be related.

From the point of constructivism, conflict plays a major role in the development of a child. Since this perspective proposes that children co-construct an understanding of the world around them through their interaction with those around them, it involves the active need to take perspectives and to understand the views of others. Since individual's experiences vary, their ideas on most everything varies to some degree or the other. If everyone agreed about everything, there would never be a conflict or the need to see things in a different perspective. Damon (1984), in a study of peer collaboration found that children's reasoning about justice became more sophisticated and often changed significantly after a group of them had been allowed to debate upon it. Other studies have demonstrated that sociocognitive conflicts among children can trigger growth in spatial knowledge and that peer interaction can facilitate certain logical and physical conservation tasks that have proven resistant to training by adults (see Damon, 1984).

Ethological theories also stress the role of conflict in development. It has been argued that phylogenetical changes occur (over a long period of time) in organisms whenever there is a change in the environment. Ontogenetic adaptations too occur in the presence of changes in the immediate environment. As an organism develops biologically the reach and realm of interaction also grows. The current experience and the ever-widening environment are at conflict

with each other and the organism has to learn to accommodate to the change.

In summary, conflict is viewed in a variety of frameworks as contributing to development and yet, there is a dearth of literature on the developmental role of conflict. Early childhood conflict provides the ideal context within which to examine the developmental potential of conflict.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Most studies on peer conflict thus far have been based on data collected through non-participant observations. Since human functioning cannot be separated from the multiple contexts within which it exists, it is important to explore the context and nature of conflict through participant observations. As Palmer (1989) pointed out, "We can know reality only by being in community with it" (p. 95). In this section I will briefly describe and discuss some of the methods that have been used in the past.

Most of the early truly experimental studies on peer conflict were inspired by Piaget's writings concerning the influence of peer interaction on children's cognitive development especially that of logical verification as a function of intelligence (Chapman & McBride, 1992). The basic experimental paradigm used in most of the research on sociocognitive conflict employed three steps consisting of a pretest, an experimental interaction session, and a posttest. The experimental tasks used have usually been Piagetian operatory tasks (like the tests of

conservation of liquids, substance, number etc.). Such studies (Ames & Murray, 1982; Doise & Mugny, 1984; Mugny, Perret-Clermont, & Doise, 1981; Perret-Clermont, 1980) have consistently confirmed that subjects who participate in the interaction session display more cognitive progress on posttest than subjects in control groups who do not interact with peers. However, it has been acknowledged that sociocognitive conflicts are products of interactions that do not take place in a vacuum (Bell, Grossen, & Perret-Clermont, 1985).

Very soon, however, the interest in conflict as a social interaction that occurs in more diverse settings than lab environments took hold. As the social-cognitive aspect of the importance of peer interaction was reignited by the works of Vygotsky (1962, 1978), the need to explore both intrapsyhic and interpersonal conflict led to research that relied on semi-experimental and naturalistic observations. These researchers tried to maintain a balance between positivist needs of ensuring the validity of methods and results and the need to study a very complex human behavior. Observations in naturalistic settings using methods such as the focal event sampling procedure (Altmann, 1974) have been used in many studies (Arsenio & Lover, 1996; Denham, 1986; Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990). This requires the observation of children in randomly distributed ten-minute periods over a length of time. Such observations can then be coded using instruments that are expressly designed to code "live action" emotions in naturalistic settings (see Arsenio & Coopermann, 1996).

Sociometric scales to measure popularity status of young children are also frequently used in combination with such non-participant observations. The most frequently used assessment of sociometric status is the Asher, Singleton, Tinsley, and Hymel (1979) preschool picture sociometric procedure (see also Denham et al., 1990). In this assessment children rate each of their peers in three categories of liking ("like a lot", "kinda like", and "do not like") by placing pictures of their classmates into one of three appropriately marked boxes and these are used to categorize children by popularity and also to see if feelings are mutual and reciprocal among the children. Such sociometric scales are often correlated with aggressive and conflictual behaviors.

Forman and Kraker (1985) suggested there is a need to change the way observational data is coded and analyzed. They proposed that most systematic observational coding systems rely on a "bottom up" procedure (p.37) whereby peer interaction is seen as consisting of strings of simple, discrete, individual acts. This approach does not provide meaningful information about cognitive processes. Forman argued that the "context-dependency" of behavioral acts in cognitive activity suggests a "top down" approach. This approach allows the viewing of joint cognitive activity as consisting of complex, interconnected activity systems.

Ensuing from Kohlberg's (1969) constructivist theory of moral development, some theorists have proposed that the development of moral reasoning should be facilitated by cognitive conflict (e.g., Berkowitz & Gibbs,

1985; Turiel, 1974). Most studies revolving around this idea have involved conflict induced by presenting subjects with moral dilemmas and exposing them to reasoning that involves both sides of the dilemma. Narratives can be fairly successful with children who are able to comprehend the complexities of the narration and have the capability of giving voice to their own thought procedures. With younger children this method is not always as successful. There is also the argument that prefabricated scenarios rarely capture the complexities of a naturally occurring phenomenon such as peer conflict and thus may be ambiguous to the children.

In a recent study (O'Brien, Roy, Calvins, Macaluso, & Peyton, 1999) the researchers observed dyadic play sessions conducted in a portable cardboard playroom that was brought into the home or preschool of the participants. This was done to isolate the pair being observed. The children then were presented with four play options (each lasting 3 to 5 minutes). Although the researchers obtained results that matched other studies, they felt that the use of manipulated setting and scenarios had limited their study in numerous ways and had not given them a true picture of what might take place in a less contrived environment.

In the past two decades there has been a distinct recognition of the need for gathering data through naturalistic observations in the area of peer conflict. It was recognized that children's understanding and inferences of mental states in naturalistic interactions might differ greatly from those in experimental situations. It is important to note here that there are a large variety of settings in which

naturalistic observations are carried out. Some studies have used multiple coders

who witness interactions from the periphery as they take notes of the more salient

features of conflict situations. In such instances the antecedents and surrounding

causes of conflicts are overlooked and physical acts of aggression hold attention.

Researchers (Smith, 1989) have used direct non-participant observation and event

recording techniques that help record events from the onset of disagreements.

Although these studies are capable of acquiring crucial and important information

on verbal and non-verbal exchanges during the conflict, they are limited in that

they do not account for what happens moments before or after a conflict. Shantz

(1987) believes that running records have major advantages over event recording

because they allow the nature of preceding and concurrent events and the type of

conflict to be identified. Smith and Barraclough (1999) utilized this format for

data collection. Observers took ten minutes of running record in the classroom

and ten minutes of the same in the playground for each of their target children.

Although such collection methods can yield a large amount of data, a conflict

situation might not arise during this time frame. Also, as stated earlier, conflict is

a relational process and cannot be studied as an isolated event in a child's daily

functioning.

One of the biggest methodological issues in studying human development

arises from the ramification of the fact that the subjects are human. These issues

are compounded when one needs to study young children and their conflict.

Rizzo (1992) commented on the paucity of empirical findings concerning the role

of conflict in the development of children's social relationships. One of the reasons for this could be that researchers often think in terms of an individual's behavior and development (see Harre, 1986, for discussion) and in so doing neglect the fact that social conflicts are interpersonal in nature. This in turn indicates that participants in conflicts usually share prior interactions and relationships that cannot be ignored, and that studies that attempt to explain social conflicts solely in terms of individuals are incomplete (Rizzo, 1992). However, relational processes such as conflicts are best studied within a socio-historic context by the analysis of naturally occurring interactions among relationship partners. One of the few studies that considered the socio-historic embeddedness of conflicts was Rizzo's study on the role of conflict in friendship development (1992). In that study, he utilized both ethnographic methods and an interpretive approach (both of which I discuss at length in the following section). Rizzo (1992) stated that the ethnographic procedures allowed him to generate detailed interactive histories of specific friendship pairs, which improved his understanding of individual events and also helped him to identify the more pervasive relational and developmental processes. In analyzing his data Rizzo found that, while two-thirds of conflicts among friends had nothing to do with friendship (this is consistent with findings reported by Corsaro, 1985; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990; Maynard, 1985), the other third had everything to do with it. He suggested that these conflicts "involve the children's expectations for friendship"

(p.102). He stated that in most of these disputes the intention was to bolster

relationship and not to effect termination.

Another area of limitation may be that most models of conflict have been

either linear or cyclical in nature, with researchers looking for direct cause and

effect relationships (e.g., temperament on conflict rate, gender on frequency of

conflicts, etc.) and a certain amount of predictability in conflict patterns. The

desired outcome or preoccupation often appears to be the child's ability to

successfully resolve a conflict. Even though research has now indicated that

unresolved conflict appears to be unrelated to the general function of disputes in

relationship building (Rizzo, 1992; Smith et al., 1995).

PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a child, I remember wondering why a particular event in our lives held

such disparate meanings/significance for my brother and me. Even now, on

recounting incidents from the past, we often talk about the same event as if it were

two separate incidents in our lives. As a social constructivist, I believe that people

construct knowledge individually (and socially) in order to make sense of their

experiences. There is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to

experience by the individual.

Accepting constructivist theory means giving up Platonic and all

subsequent realistic ontologies. It also means that there is no such thing as one

truth or reality "out there" independent of the knower, but only the meaning we construct for ourselves as we learn in the midst of others. Constructivism, to me is what constructionism is to Crotty (1998), when he writes, "All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (p. 42). According to constructivist theory, we do not create meaning out of nothing. We construct meaning in interaction with others. And while it is possible to make sense of the same reality in quite varied ways, it is not entirely subjective as it arises from our interactions with the "object." Like Vygotsky, I believe that children come to a better understanding of the world around them through their interaction with peers. These understandings then become the fundamental basis of the social knowledge, upon which they continue to build. He believed that children do not exist in isolation but rather in a social matrix that is formed of the interconnection of social relationships and interactions between peers. Knowledge then is a personal and social construction of experience. This is not to say that meanings are created and imposed on reality (Crotty, 1998, p.43), but rather meanings are constructed through interactions, interpretations, and symbolic representations that are formed through personal experiences.

If one accepts the constructivist position, one is inevitably required to follow a pedagogy, which argues that we must provide learners with the opportunity to (a) interact with experiences, and (b) construct their own world. As

a constructivist researcher, I continuously find myself justifying the relative objectivity of my meaning construction. It is important to know that the "basic generation of any meaning is always social" (Crotty, p. 55) and arises out of our interactions with the human community. Thus meaning construction is an active process and involves the individual's engagement with the world. And each meaning we construct makes us better able to give meaning to other sensations that can fit a similar pattern (Reznick, 1989). Also, meaning making is contextual. We do not learn isolated facts and theories in some abstract ethereal land of the mind separate from the rest of our lives: we learn in relationship to what else we know, what we believe, our prejudices and our fears.

As a constructivist I feel that an interpretive approach best suits my study of conflict. Gaskins, Miller, and Corsaro (1992) identified three key premises of the interpretive approach (a) the situatedness of meaning and development, (b) the active, affective process of meaning creation, and (c) the constitutive power of language. To these I have added a fourth, (d) that meaning creation is both affective and cognitive. The next paragraphs will elaborate on each.

The first, situatedness of meaning and development, implies that the process of meaning making can be understood solely by situating children in their cultural contexts. It carries the assumption that child and context together constitute the phenomena of interest. This interdependence raises the issue of cultural variation as a central developmental question. This variation is evident in the way different cultures deal with children's conflict. For example, American

adults are eager to teach children skills to help manage conflicts, while Japanese parents and adults work at creating a healthier disposition towards the same.

The second premise is that meaning creation through participation in collective cultural routines and practices is not passive. Meaning creation is non-neutral and children take a variety of stances (acceding to, transforming, and resisting) towards the available cultural resources. The creation of meaning is therefore both an individual and a collective process that is inherently dynamic, varying not only from individual to individual but also within the same individual. Acknowledging individual differences offers a means for discovering the differences that exist between the investigator and the people being studied. In an interpretive approach not only do researchers attempt to understand the point of individuals other than themselves, but they also come into the study aware of their own biases. While an interpretive approach does not presume a universal course of development for the human species, the discovery of universals is not discounted.

The third premise of interpretive approaches is that language is crucial to understanding meaning, since it is the primary tool by which humans negotiate and create realities. The interpretive approach allows one to assume that children create meaning in a local context (Gaskins et al., 1992), which in turn brings up the likelihood of alternate paths to human development than those posited by existing theories.

I also believe that meaning creation is both affective and cognitive, that cultural resources come with values attached to them and that, while children seek to actively learn about their world, they also actively resist or transform those values. This in turn implies that individual variations are catalysts as well as by-products of meaning creation.

PERSONAL COMMENTARY

The way of life and living in the world is undergoing a rapid change. Globalization, mass communication, international immigrations, world trade, sophisticated and mass-produced weaponry has changed the way we reflect upon ourselves, our lives and the needs thereof. While opening up our doors it has also made great demands on us professionally, mentally, and physically. Competition gets tighter and we need more just to live comfortably. Ever increasing needs, both in the professional and domestic realm, in turn have placed additional stressors on our lives. Dual income and nuclear households have become the norm. Mass media has brought the world into our homes. Along with everything else the world of the child too has gone topsy-turvy. Unsupervised play in parks and street cul-de-sacs are a thing of the past. Fear of the "predators" whom we see on TV has made it necessary for parents to be vigilant. Stresses of living have broken many souls and they in turn are reported as being dangerous. The media keeps bringing the outside into our lives, and we find the best way to cope with

dangers is by closely supervising our children. Close monitoring is often accompanied by heightened intervention. The media also occupies its time digging up histories of the "predators" in an attempt to find out what went wrong. Inevitably, there is childhood aggression and conflict mentioned. Parents internalize this information and what was peripheral invades the household and the policy chambers and a decision is made to curb all traces of violence in young children.

In short, what was once a normative behavior for a young child, i.e., experimenting with relationships has come under intense scrutiny. The result (as I have witnessed in my classroom) is that children will often not know what the consequences of fighting with a friend can really be because all they experience is adult intervention in the form of talk. I want to examine this phenomenon minus the connotations we have given it.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature and context of interpersonal conflicts between preschool children in order to understand the meaning they make of conflict as reflected in their understanding of each other in the classroom culture. As such, the focus was on dyadic and group interaction between and among children in the classroom. For the purpose of this study, interpersonal conflict was defined as disagreements or oppositional interactions between individual children or groups of children (Goncu & Cannella, 1996). Relational processes like conflict can be best studied through the historical analysis of naturally occurring, daily interactions among relationship partners (Braiker & Kelly, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Hinde, 1979; Rizzo, 1992). However, such an analysis was difficult to accommodate within the conventional quantitative research paradigm. Therefore the present qualitative study employs ethnographic methods and interpretative analysis such as participant observation as the primary tool of exploration. The goal of the ethnographer is to understand human behavior from the perspective of the protagonists of the behavior (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). In this study I try to incorporate this perspective by using ethnographic tools and participant observation in two classrooms over a period of time.

Interpretive analysis provides a means to understand how a particular cultural context influences the behavior of the members of that culture and, in turn, how the actions of the members of that culture or community maintain the stability of the culture (Cole, 1996). Interpretive procedures helped me to embed interactive events in their historical and sociocultural contexts (Rizzo, 1992). Human functioning cannot be separated from the multiple contexts within which it exists, therefore relational processes such as conflicts are best explored through participant observations, since this process allows the investigator to look beyond simply the interaction. As Palmer (1989) said, "We can know reality only by being in community with it" (p.95). Further, Merriam (1998) posited that, "observational data represents a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest" (p. 95).

This study conducted in two settings endeavored to explore the very process of meaning-making as it occurred in the interactions within two preschool classrooms. The first setting provided opportunities for observation over a period of two semesters and for collecting data through participant observation where I was often more participant than observer. The second setting spanned five weeks and was located in a different preschool classroom and the data were collected through participant observation, but this time I was more observer than participant. The inclusion of two settings fulfilled a number of purposes. It explored the researcher role as participator and observer on a continuum with complete participant at one extreme and complete observer on the other (as

described in Gold's typology, 1958). The second setting provided an opportunity the transferability of certain conflict behaviors.

While more traditional methods were poorly suited for generating the detailed and sensitive chronologies necessary for understanding relational processes like conflict, the use of theoretical sampling and triangulation of information sources allowed the opportunities to generate and interpret these chronologies. The question of how one goes about studying the processes by which meaning is created can probably best be explained in the words of Briggs (1992), "bringing individuals clearly into focus contributes to our understanding of how culture operates in persons and how persons operate with culture, each creating the other" (p.27). So, while a statistical analysis of a large number of children may have yielded results that were impressive, the intensive scrutiny of a smaller group and a more rigorous qualitative study, it was assumed, would help bring into focus the delicate and intricate nature of interaction between individual and culture and vice versa.

In order to minimize confusion I present the data analysis of observations from each setting in separate chapters though I discuss the context and procedure of data collection for each in this section.

Contextual framework

Setting I:

      The data from the first setting was collected over a period of two semesters and examined of social interactions, peer relations, and classroom culture. The data were collected by direct participant observation of children in a preschool classroom in a university based child development laboratory school. The class consisted of a multicultural (both international and U.S. citizens) mix of 15 children (7 boys and 8 girls) between the ages of 3 - 5 years. The preschool classroom operated three days a week for three hours each. As the preschool was part of a university lab school, many of the children came from academically oriented households. The variation in age provided for the observation of diverse social needs and interaction skills. Three of the children spoke English as a second language; this added greater depth to the classroom culture, since the lack of a common language added to the multiple contexts of the classroom culture.

      Besides myself (the head teacher) there were eight student teachers who came in on different days of the week, with not more than three of them in the classroom at any given time. The student teachers were an important part of the data collection procedure as they provided information in the form of daily reflections, anecdotal records, portfolios, and informal dialogues. Since I was the head teacher in the room the setting was ideal, not only for observations of interactions in the room, but also for the opportunity to interact and converse with

parents and other student teachers as I explored the multiple contexts of the participants' lives.

The university laboratory school, including the classroom observed, practiced a Developmentally Appropriate Program and was influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach, which uses documentation of children's images and work as a guide for emerging curriculum. Documented displays of activities and children's portfolio allowed the children opportunities to revisit their experiences and parents and visitors a glimpse into the classroom activities. The daily schedule of the classroom included time for free-play in different centers, time for play on the playgrounds, and group time.

The selected preschool classroom was one of two that operated during that time in the program. A hallway as well as a "porch" area connected the classrooms. These spaces provided shared areas for the children in the two classrooms. The "porch" was also designated an intergenerational area as the adults in the adjacent Adult Day Center used the area for their own activities as well as to interact with the children. The room was located toward the back of the Lab School, away from the front entrance, and had two sets of windows. One set was for observational purposes and had glass-panes that allowed one-way observation (observers can look in but those inside the classroom could not look out). The other set of windows looked into the atrium that housed an art gallery and an open area (inside the building) that the children used during inclement weather.

Inside, the classroom was split into several areas that could be divided into the art, the blocks, the dramatic, the loft, and the media table area. All artistic material in the art center was kept on open shelves that allowed the children free and easy access to them. Daily activities were based on centers, which were separated into manipulative, dramatic play, art, media table, blocks and loft. Group time was reserved, not only for announcements, but also provided an ideal opportunity for both teachers and children to talk about their emotions.

Setting II:

Observations in the second setting was conducted in a full time daycare center in a small university town in Southwest Virginia. All children in one of the preschool morning programs were invited to participate. While there were 18 children enrolled in the preschool classroom, there were no more than 15 present on any given day. The irregularity in attendance was ascribed to the onset of summer vacations. There were ten girls and eight boys ranging from 4.0 to 5.2 years in age. The classroom selected operated from 8:00am to 5:00 p.m., five days a week. The classroom included two lead teachers with at least one of them being present in the room at any given time. A substitute teacher aided them, and during the duration of this study there were three different substitutes who came in on different days. The day care implemented a Developmentally Appropriate Program and was influenced to some degree by the Reggio Emilia approach. Within the classroom, the daily activities included large blocks of time for free play in different centers, group time, and free play on the playground. The

centers were separated into manipulative, housekeeping area, art, a media table,

the "circle rug", and a (quiet activity) loft. The selected preschool classroom

offered the children one and half hours of free play time inside the classroom at

the various centers in the mornings and another one and half hours in the

afternoon. All the observations were conducted during the free activity time inside

the classroom. For the first four weeks only the afternoon sessions were observed,

but for the last week I observed both the morning and the afternoon sessions. This

was deliberate since the daycare was closing for a week for renovations and I had

begun to notice that the teachers had a distinct impact on the behavior of the

children. Since the morning free play was supervised by Susan and the afternoon

ones by Tiffany, I hoped to be able to observe different patterns in peer

interactions.

The free activity time was specifically chosen for this study because the

space in the classroom allowed for the observation of children in the most varied

of activities, ranging from planned activities at centers to open play areas within

the room. The children had free access to playmates and materials, and this in turn

was conducive to increased peer interactions.

The school was selected primarily because of easy access, teachers' and

parents' willingness to participate in the study, and my familiarity with the school

context from previous experience as a parent there. Most importantly, the free

activity time afforded to the children and the curriculum, based on social

constructivism and inquiry, promoted and encouraged social encounters among the children.

The classroom was comprised of primarily white children from middle and upper middle class homes. While the center claimed to provide daycare services to a large cross section of the town population, it was one of the more expensive ones in town and the families using the services were mostly professionals, a number of them affiliated with the university. There was only one non-white, non African-American child in the class. Since the school practiced inclusion, there were two children with special needs. One had Down syndrome and another had a physical and speech disability. The variation in age provided for observation of diverse social needs and interaction skills.

I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Since I was using ethnographic methods, and participation required "getting close to the activities and …experiences of ...people," I was a part of the classroom during the observation periods. I had to "combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the (phenomenon) as an insider while describing [it] for outsiders" (Patton, 1990, p. 207). The observations were conducted during 90 minutes of free-play time in the classroom. Running records of "perceptions in the field" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) focused on what young children "do" and "say" together, especially on their use of language in negotiating social situations. For both the studies I use pseudonyms for all

participants except for the researcher. The pronoun "I" is used to indicate my

presence in the interactions (when necessary) throughout the study.

Data collection

Setting I:

Data were collected for the duration of two semesters (Fall 1999 and

Spring 2000). The laboratory school followed the university calendar, opening

one week after semester start and closing on reading day just prior to exams.

While the bulk of the data were collected during the 90 minutes of free play at the

beginning of the afternoon sessions (1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.), I have incorporated

some that were collected at other points during the day. These are used when

necessary to support the research questions that guide the study.

As the teacher in the classroom I was able to observe and take notes

throughout the three hours the children were in the facility. The eight student

teachers who assisted in the room (never more than three on any given day) also

took detailed notes and kept anecdotal records of the activities in the room. These

were sent to me each night via email. Their raw notes on paper were also

collected at the end of every week. The student teachers and I met once a week

and exchanged views on what had transpired during the week. This afforded an

ideal forum for incorporating different perspectives. These meetings and the

frequent informal conversations I had with them during the course of the day

provided a fuller picture of what was happening in the room. This was especially

helpful when due to my role as teacher I had to often disengage from my role as an observer and actively participate in another activity even when in the midst of observing a conflict.

Throughout the study the social dynamics of the children were recorded through webs that mapped their relationships. The data include excerpts from my conversations with parents (which where written on the day that they occurred). These occurred when parents came to either drop or pick up their children and in the process either filled me in on details from the children's home environment or answered my queries regarding certain of their children's behavior or conversation in class.

Data from fieldnotes, anecdotal records, and conversations were further supported by material gathered from children's portfolios and artifacts of children's work and play.

Setting II:

Data were systematically collected for the duration of five weeks. Observations were conducted for approximately two hours daily from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. for the first four weeks. During the last week observations were conducted for two sessions of two hours each, once in the morning from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m., and then again in the afternoon. During the first few days I mapped the social dynamics of the children by focusing on the relationships that appeared to be forming in the classroom. This was accomplished by keeping a tally of the

children who were playing together at various points during the observation. The results of this tally were represented in a web at the end of each week and are included in the appendix (E). These, along with the observations helped me see the constantly changing patterns of relationships in the classroom peer culture.

At first my observations were more general and my gaze and fieldnotes swept the classroom seeking out patterns in behavior and relationships. These observations served as a foundation as I narrowed in on potential conflict situations in the room. It also helped me identify the various conflict styles of the children. My observations started a week into the new semester for the daycare and hence there was a good mix of new and old children in the room. The first week was also very crucial as I, with the help of the student teachers, managed to sort out the potentially confusing behaviors of some of the children and situate them in contexts that helped make meaning of them. These will be discussed in later chapters.

Data from this setting came mainly from the fieldnotes gathered during observations. These, however, were reinforced and enriched by the informal conversations that I had with the teachers at various points in the study, as well as from documentation around the room in the form of "Me" books, photographs, and artifacts.

The initial focus in the process of data gathering was to obtain as complete an understanding of the cultural context of the classroom as possible (Rogoff,

1990). Graue and Walsh (1998) suggested three ways in which this can be accomplished: observation, interviews, and document analysis.

<u>Participant Observation</u>

The study was designed to examine the relational process through which children make meaning of conflict. This entailed the careful recording of physical and dialogic models that helped give the process a shape. The bulk of the data was gathered through participant observation. While many qualitative researchers in the field of education rely largely on interviews as a source of data, research using ethnographical methods draws heavily on observation and participation, with interviews often used as a secondary source of data (Nespor, 1997). Participant observation, which is the choice for data collection in this study is also a key method of ethnography and allows the investigator to engage overtly or covertly in people's lives for a long period of time, watching, listening, and inquiring (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992). This method is appropriate for the study of interactive behaviors of groups of children as they go about their daily routine in a natural classroom setting. The present study puts more emphasis on exploring the nature, content, context, and meaning of social interactions and negotiations in young children than in testing hypotheses about it. This demanded my entry as a researcher into a social setting and required my participation in the daily routines, the building of relationships, and the observation of behaviors.

Since I was collecting data through participant observation, and since this required "getting close to the activities and …experiences of ...people," I was a

part of the classroom for a period of five weeks. During this time I helped the teacher by being an extra pair of hands whenever the need arose. I had to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of "understanding the (phenomenon) as an insider while describing (it) for outsiders," (Patton, 1990, p. 207).

I gained field entry via, what Corsaro (1985), describes as, a "reactive" mode. Initially I was drawn into activities as the children got to familiarize themselves with my role as an "interested observer." Gradually, however, I was able to take on the role of a "peripheral participant" and "observer" as I moved within the ecological area of interaction without affecting or initiating the nature or context of peer interactions. The demarcation between participant and observer was often blurry as I constantly had to switch roles as and when required of me by the children.

While I may not have influenced the children's behavior by my presence, the "natural" setting of the room had changed because of me. The presence of an extra adult in the classroom may have acted as a deterrent to a few potential conflict situations.

I entered the room while the children were still asleep on their cots. I greeted Tiffany as she rushed around on quiet feet trying to get things ready for the afternoon centers. I walked up to the window seat (a seat I had chosen on a prior visit as it allowed me a clear view of almost the entire room) and settled down, notebook and pen in hand. As I looked around (a little excited at what

the day would yield), I noticed a pair of calm eyes upon me. These eyes peeked at me from underneath a blanket and as they met mine they closed pretending to be asleep. We played this game of "look & sleep" for a while and then the little mouth that went with the little eyes mouthed the question, "Who are you?" I had prepared for this moment all along but now I was at a loss for words. Should I start explaining now before the others are awake and then repeat it numerous times as others awakened? I mouthed back, "Later". The lips smiled and nodded. I was subjected to the same delightful curiosity over and over again as each child awakened to find me sitting in the room. Some called out to their teacher, "Who is she? Why is she here? Is she our new teacher?" Some came over and told me their names. A little boy introduced his "best buddy" to me. I waited till all of them had put away their cots to introduce myself. While most just nodded at my explanation some thought it was "cool".

There was a lot of whining and complaining as the children moved around, Gwyneth came over and explained, "we are all tired form swimming. That's why we are not being fun". This set the trend for my observations in the room. Often children would volunteer to come up to me and explain the cause and effect of things.

(Fieldnotes, May 28, '02)

<u>Observation Process</u>

While there was much to observe by way of interactions in the rooms, my focus was on conflictual interactions. As such the interpretation of what constitutes a conflict and which conflicts to observe (as it was humanly impossible to observe all) was from my perspective and as such revealed my biases. It is rarely that two people observing the same phenomenon will describe it the same way (Uttech, 1999) but time, systematic observations and attention to detail could help to overcome this issue of perceptions in order to recreate an event.

While I have tried to write the description without loading it with interpretative significance (Uttech, 1999), it is inevitable that a certain amount of interpretation is intrinsic and unavoidable since I chose to observe that particular incident over others. The descriptions, however, include the important elements such as the setting, the participants, the activities and interactions, and the implications of the environment to the actions of the protagonists (Merriam, 1988).

<u>Field Notes</u>

A running record was kept of my "perceptions in the field" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998), along the margins of these I also noted insights, questions, or thoughts that arose at any point during the observations. Observations jotted down during participation in the setting were fully expanded immediately after each

session ended. Detailed field notes provided the main data for the study. The focus was on what young children "do" and "say" together, especially on their use of language to negotiate social situations. Conflict was considered a social activity, created, and conducted through language. The study did not involve the comparison of individual children, formal testing of the children, or any attempt to structure their behavior for observation. Only behavior that occurred spontaneously in the classroom setting was observed.

Since it was impossible to record every interaction in the classroom, representativeness was ensured by collecting data across several dimensions which included, children, place, time, and activity (Denzin, 1977; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The representativeness of the data collected was also verified by presenting the head teachers with samples of my fieldnotes and asking for feedback. Initially the observations and fieldnotes were of a more general nature covering a much broader spectrum of peer interaction. As themes in group dynamics and interactions were identified the observations became more specific.

My fieldnotes initially sought to describe everything within the realm of my vision. As I started focusing on the details of a conflict, peripheral details of the room became much harder to observe and my fieldnotes concentrated on the conflict and the words and actions that accompanied these. While concentrating on the actual conflict I also took great care to record what happened before and after the conflict. While not observing a conflict closely I kept notes of the general interactions in the room. This proved especially beneficial during the

analysis, as I was able to look back and see where a potential for conflict may have arisen.

Dialogic Conversations as Interviews

As Lofland (1971) pointed out participant observation and open ended in-depth interviews go hand in hand with much of the data collected in participant observation coming from informal interviews in the field. I envisioned numerous conversations with the children and teachers in the classroom during the course of the day to be a part of my data. The conversations with the children were not directly related to the cause of the conflict unless an interaction had been particularly baffling or out of the ordinary. Rather these helped in elaborating what their ideas of friendships, relationships, and disputes were.

I would like to stress the word informal, since my conversations with the teachers did not involve the use of interview guides but rather were spontaneous exchanges and sharing of experiences that occurred at various points during my observations. As a social constructivist this enabled me to show that individuals define the world in their own unique way (Merriam, 1998), and that making sense of experiences is a social process. Rossman and Rallis (1998) saw these as providing serendipitous moments that point the way for future decisions regarding data collection and analysis.

These dialogues with the teachers were especially helpful in gaining a clear picture of the context, especially conflict behavior that appeared to have

been carried over from another context outside of my observation. Often the conversations were about the children's family (number of siblings, order of birth, recent changes etc). Since my social constructivist idea of meaning making posits the crucial role that multiple layers of context play, I felt it would be negligent on my part to ignore the impact of the larger cultural influences that the child may experience in this process of meaning making. These talks did not directly address their notions of conflict among children, but rather gave them the opportunity to talk about their general opinions regarding peer interactions.

Collaborations

Collaboration for this study has been important from the very beginning. In the process of doing an earlier study (see proposal Appendix E), a central feature of the ongoing analysis of the data was the input from a collaborative group that met each week to reflect on and interpret the data that had been collected. This provided for multiple points of views, reinforced an already informed base for interpretation, and provided interesting directions for the study as it progressed. For this study the collaboration took place at many different levels. The teachers in the classroom collaborated with me by providing a constant stream of insight and information throughout the study. My chairs formed the panel of experts that I turned to for inspiration and guidance throughout the research process. The ability to incorporate numerous perspectives

into my study right from the beginning helped in the understanding of the

complex phenomenon of conflict.

Documents and Artifacts

Apart from the fieldnotes from my observation as a participant observer, I

also collected data in the form of artifacts. Classroom documentation (student

teacher reflections, family photographs, action photographs etc.), portfolios, work

produced by children, school notices and flyers, classroom news and

announcements comprised the variety of artifacts available.

Data Analysis

All the data collected was subject to analysis right from the start.

Throughout the study, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously

becoming "interrelated phases of a single process" (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines,

1988, p. 228). My committee chairs provided a forum for dialogue, to focus,

define, and frame my research questions. Decisions regarding the direction of

inquiry arose from the reading and rereading of field notes, reflections, and from

my conversations with the classroom teachers and my committee chairs.

The first minute step in the analysis of the data was the management and

simultaneous interpretation of the data. The data from the first setting was

especially overwhelming. As I handled the data I was constantly reminded of the

kaleidoscope metaphor. Within my focus lay a vast array of tidbits that were all

an integral part of the study and yet each look (reading) provided a different picture. Like the angled faces of the mirrors in the kaleidoscope the influences of the individual, the dyad, and the culture had the potential to influence the interpretation of each conflict episode. While I had developed a certain amount of confidence in my ability to do qualitative research I still worried about being able to remain true to the phenomenon. While the challenge was stimulating I had to continuously reread my notes in order not to lose touch with the data.

Culling data from the first setting was the most challenging. Even though all the anecdotal notes, fieldnotes, and reflections from student teachers were organized by date it was very difficult yet ultimately rewarding to piece together episodes. In the second setting, I was solely responsible for the observations and as such (while limited in scope) I was also keenly aware of precedents to conflict incidents and could thus refer back and forth with ease. In first setting, the search for precedents meant sifting through a larger and more varied information base.

Having read and reread the fieldnotes a number of times. The conflict episodes were extracted along with descriptions of what preceded and what followed each episode. These were then examined even more minutely for emerging themes and patterns. Some of the more enduring themes that emerged were related to conflicts among friends or children in close relationships, the ritual nature of conflicts, and how conflicts sustained and maintained themselves across activities. The stories that each episode tells are presented in the following chapters.

Confirmability

As a qualitative researcher, I had the added responsibility of ensuring the confirmability or trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that confirmability was an important methodological standard to evaluate qualitative research. I used multiple sources of data (triangulation) to confirm the emerging findings (Merriam, 1998) and this added strength to the study. Data were gathered through observation, participation, dialogic conversations with teachers and children, and from the analysis of documents and artifacts. Asking committee chairs as well as colleagues to comment on the findings, as they emerged, further strengthened the internal validity of the study. During the observations in the first setting, two faculty members and a colleague formed an expert panel and provided insight into interpretations, raised additional questions and guided the research process helping me keep focus on the phenomenon of conflict.

As a qualitative study, generalization of the results was not a priority but I hoped that a "full and thorough knowledge of the particular" would allow others to see similarities "in new and foreign contexts" (Stake, 1978, p. 6). I also provide rich and thick descriptives so that readers may be able to relate to and determine how closely this particular situation matches other research situations (Merriam, 1998).

Often clarifying the researcher's biases and worldviews helps establish validity (Merriam, 1998). I have included a personal statement in Chapter 2 that

describes in detail the biases and perspectives I brought with me into the study. Although I was the primary investigator, the input of the classroom teachers, and my committee members helped guide my research. In the first study I had the opportunity to present the expert panel of my collaborators with transcribed episodes of interactions that they then interpreted without any additional information about the context. Our interpretations were similar on every episode presented.

Chapter 4

DESCRIPTIVES – SETTING I

The Process of Immersion

"The tightness in my stomach started to relax as the stream of young and now familiar faces streamed into the room. The room was set with carefully thought out activities and I waited to see how the children would react to the material. Play dough, I had been told, was always an excellent ice-breaker. I had two mounds in yellow and purple waiting for them, wafting grape and lemon smells. The media table filled with tepid water and plastic frogs and fishes beckoned, I hoped, invitingly. The blocks and Legos lay in neat heaps on the carpet waiting to be created into towers and roads and ramps.

In the past week I had hurried from house to house, visiting the young children who would be in my classroom. Anxiety had built up as I noticed momentary hesitation in the parent's greetings (over the phone) as they tried to place my unusual accent and name. My identity as a foreigner was not lost on me. I had experienced a full spectrum of reactions, most of them pleasant and a few that I hoped to forget. I was just getting past self-consciously walking down the store aisles numerous times in order to find what I needed, rather than asking for help and running the risk of being misunderstood.

When I was informed that my assistantship would require me to work with children I had been delighted at first and then grew increasingly anxious as the full significance sunk in. So far I had worked with children in India. My exposure

to "American" children was confined to babysitting children of friends and reading stories to inner city school children. The latter experience had been very educative as I learned in subtle and not so subtle ways the influence culture can have on children.

In the short time (3 years) that I had been in the US, I had realized that children in this country had grown up with different books, movies, and music than I. My nervousness stemmed from my keen awareness that I may not be able to fully meet their needs due to a lack of shared history. As I watched, the older children ran in, confident in their knowledge of the room and in its content. The new children hung back, clinging to their parent's legs, unsure yet curious about their new surroundings. I realized that as an adult I had numerous tools and co-workers to help me negotiate my way around the unfamiliar, and I wondered how children learned the ropes.

As weeks went by I adapted, changed, and grew as new circumstances expanded my repertoire of experience and caused a shift in attitude and behavior. I also began to notice that children, once unfamiliar with each other, gained confidence in their budding relationships with each other, forged friendships, and sharpened their opinions regarding the immediate world around them. The more I observed the more I realized that conflicts offered an ideal opportunity for such movements in thought."

Social context

The classroom was divided into two distinct groups of the "old" and the "new". The "old" consisted of nine children (7 boys and 2 girls) who had been in the program for over a year. The "new" consisted of six children (1 boy and 5 girls) for whom the lab school was a new experience. This feature provided valuable data for the study of the effects of familiarity on the development of relationships, intersubjectivity, and conflict. Hinde (1979) has defined relationships as succession of interactions occurring between two individuals over a period of time, where each interaction, however short in duration, is affected by past interactions and potentially influences future interactions.

Among the "old" children, dyadic relationships had been forged and there were frequent and exclusive interactions among these children. The "new" children appeared to either keep to themselves or to seek out play partners from among the new children in the adjacent preschool classroom. There were children in both groups who found it difficult to maintain friends, and there were those who did not seem interested in forging new relationships.

This being a mixed age classroom, there was a very distinct awareness in the room about who was "big" and who "small". Erika, Christy, Nicole, and Betty were all looked upon as young and the older children saw themselves as guides. The four and five-year-olds often helped the three-year-olds with projects. Madeline (4 yrs) had taken Christy (3yrs) under her wings, because as she stated, Christy "is so little … and I can show her things and be her friend." It was also

observed that the more aggressive, older kids often took a liking to the younger

children and frequently sought them out. Nick (41/2 yrs) would seek out Erica and

show her how to play with some of the manipulatives in the room or help her with

a puzzle. The older children seemed less threatened by the presence of the

younger children.

Where dyadic relationships had been formed, the children showed a sense

of comfort with and understanding of each other. The rest of the classroom sensed

this bond and children were often eager to guide a child to a friend or to report

that, "____ didn't come to school today." Though these friendship relationships

were clearly recognized by all, there still seemed to be the need to constantly

assess loyalties and to often pose the question, "I am your best friend, right?"

Subtle and overt hostile reactions were witnessed when a friend included a non-

friend in play. Most interestingly, children in these relationships seemed to

develop a stylized mode of communication. For example, Liam and Michael

would often be heard speaking in a "secret" language; Anita and Natasha often

rhymed each other's words. Paul and Erika were the only ones who appreciated or

understood the roughness of their play; Nick, Steve, and Sam seemed to have one

set of rules for themselves and a different set for others, while Kiran (from the

adjacent classroom) and Madeline had a very intricate hierarchy in their

friendship. Madeline would often protest that she did not want Kiran to do as she

did and Kiran would diligently adhere to Madeline's "scripts" (Nelson, 1986) in

their play, understanding that doing otherwise could jeopardize their friendship.

Understandings of Relationships as Played out in Conflict

Testing the Terms of Friendship:

Nick and Sam are arguing at the sand table.

The two boys have of late become great friends. They both belong to the "old" children group in the class and are outspoken and confident. They spend a great amount of time playing with each other while at school and meet regularly for play when at home.

Nick: "I don't even want to be your friend."

Sam: "Okay. I am not your friend. I don't like you or your cars."

*Nick: "Sam, remember **you** started this. My friend is Mathew … not even you."*

Sam: "I am not going to call you for my birthday."

Nick: "You called me a baby when I came to your house."

Sam: "Nah ah. I did not even remember saying that."

Nick: "Ah ha. You did too. You said I was 'little Alex' and you know that is not true … I am BIG."

Sam: "I don't even like you."

Nick: "I don't like you either, your computer sucks."

They continue to play in silence. Both of them look visibly angry and annoyed. Sam is building a "volcano". Nick has spoons and a bulldozer that Sam really wants but he ignores Sam. After about three minutes of absolute silence, Nick helps Sam by scooping sand up for Sam's volcano. He then

reaches over and hands Sam the bulldozer. Neither of them talks. Finally

Sam breaks the silence.

Sam: "I am sorry I said mean things to you Nick." Nick does not comment,

they carry on playing together. A while later Nicole (who is one of the

"new" children) walks up and asks me to smell a paper flower she just

made. The two boys want to smell it too. She refuses, "Boys don't smell."

The two look at each other and Nick calls Nicole over.

Nick & Sam: "Why are you always being mean to us?"

Nicole: "What? I never say anything."

Nick & Sam: "Yes you do. You say 'go away' and 'boys can't play here.'"

Nicole: "Really I never do anything . . . Never says anything."

Nick and Sam: "Don't be mean to us anymore."

Nicole: "You boys are funny. Okay. You want to smell the flower now?"

The next day the class goes for a field trip to a park. Nicole, Nick, and Steve

are running around the playground equipment.

Nick and Sam: "Nicole is helping us to scare the other boys away."

(Fieldnotes, 4/26/2000).

The two are good friends who often get into arguments over a toy. Since both are assertive, it usually escalates into a drawn out altercation. Usually a student teacher would intercede and the argument would be cut short, apologies would be exchanged but the pouting and sulking would last the entire afternoon. During this episode the student teachers were asked to leave them alone to resolve

the conflict on their own. An adult sat nearby, seemingly involved in the activities of other children, in case the conflict became physical. The two tried the limits of what is permissible in arguments between friends. When it got too personal, (e.g., "I don't like you"), they stopped arguing and became silent. The next move was a gesture of friendship and it was accepted as one without argument or reproach. When the second gesture was made, the child who had "started it" apologized and the conflict was resolved. It was interesting to note that Sam did not seem to mind that Nick neither accepted nor reciprocated his apology. Even more interesting was that having resolved the conflict between them, they went on to resolve a conflict they had as a team with another child.

Close relationships hold the potential to evoke considerable positive and negative affect. It has been suggested (Laursen & Hartup, 1989) that close relationships involve more interdependencies and this in turn suggests a "greater potential for anger . . . as well as . . . contentment" (p.82). In order to maintain a continuation of the rewarding exchanges, the authors posit that, interactions in close relationships reflect a need to minimize interruptions and avoid adverse affect. In the above episode it is apparent that the participants are sensitive to the dangers of angry conflict and so adopt ways to moderate the risks of losing the friendship. There were other episodes that fit this model.

Anita and Natasha are sitting at a table sticking toothpicks into a mound of playdough. Nicole is sitting nearby drawing on a piece of playdough with a

pink marker. Leslie (3) is watching them while fiddling with a lump of playdough.

Anita and Natasha start talking about what they did during the weekend.

Natasha: "My Dada took me to the bookstore . . . I played with a puzzle . . . a big one"

Anita: "I went with my Mommy to the store to buy spaghetti and chicken"

Natasha: "To the grocery store right?"

Anita: "to the big one"

Natasha: "There is no big one near your house"

Leslie: "there is in my house . . .big one . . . so big"

The two older girls giggle

Anita: "Yeah, there is a big one near my house"

Natasha: "I don't think so"

Anita: "Don't say that . . . you are always saying that"

Natasha: "No I am not"

Anita: "Yes you do . . . I don't like it"

Leslie: "Natasha is mean"

Anita: "No she is not, she is my friend"

Leslie hesitates and then: "no . . . she is mean . . . mean to you"

Natasha: "Nah uh, we are just friends. I share my things with Anita"

Anita: "Yeah . . . and also . . . ummmm"

Natasha: "food? . . . (giggles) . . . yeah foody food"

Anita and Natasha giggle and Leslie goes back to her work.

(Fieldnotes, 3/6/00)

In the past this kind of an ("did too", "didn't") argument between the two girls had led to the disruption of play but in this instance Leslie's presence and criticism of one friend leads to a resolution of the conflict. Friendships in the classroom are recognized and acknowledged by the children. Loyalties to friends are common and interactions such as these reinforce the importance of close relationships in the classroom. It is also an indicator that friendships are an important moderator of conflicts. Like Rizzo (1989), I found that disputes did not lead to friendship termination. The worst that occurred was a disruption of the current activity.

A slightly new dimension was added to the model when a child that did not share a close relationship with two others but really desired a more amiable relationship with them disregarded the equity of exchange in order to forge greater emotional involvement and thus avert a potential for serious conflict.

Paul, Nick, and Steve are playing at the media table with corn kernels. They each have a truck and are loading and unloading the corn as they push the trucks around. So far they have been conversing softly with each other. They arouse my curiosity when I hear them arguing. Steve accuses Nick of not being fair.

Steve: "that is not fair Nick . . . we don't say that word"

Nick: "No . . . I am saying that to Paul . . . not to you . . . you are my friend"

Steve: keeps mumbling "we are not allowed to say that . . . like that . . . no"

Paul: smiles and keeps playing "Hey guys who needs more corn for their house?"

As I approach them they all look up and smile.

Paul: "We are playing trucks and we are all friends, right guys?"

Steve: "I am Tonka Joe I the bestest road builder in the World"

Nick: "Yeah. And I am Tonka Joe II"

Paul: "And I am Tonka Joe Jerk"

Steve: "That is not a nice name"

Nick: "I didn't say it to him. He said it by himself"

Me: "Is that a nice name for a friend?"

Nick: "Not for me...I didn't say it to him"

Paul: "I am just Tonka Joe Jerk . . . ha . . . ha . . ."

I pretend to walk away. Steve is trying to give Paul a new name. Nick doesn't appear interested in the game anymore.

Nick: "Let's play in the loft Steve"

Steve: "Okay"

Paul: "Guys can I play too?"

Nick: "No this game has only two people in it"

Paul sulks and continues to play with the corn while the two boys walk away.

(Fieldnotes, 9/20/99)

This interaction analyzed as an isolated incident would arouse mild curiosity but knowing the history of past interactions among the boys offers a clearer picture about their relationships in particular and the classroom dynamics

in general. Paul was one of the younger children and he was the only new boy in the classroom. Ever since the first day he had been trying to find a place for himself in the already established relationships in the room. He was particularly interested in joining Steve and Nick in play and frequently tried to join in their play. They were two of the older more popular boys in the classroom. In the past he had experienced rejection in many forms from the two children. This was one of the rarer occasions when I had actually seen the three playing together. It is not possible to tell from the episode whether Paul knew the implications of the word "jerk". Did he accept the offensive moniker and continue to play just in order to maintain proximity with the two boys or did he not comprehend the intended putdown and was just happy to be part of the play?

Looking at this episode within the exchange equity model it is apparent that, at least for Paul, the exchange was not equal. But, by the same token he had a lot invested emotionally in the interaction and thus we might conclude that he was reluctant to terminate the interaction as the "reward" of being accepted as playmate outweighed the "slight" he had to put up with.

The other very interesting dyadic dynamics at play here is that of Steve and Nick. Steve is aware that name calling is not a "nice" thing to indulge in and tries to protest on Paul's behalf. This conflict does not take on a very serious turn either because Steve is not very invested in Paul's concerns or because he realizes that this does not in a major way affect his friendship with Nick. He appears comfortable enough in his relationship with the later, however, to disagree.

 Power Differentials in Social Relationships:

Kiran and Madeline are playing under the loft with a divided tray containing large multi-colored "gems." Madeline has the tray in-between her spread legs and Kiran is sitting facing her. Every once in a while Madeline will pick up a "gem" examine it and hand it over to Kiran saying, "Look, this one is really pretty. I like the pink ones".

Kiran would reply, "Me too, I like the pink ones too".

Madeline, showing a blue "gem", "Oh, this one is nice. I like the blue ones"

Kiran, "Let me look...let me look...I like the blue one, me too"

Madeline: "The green ones are nice. See how they shine"

Kiran, "Yeah, this is shiny. I like it"

Madeline: "You don't have to say that. Like it all the time like me. No"

Kiran: "I like the green one"

Madeline: "Don't repeat what I say"

Kiran: smile "Okay"

Madeline: "See this big one? It is like a lumpy thing with bumps on it"

Kiran: "Yeah bumpy lumpy...ha...ha"

Madeline: "I think it is nice. We can put it on playdough and make something"

Kiran: "Let me find one to put in the playdough too" looks and finds a small pink bead, "this one is good".

Madeline: "This lumpy one is good too"

Kiran: "Mine is good too"

Madeline: ignores the bead Kiran is holding up "No, the lumpy one is funny, look"

Kiran: reluctantly puts his pink bead back in the tray and turns his attention to the one Madeline is holding out "Yeah the lumpy one is funny . . . ha . . . ha"

Madeline: "Okay, now we can find playdough to put it in. You can come with me Kiran, come".   *(Fieldnotes, 12/9/99)*

As mentioned earlier, Madeline and Kiran's relationship was hierarchical. Kiran usually followed Madeline's suggestions and often repeated Madeline's words and actions. In my entire time as a teacher in the classroom I did not observe Kiran lead in play (when playing with Madeline) even once. This does not imply that they did not conflict. Every once in a while Kiran would try to do something different, often at Madeline's urging but, like the above example, Madeline would subtly lead him back to doing things her way. Once, early in the Fall semester, Kiran rebelled and tried to make Madeline do what he wanted. Their interaction ended rather abruptly and Madeline refused to talk to Kiran for the rest of the afternoon. She asked Kiran to "go back to your room" on three different occasions. Something I had never observed before or since.

Madeline and Kiran are playing in the porch, pretending to be puppies. They crawl on the floor barking and giggling. When I walk up to them and ask if they are puppies they reply in "woofs".

Madeline: "Woof woof…go away doggy…that is for me"

Kiran: "you go away doggy . . . that is for me too"

Madeline: "No you have to find your own thing now"

Kiran: follows Madeline and mimics her movements.

Madeline: "Don't keep following me I am not your mommy, puppy" and she laughs.

A few minutes into their play Kiran decides he wants to play with the big wooden blocks and make a house for Madeline "the dog."

Kiran: "Come on . . . come on . . . lets build a house now . . . it's for you okay . . . for the doggy"

Madeline: "No. Doggy doesn't have a house. Not now . . . is not for doggy"

Kiran: "But I am a builder . . . I am making house for doggy"

Madeline crawls off in another direction.

Kiran: "Doggy come back here . . . it is going to rain and you have to stay in here"

Madeline: "I am not playing like that Kiran. Stop!" Comes up and pretends to paw Kiran.

Kiran: "Good doggy . . . stay in house doggy"

Madeline: "I am not playing with you. You have to go back to your room"

Kiran ignores the remark and gets busy building as two other children join him in building a "doghouse."

Madeline moves away and pouts. Then she stands up and says "I am not playing stupid doggy anymore" and walks away.

Much later, after clean-up, when I ask the children to wash their hands for snack,

Kiran goes up to Madeline and asks if she wants to go wash her hands

Madeline: "No"

Kiran: "We have to wash for snack"

Madeline: "I know"

Kiran: "Come"

Madeline: "No. I am not playing with you. Go back to your room to eat snack"

Kiran hesitates briefly and then walks away. The two don't talk or play with each

other for the rest of the day even though I notice Kiran occasionally playing near

Madeline when out in the playground.   *(Fieldnotes, 10/4/99)*

When examining the two episodes side by side it almost appears as if Kiran learned early in the relationship that while Madeline often indicated that she would like Kiran to think for himself, she had come to expect the opposite and Kiran appeared to understand this. When one examines this particular relationship using the close relationship model posited by Hartup and Laursen (1993) it becomes evident that while there is a marked power differential in the two children's interactions the individual investment somehow helps to maintain some form of exchange equity and helps preserve the relationship. Kiran goes along with Madeline's wishes knowing that this maintains his proximity with her and therefore an opportunity to participate in the usually creative activities that she comes up with. By the same token, though Madeline often shows annoyance at

Kiran's lack of originality in thought, she appears to realize that this in turn affords her the company of a willing and abiding partner in her play. Based on social exchange principles (Berscheid & Walster, 1969), equity theory maintains that continuance and maintenance of participants are based partly on perceptions of equity in past exchanges and expectations of equity in future ones. Hence, if either of the two children perceived these exchanges as inequitable and intolerable or that greater equity could be attained with alternative interaction partners, their relationship could be at stake.

Kiran was willing to follow in Madeline's footsteps. He rarely complained at not taking the lead and after the initial outburst of rebellion, was content with his role in the relationship. It is unclear, however, if Kiran had to compromise his innate temperament or nature in order to do so. In another scenario James indicated in a conversation with me, after a conflict with two other boys in the room, that he might have to behave differently in order to become friends with them.

James, Nick, Eric, Steve, and Paul are in the porch playing with the big wooden blocks. They all seem to be working on separate projects, though every now and then they will talk to each other usually to ask for a particular type of block. James has around his shoulders a red cape. Steve is wearing a miner's helmet and Nick a fire fighter's helmet. They are not, however, play acting these roles. After a little while Nick turns to Steve and gives him a friendly push and laughs, "What are you? A big fat roader?"

Steve: shoving Nick, "No! You are the big, fat roader...shroader...silly"

Nick: "I am a fire fighter...and I fight the fires"

Steve: "No you are a roader moader and you fight the roadies" (they mock wrestle on the carpet)

James: "I am a roader superman and I fight the baddies" (yells and runs towards the other boys)

Nick: "NO! You can't come and jump on us like that"

James: "Yes guys . . . I am a big fat superman roader too"

Steve: "But we are playing...only Nick and me"

James: continues to try and get in the tussle and manages to hurt Nick's arm in the process.

Nick: "Oww! Now look what you did. You don't know how to play this game"

Steve: Sees me approaching them and complains, "Ms. Vejoya, James is hurting us"

Me: "James please be careful when you play and you have to listen to your friends"

James; "They are not my friends. They don't want me to play with them"

Me: "Come here"

James follows me to out of the porch. We sit down near a pile of books.

James: "I need to be rough"

Me: "Why?"

James: "They only play rough"

Me: "Who plays rough?"

James: "Nick and Steve . . . they like to fight and they won't be my friends . . . I
have to fight too"

Me: "You think you have to fight to be friends with them?"

James: "Yes, they only play with guns and fight . . . I have to get some guns and
fight like the boys"

I try and disabuse him of the notion.   *(Fieldnotes, 2/12/00)*

To understand the full import of this communication it is important to
know a little about James and the two boys. Nick and Steve were very energetic
and popular. They developed ideas that the other children, especially the boys in
the room, wanted to emulate. On one occassion they decided to put water in the
sand table. On another they raced Gak from the ceiling and on yet another they
built a fort with the blocks. Their play with each other often got physical and they
would shove or wrestle each other to the ground. James, on the other hand, liked
much more sedentary activities. He liked to work on intricate projects with the
Legos, go on solitary archeological digs, or have a book read to him. He often
played alone and his attempts at entering play had frequently resulted in violent
outbursts on his part. His behavior during interactions were highly unpredictable
and ranged from giving unsolicited advice to making disparaging remarks
regarding their "stupid" play. He did not like others disturbing his solitary play
and would usually push or shove the intruding person away. His long, loose hair,

pale complexion, and sandals often confused the three/four year olds in the room

regarding his gender. His aggressive entry into play and his own exclusion of

others into his play made him rather unpopular. He frequently stopped to watch

the other boys play and would often try to enter the play, like on this occasion.

Through his interactions (often conflictual) with the boys he had come to the

conclusion that to play with Nick and Steve he would have to "play rough". While

the two boys were very boisterous in their play they seldom aggressed against

each other or their peers. It was usually James who pushed, shoved, kicked, and

even threw blocks at his peers. In disputes children often found the opportunity to

work out terms of relationships and a means for obtaining a better understanding

of what they could expect from each other by way of friendships as also an insight

into their own actions and role as a friend (Rizzo, Corsaro, & Bates, 1992). James,

however, appeared to have misread these signals either out of a wish to fulfill his

need for a "rough and tumble" friendship or because of other experiences that

were not observed.

Ways Conflict Scenarios Carried Over to Other Activities:

One area in which being a classroom teacher aided in the data collection

was to inform me of ways conflict carried over to other activities. While it was

common enough to see children hold a grudge or a hurt feeling for extended

periods after a conflict situation, it was not the only way conflicts played out in

the room. Often long forgotten conflicts would resurface, sometimes in contexts

that were only very tenuously linked. For example, on October 20, James had

knocked over a block construction that Nicole had built and the conflict over that

had ended with James declaring it an accident and Nicole rebuilding the

construction. Then on January 19,

Nicole refuses to hand James a paper cup at snack time and when asked why tells

James, "Because you always break my things".

James is perplexed because for the past few weeks he has been very good at

managing his temper and tantrums.

James: "But I didn't break anything . . . I didn't"

Nicole: "Yes you did . . . last time . . . you broke my house"

James: "When? I don't remember, really"

Nicole: "But I am not talking to you anymore because you are too mean"

James grabs a cup and continues his snack. Nicole finishes hers and leaves the

table. *(Fieldnotes, 4/13/00)*

This observation was meaningful only because the previous conflict had

been recorded. If there had been an interim dispute between the two children that

was not observed by me or the student teachers then the meaning attached to this

discourse would change and the significance of conflicts transcending time would

be invalid. This episode, however, is not the only one of its kind. We observed

frequent references to earlier conflicts of which one of the parties in the conflict

appeared to have no recollection, an observation that is congruent with the fact

that conflicts have varying degrees and levels of significance for the people involved (Hartup & Laursen, 1996).

One of the daily routines of the classroom included a group time just before the outdoor activities. Unlike the beginning-of-session group time this one usually consisted of revisiting experiences of the day and sharing our feelings. It also developed into a time when children voiced their delights and grievances regarding their interactions with peers. The children were always very open and honest about their feelings and it often surprised me how deeply they felt about such, what I considered to be minor, transgressions. I list below five very typical complaints that were heard during these occasions.

a). *" name of person I didn't like the way you grabbed that name of object from me. I don't like it when you do that"*

b). *"It was not nice to hit me. I don't want to play with you when you hit me"*
   Variation: "You are always hitting. I don't want to be your friend because you are always hitting me"

c). *"It always makes me sad when you don't let me play in the (loft, sand table, porch) with you. It makes me sad when you are nasty"*

d). *"you are mean. I don't like to play with you . . . you are always mean to all of us"*

e). *"name of person called me names. It is not nice to call names. Don't call me that again"*

Often these moments of sharing focused on the good side of peer interaction and reflected the children's understanding of their peers in relation to themselves as in:

a). *After an e specially long dispute revolving around the use of an orange marker Paul had this to say about Erica during group time: "Erica is my friend . . . she likes orange and I like the same color too".*

b). *Madeline: "When James was pushing me and I fell down to the floor . . . and Nick helped me to get up . . . I liked that because he helped me . . . like we are good and friends. But James made me mad and teacher said we can't push friends"*

c). *Christy: "Davey, don't call Liam . . . like Len . . . his name is Liam. He gets mad when you call him Len, okay." When I asked her how she knew this. She replied: "Once I called him Len and he said he was mad to me and didn't want to be my friend"*

d). *Steve: "We are good friends, right Nick? I help him build and sometimes he helps me build. We play and we only fight sometimes when he calls me stupid . . . or . . . poopy head"*

The above statements not only indicate that children remember transgressions against them for a long time but that they use interactional behaviors as cues of friendship or otherwise. When Steve mentions that Nick and he are good friends he highlights behaviors he feels are consistent with the role of a friend like helping, and sharing. His words appear to indicate that he does not

find fighting compatible with friendship as he hastens to qualify their fights as being somewhat trivial in nature.

Steve's views about friendship and disputes seem contrary in view of research that indicates socially interdependent conditions seem to intensify children's conflicts. On the other hand, one can explain this discrepancy by positing that since children appear to internalize the notion that good friends don't fight they might, even in the midst of a dispute, try to dispel the negative affects by trying to resolve the conflict in a manner that does not jeopardize the relationship.

How do conflicts evolve and what maintains conflicts?

Conflicts in the classroom are normal and occur frequently (Genishi & DiPaolo, 1982; Shantz, 1987; Verbeek, Hartup, & Collins, 2000). The conflicts that were observed during the study occurred when one child protested, retaliated, or resisted the words or actions of another (Hay, 1984; Shantz, 1987). While instances of object-oriented conflicts were observed for this study, only the ones that were related to more socially-oriented issues were analyzed. Socially-oriented issues related to conflicts stemming from disagreements about the nature of and access to play, opinions about rules, and teasing. The children demonstrated an ability to understand the causal link between intention of an act and its outcome and frequently used complex reasoning to evaluate social situations.

The following episode does not involve a serious conflict but reflects the meaning that the two boys had formed from their previous experience with similar situations that had often resulted in protracted arguments that had ended in name-calling and hurt feelings. James, once again, was trying to gain entry into a play that Nick and Steve had just invented. Instead of arguing with James they (grudgingly) abided by the classroom rules that "we try to be nice to each other" and let him join.

Steve and Nick are lying on their bellies hitting a marble back and forth with the help of rhythm sticks. When asked, they inform

Steve: "We are playing a game called Hit Ball!"

Nick: "Yeah! We made it up for us to play."

I asked if the game had any rules

Steve: "You cannot hit it too hard, it has to stay on the ground, there are no goals or points, and there are no winners or losers."

Nick: "Yeah no winners or losers and then no one can be sad."

A while later James asked if he could play the game with them. They were reluctant at first saying it was "our game," but later (with a little encouragement on my part) agreed to let him try it. James was placed on one side and Steve and Nick on the other. When James hit the marble too hard and it went past Steve and Nick they jointly proclaimed that he had "lost." James lost interest in the game and walked away. *(Fieldnotes, 4/12/00).*

James' inclusion in the game was short-lived as the two boys tacitly strategize to expel him from the game. The intersubjectivity that the two playmates share is intricately intertwined with their understanding of intended acts and outcomes. The two children who shared a tacit understanding of the game also appeared to understand that certain rules were for friends and others were for non-friends. James who had no shared understanding with either child did not even realize that the rules had been changed for him. The classroom peer dynamics appeared to influence the nature and resolution of conflicts. In this instance we see how prior conflictual interactions shape the present.

In other instances conflicts seemed to evolve into almost ritualistic scripts. It is uncertain if the protagonists were aware of this until they were midway into their arguments and suddenly realized that they have been through similar disputes before and argued in a similar manner. The following are three separate occasions when Christy and Nicole (both Korean) indulged in "scripted" arguments.

a). *Nicole: "Christy, you make the cake and I will make the juice"*

Christy: "No you make the cake and I will mix the juice . . . I can make it good"

Nicole: "I can make it more gooder than you"

Christy: "No! I can do it gooder"

Nicole: "I don't want to play that silly game"

Christy: "I don't want to eat that silly cake"

They turn their backs to each other and Christy walks away and joins Anita at

the sand table. *(Fieldnotes, 9/23/99)*

b). *Christy and Nicole are playing in the loft pretending to write out invitations*

for a birthday party. They have drawn balloons on the front of some paper

sheets.

Nicole: "Ooh this is pretty! Christy now we got to color them and write the

names okay"

Christy: "Yes…so pretty. We made them cutie pretty. I am going to write

Debbie's name okay?"

Nicole: "No! Christy you color the balloons pink and red okay. I will write our

friends name. You don't know how to write"

Christy: "You can't write, but I can write real good. You have to color"

Nicole: "I can write gooder than you."

Christy: " I can write gooder than you" and grabs the pen from Nicole"

Nicole: "That is not nice. I can write gooder . . . you know"

Christy: "Okay! Write it . . . I am not going to be your friend" and she walks

away. *(Fieldnotes, 10/12/99)*

c). *Christy and Nicole are standing at the easel painting on a single sheet of*

paper. Both the girls have been hard at work for the past five minutes. They are

using thick paint brushes and making big sweeping strokes. I am watching them

as they start running out of space and quietly nudging each other out of the way

as they try to reach for unpainted spots.

*Christy: "Nicole, **move**. I need to paint some more"*

Nicole: "Me too. Move that side. I need the yellow"

Christy: shoving Nicole back with her elbow "You move"

Nicole: "But I want to make this picture pretty"

Christy: "Look at mine . . . it is a rainbow . . . a pretty rainbow"

Nicole: "Mine is prettier, see. It has red dots"

Christy: "No mine is prettier"

Nicole: "Move Christy! I am going to make this pretty and give it to my mother"

Christy: "Me too. Stop pushing me." Calls out to me, "Make her stop"

Nicole: "Christy I am not going to play with you anymore."

Christy: "I don't care"

Nicole sulks and walks away.   *(Fieldnotes, 10/28/99)*

It is quite apparent that the two friends were very competitive. They also had a history of seeking each other's company. The two girls met socially outside of the lab school because their parent's were friends. While their arguments were often predictable they never stayed away from each other for long. Usually they were back playing together by the end of the day. Their competitive nature maintained their conflict while the implicit knowledge of the interdependency of their relationship allowed them the privilege of using statements like "I don't

want to be your friend"…."I don't care" etc. with ease and without the fear of loosing a good friend.

Conversely children perceiving a peer as unfriendly could also maintain conflicts. By the middle of the Fall semester most of the children in the classroom appeared to have chosen the peers with whom they wanted to maintain close relationship. As with every process that requires selection, some children were more popular as playmates than others. Children like James, Paul, and Betty were often excluded from play. Over the first few weeks the children had frequently voiced concerns about Paul's rough playing, James' aggressive behavior, and Betty's reluctance to participate in cooperative play. Either through personal experience with a child or from observing his/her behavior with others the children in the classroom had begun to form rather lasting opinions about their classmates. Paul's promises, "Guys, I promise I will not scream. I'll be good" was often met with skepticism and withdrawal. James's attempts to join the "boys" in play met with the same kind of treatment. This does not imply that the two children did not have playmates but only that their interactions with the majority of their peers was rather precarious. Paul's inability to play or function at the same wavelength as the other boys often resulted in disrupted play, as in the following example:

Nick, Steve, and Sam repeatedly play a game about detectives where they look for and find secret doorways. Paul (who is new) approaches the play and wants to join. He claims he has found the secret doorway, the boys ask him to say

the secret password that will open the door. Paul doesn't know the password and

is thus excluded from the play. He tries to rejoin by saying he has the key to the

secret doorway. The boys insist that only a password will work. Conflict ensues.

(Field notes, 10/5/99)

The same scenario transferred to other areas of play. Paul appeared to be out of synchrony with the play of his peers and this often resulted in conflict that required adult intervention. An inability to understand the tacit rules of games maintained Paul's conflicts with his peers. In another incident Paul joined in pretend play about super heroes and then decided to turn into a cop who catches heroes. Nick and Steve were aware that Sam was uncomfortable with any kind of gun-play, but Paul who either did not share the knowledge or did not care ruined the play.

In analyzing the data it becomes apparent that the children were steadily becoming aware of which statements had the most potential to hurt. Effective statements were repeatedly used during arguments. One that steadily gained popularity was "I am not going to invite you for my birthday". It had the power to hurt as it was specific and held the potential of being carried through unlike other threats, which were more ambiguous like "I don't like you anymore", or "you are a _____head".

Threatening new alliances was another way children maintained conflicts. Steve would often threaten Nick by saying, "If you be that way I am going to play

with Sam (or Paul, or James etc.)", by the same token Nick used the same peers as threats to Steve. Madeline constantly threatened Kiran with mention of friendship to others in the room.

Role of the teacher in the meaning making process:

The role of a teacher is to provide a safe yet dynamic environment for the children within which they can experiment with their new and growing knowledge of each other. As a teacher I view most children as being capable and competent, well equipped (by this age) to resolve most of their peer related conflicts. The intervention of an adult can sometimes obstruct children's ability to understand the complex terms and limitations of social relationships. Such relationships are based on complicated reciprocal give and take that can be understood only through experience. Peer interaction provides a rich venue for such experimentation. Sometimes adult intervention can pose a hurdle for children seeking to find their own meanings in interaction. In the following episode two children try to come to their own understanding of a conflict situation even after a student teacher has intervened.

Erika, a three year old, was pushed away roughly by James, a four year old, when she came up to where he was playing with toy farm animals. A student teacher rushed to intercede and the two were asked to articulate their feelings and asked to "use their words" in the future. The episode ended with James apologizing to Erica who replied, "Oh! Alright." Later that day, at snack time,

Erica sat next to James and the two ate their snack in silence. Suddenly Erica

turned towards James and the following conversation ensued:

Erica: "James, why did you push me away?"(There is no anger expressed.)

James looks very confused, "I ... I . . . Well...I thought you wouldn't

understand...um I . . . thought you wanted to spoil what I was doing."

Erica: "No, I just wanted to see."

James: "But I thought you would take something away."

Erica: "No. I just wanted to look."

James: "Okay I will let you look next time, okay?"

Erica: "Okay."

Still later that day, James shared with a student teacher, "That new girl Erica, is

my friend."   *(Field notes, 9/12/00)*

The episode is interesting because a peer had rarely ever questioned
James, who was usually very assertive and aggressive about his actions. The
consequence of his hurtful behavior often came in the form of adult reprimand.
The idea that such behaviors could make him lose friends had probably not
occurred to James even though group time was often used to talk about friendship
and qualities of friends. Perhaps James had to experience it personally for the
concept to be internalized. Erica, a newcomer to the class, was unaware of
James's reputation and sought to find the reason for his action even though a
student teacher had walked them through the "empathy talk" process. James was

put on the spot and had to look within to find a reason for the aggression that he had come to take for granted. This episode also illustrates the growing autonomy of the younger child in resolving a conflict. James agreed to let Erika play with him in the future not because a teacher told him it was right but because he had come to some sort of an understanding and appreciation of the friendly overture Erika made. Erika also reassured him that she would not disrupt his play. Such dialogue between peers encourages a mutual understanding of each other that is invaluable in the building of relationships. At the end of this episode, the group dynamics of the classroom changed. A child from the "old" culture had willingly taken a child from the "new" culture as a friend. The friendship that was established on this occasion lasted on and off for the entire year. A relationship that was marked by James's interest in Erika's imagination and the curious nature of her play (he once watched in fascination as Erika proceeded to bury herself in the sandbox). What remains unclear is whether this exchange would have taken place earlier in the day if a teacher had not intervened but let the children talk it over between themselves. Had the earlier intervention equipped the younger child with the words to question the motives of the older child? Do children come to a more intrinsic understanding of each other and their culture on their own? When does a teacher step in as an expert enabler and when does she or he step back as an interested observer? This and other episodes like this one illustrates the need for children to understand the complexities of a situation as well as the need for children to understand the perspective of another when put on the spot. The most

critical as well as difficult part was balancing the role of a caring enabler and an interested observer. Knowing when to stand back and when to jump in. Intervention was imperative in the light of harmful or hurtful behavior.

One of the ways a teacher can promote the relationship building potential of conflict is by providing an environment in which the children can revisit and talk about their emotions and conflictual interactions with each other. The scheduled group time provided the ideal forum for such discussions. I, as a researcher, am keenly aware that my stand on minimum intervention during verbal disputes between children had a marked effect on the interactions in the room. What is unclear is how much that might have influenced the social dynamics of the classroom. During group time the children were assured of a safe arena within which they could voice their emotions and opinions without the fear of being judged. It was during these moments that children reflected on the conflicts they had, talked about the qualities they looked for in friends, qualities that made interactions unpleasant.

a). *"Nick is my friend, he helped me when James wanted to take away my bike. That is not nice James"*

b). *"Paul is always pushing us when we are on the slide. That is not what friends do"*

c). *"It makes us sad when you tell us to go away. We want to play in the sandbox too"*

d). *"You called Sam a booger head. That is why he doesn't want to talk to you. I*

called him a snotty one time and Sam was mad with me for a very long time"

e). "If your friend wants to ride on the bike then you have to let him because he is

your friend. We don't want our friends to cry"

These are some of the examples of things said during the group time that directly reflect the children's growing understanding of each other. At other times the deeper knowledge of "Who am I? And how do I fit into the picture?" is a more blurry one. During the study I was as much a part of what I observed as an observer. Concern for James' inability to adapt or accommodate his peers was a source for concern. I noticed on a regular basis his struggle as he tried to gain acceptance amongst his peers. During a dialogic conversation with a colleague I was confronted with the question: "What do you do as a teacher to help him?" The answer to that question is very complex. Can one mandate friendliness? Can one impose relationships? I modeled acceptance and tolerance. Talked about forgiving and inclusion and hoped that James would learn the tacit rules involved in building friendships and that his peers would identify his need for company and look beyond his aggression.

During one group time, the children are discussing pets, especially dogs. James, who has no pet dogs, raises his hands to indicate he has something to say. However, he catches my eyes and winks before he speaks. I take it as an implicit appeal to play along with what he is about to say. James goes on to tell a fabulous tale of how he went to the pet shop to pick out two puppies. He chooses their names and even indicates what breeds they are. He tells the group that one has

blue eyes and the other brown. The children listen riveted as he gives them interesting details of his new pets and is impressed with the story. James looks very proud. A few minutes later as the class prepares to go outside, James asks me, uncharacteristically, if he can hold my hand as they go out.

(Fieldnotes, 3/22/00)

This episode provides a very poignant moment in teacher-child intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity was critical to understanding the situation. The wink from James in this situation was very different from a wink from another child in another situation. This wink indicated trust. On numerous occasions he has mentioned that his peers don't seem to understand what he is saying. His play is usually very complex and elaborate and he has trouble explaining his intentions to his classmates. He shows great interest in interacting but does not always succeed in doing so. When he noticed that talk about pets brought everyone together, his desire for inclusion made him create this fantasy of owning pets. The conflict here was one of exclusion or the child's perception of this exclusion by his peers. As the teacher, I try to maintain a distinction between pretend and reality. I realized because of my intrinsic understanding of James that this moment was important for him and I played along, reluctant to spoil his moment. In the process, I hoped that James too discerned where shades of truth were appropriate and not appropriate. His desire to hold my hand as we walked out of the class was an eloquent gesture of acknowledgement of my role as an accomplice. The role of a teacher in this episode is of one who promotes an environment of inclusion and acceptance. The conflict of purpose between a child and his peers was temporarily resolved by the teacher's

willingness to "bend rules", as it were, to facilitate an attitude of generosity. The potential of this incident to encourage James to lie or embellish the truth in order to gain friends was imminent. However, as a teacher I had to choose between the greater advantage of having James experience a positive moment in relation to his peers and the more remote possibility of having set the stage for future deceptive behavior.

Chapter 5

Social Dynamics

DESCRIPTIVES – SETTING II

Motivations:

The idea of doing a shorter follow-up study germinated while in the midst of doing the first. There were three key reasons behind this; generalizability, objectivity, and length of study. While collecting data in the first setting, there were moments when I wondered if the phenomenon of conflict and the way it played out in my classroom was particular to it or if similar patterns would emerge in preschool conflicts in varied contexts and with different populations. Secondly, the question whether my role as a researcher and a teacher would lend itself to the objectivity of the study was something I could confirm only by doing another study where the line between the two roles was not so entangled. Third, I wanted to juxtapose a long, involved participant role against a shorter, intense observer role and see if time and researcher role were central in making informed interpretations.

While these were some of the thoughts that provoked the need for observations in the second setting, the findings from it supported and gave me new insights into conflict and the meaning children make of them. In the following paragraphs, I have found it necessary to describe in brief the children and teachers. A need I did not feel in presenting the first. This may be indicative of a deep sub conscious way of providing the readers and myself with details

about a group I knew very briefly. In the first study my understanding and

consciousness of the children were so deep and involved that it is often beyond

the scope of time and space to put it in words.

Setting and Activities:

Hartup and Laursen (1993) noted the importance and effect of settings and

activities on children's conflict behavior. They stated that while "children's

conflicts almost always reflect the settings and relationships in which they are

embedded," the settings themselves are not entirely responsible for either the

evocation or resolution of conflicts. Therefore, it is important here to describe the

setting of the classroom in some detail as it directly affected my ability to observe

children simultaneously as it did the ecology of the children and thus their

conflicts. It is also important as many of the room rules (which figure prominently

in the data) pertain to the spaces and structure of the room.

The private daycare at which the observations were carried out was a low

lying very well maintained building. From personal acquaintance with the owner

and the literature provided for parents (whose children attended the daycare), I

was aware that the spaces in the daycare had been carefully planned. There was

ample light from strategically placed windows in every classroom and all the

rooms had doorways that opened out into the open, either onto the playground or

onto the parking lot. The rooms all had an abundance of natural light

While not very large, the room had ample space to accommodate the 16

children enrolled in the classroom. The walls were painted red. The tiled floors

were gray with clusters of square red tiles. The furniture was appropriately child-sized. At first glance the room appeared to be divided into three distinct areas. The two prominent wooden tables for manipulatives and food, the circle rug for group activities, and the dramatic area which consisted of a housekeeping section and a loft.

As one entered through the door there were two rectangular tables, made of wood, to the left of the room each with eight chairs placed around them. The room was almost cut in half by a row of shelves that served as cubbies. Beyond these shelves was the dramatic play area that included a row of hooks with dress-up material hanging from them on the wall on the right. A mirror, a rocking chair, and a little side table complimented the area. Beyond this lay the house keeping area replete with a kitchen table, a wooden toy range and refrigerator. The shelves of both were stocked with toy food and kitchenware. To one side of the kitchen table was a rack full of hats, shoes, helmets etc., against the back wall was a shelf full of dolls, some anatomically correct and some representing various ethnicity.

Directly above the kitchen area was a loft. I learned during my observations that this was a place for quiet play. There was a flight of sturdy steps leading up to the loft. The loft was full of soft pillow, a bookshelf full of books (each shelf with precisely ten books in it). A pegboard against the right wall completed the loft décor. The loft was called the "tree house" and was meant for "quiet and gentle activity," I was told that the books and the pillows were there to facilitate this type of behavior. The children frequently had to be reminded about

this as they ran up in the midst of a boisterous activity to get away from a teacher's scrutiny. Along the left rails of the steps was a shelf that housed the children's mailbox and this doubled as the music shelf, upon which lay a whole array of musical instruments (toys and kid sized equipment).

To the left of the steps was an open area with an electric blue rug with variously colored shapes along the border. This was called the circle rug and all group activities took place around this rug as the children were urged to "find a shape on the rug by a friend." Apart from group times this area afforded the children a nice open area to play in. The left wall of the classroom was covered with windows and a door that led outside onto the parking lot. One of windows had a little seat built into it and was strewn with a few pillows. This was where I sat and did most of my observation. To the right of the window seat was a small table with a microscope and next to it an oblong media table (a recessed table in which a variety of media such as water and sand may be placed).

Right in the middle of the rug and one of the long wooden tables was a low wooden platform. Storage bins under the platform held play materials of all kinds while the surface of it was used for play and storage of play items in current use. The room rules forbade a child from sitting or climbing on the platform at any time. Next to the platform, and surrounded by shelves on two sides was a wooden writing table. The shelves around it held paper, markers, crayons and other tools for writing.

While the setting provided an important context for interaction and conflict for the children, the most important data came from the children themselves. In light of the interpretative approach that I have used in this study it becomes crucial to give a much deeper and richer description of each child and their relationship, as I witnessed it, to each other. It would undermine the study to just refer to them as boy, girl or even to use just their pseudonyms. In the following section I will try to paint a vivid picture of each protagonist in the hope that these will help the readers make their own interpretation of the vignettes I will be using to illuminate my study.

<u>People as context</u>

There were 18 children enrolled in the classroom, 10 girls and 8 boys. At no point in the study were there more than 15 children present in the classroom. This, I was told, was typical of summer enrollments, a period when many families take vacations. The children's age ranged from four years to five years and two months (see table 1). All the ages of children presented here are based on the first day of observation (June, 2002).

TABLE 1.   Age in months and gender of children in Study II

Child Name	Months	Gender
Alex	55	**M**
Elle	54	**F**
Sara	48	**F**
Mark	54	**M**
Eric	59	**M**

Dennis	53	**M**
Natalie	52	**F**
Debbie	63	**F**
Amir	58	**M**
Calvin	60	**M**
Leigh	57	**F**
Sandra	48	**F**
Deejay	53	**M**
Mandy	58	**F**
Bart	62	**M**
Luna	56	**F**
Jane	62	**F**

While all the children were engaged in some interaction with others, there were some children who had more disputes and got into more arguments then others. Some children were observed specifically as they represented dyads with established relationships and these provided a closer examination of the relationship building aspect of conflict. Details of all the children are illustrated next.

Calvin was a tall rather thin five-year-old. His bright eyes and wide smile caught ones attention immediately. His slender body appeared to be tanned brown by the summer sun. He was the first to come over and talk to me as I sat by the window. His curiosity manifested in dozens of questions as he tried, with furrowed brows, to understand why I was there. As the weeks went by, I discovered that he could apply his mind to anything. He always knew the answers to the "if _#_ are present in class how many are absent?" While others used their fingers to do the math or quickly cast a glance around the room counting . . . Calvin already had the answer. On my first day in the classroom he jumped

around with a red ski cap pulled all the way down to his chin. He introduced
himself as "Spiderman" and informed me that Bart was "his best buddy", that
they "even wear the same shoes", that soccer was his "very favorite sport". He
usually wore loose soccer shorts and T-shirts with soccer logos on them.

He was very playful. He, unlike most children in the class, could write his
alphabet and also spell simple words, but he rarely sat at the writing table. His
games were physical and he played almost exclusively with Bart though he was
quick to help others. He, more than any other child in the classroom, mediated
other's conflicts. His play with Bart usually involved super heroes. The two boys
shared a close relationship which, I was told, extended beyond the daycare. They
often pretended to communicate in strange languages, they both had an intense
interest in Native Americans. While not averse to having others join their play the
interactions were brief. His creativity and cooperation made games more exciting
for others.

Bart like Calvin was five and admitted to feeling very proud to be going to
kindergarten in the Fall. He was a very fair complexioned child with closely
cropped blond hair and shiny blue eyes. He was quick to smile and loved to talk.
He moved around the room with a lot of confidence and was popular among the
children. He dealt with adults around him in a confident way but appeared to be
embarrassed very easily. He came from a family of boys, three siblings all of
them boys. He was very proud of being able to write his name, which he wrote in
a stylized manner and only two letters were recognizable, of which one was

reversed. Very often he would walk up to me and ask if he could write his name on my notebook. His clothes reflected his love for basketball. He often wore basketball uniform styled sleeveless shirts with loose sports shorts.

Eric was a chubby, articulate child. He was emotionally volatile smiling and laughing one minute and in tears or close to them the next. He could draw rather well and drew a lot of attention from his peers when he sat at the writing table. The attention appeared to make him irritable. He had trouble making transitions. I was usually a witness to the transition to playground time and Eric made a big fuss every day about getting his sunscreen on. He spent at least five minutes each day saying "I don't want it" and "I don't know how to put it" and then a good ten minutes putting it on under protest with two fingers. I learned from his teachers that he had just become an older brother. So far he had been the youngest of three and the new addition had apparently caused a lot of upset.

Debbie was a tall, lanky, five-year-old girl. The bobbed brown hair framing her animated face was usually pulled back in a ponytail, which she constantly untied and tied as she played. She frequently brought in hair accessories to the room even when the teacher asked her not to. She would often misplace them and cry. Her time in the classroom was usually accompanied by either loud play as she sang and danced while playing, or a frown as she sat by the window. She was the only child in the class whom I observed in outright conflict with the teachers. Often she would stomp away or even hiss and spit at teachers when told not to do something. Most of her conflict with others in the class was

related to power. She played most often with Jane (who came in three times a week with Mark coming in the other two). She usually wanted Jane to play exclusively with her and appeared angry when Jane played with others.

Jane was tall and blond, quick to smile and eager to talk. She was there just three days a week. I wasn't able to observe her for long as she went on a long trip halfway through my observations. Jane was easy going and appeared comfortable playing with all her peers.

Elle was probably the most cheerful child in the class. She had a ready grin and tackled most things with a smile. She was physically challenged and had limited mobility in her right limbs. Her speech was slightly slurred and other children in the class sometimes had difficulty understanding her. This did not stop her from trying out everything in the classroom. She was new to the room and appeared a little hesitant in joining group play but loved to watch and joined in whenever the opportunity came her way. The impact of her disabilities on her peers was marked. They were willing to accommodate her without being blatant. She seldom asked for help with anything. I once saw her struggle for a good seven minutes trying to get a box of props off a shelf. The only time she needed help was in climbing up and down the loft. One day I noticed her at the top of the steps waiting to come down. Just as I was getting up to help her something distracted me for a few seconds, before I knew it Elle had come down the steps and was waiting at the bottom grinning from ear to ear saying in a calm voice "I did it".

Mark was a four-year-old boy with blond hair and light eyes. He frequently looked like he had just rolled out of bed with his eyebrows raised in question and a slightly bewildered expression on his face. He rarely ever expressed any kind of strong emotion over anything. However, everyday on waking up from nap he would sit to pull on his sandals and would comment on how "big (his) feet are and how small (his) sandals are". I rarely observed anyone actively seek out Mark for play, yet he was never alone. He appeared to almost deliberately avoid conflict.

Alex had his left arm in a cast for the first two weeks of observation. This meant that he could not participate in the swimming lessons and he was also having difficulty taking a nap in the afternoons as the thumb he used to suck was encased in the cast. He looked like he was about to burst into a giggle at any minute. He had an opinion about everything. He was a wonderful catalyst for conflict. He had the knack of pointing out discrepancies in the functioning or play of his peers that often led to conflicts.

Deejay was a powerfully built four-year-old. He like Sara, Sandra, Elle, and Dennis was new to the classroom. His powerful voice was loud and deep. Deejay liked to play by himself most of the time and this he did by amassing material, which led to conflicts with other children. Despite his egocentric behavior he often made room for Elle or Dennis to join his play.

Amir was a fragile looking, soft-spoken little boy. He was the only non-white in the classroom, but I am not sure if the children even noticed or cared. He

was born in America and spoke without an accent and that may have helped. Out of all the other children in the class Calvin and Bart picked him out to play with. He was usually very easy going and adapted well to other's play. Despite his quiet manner he was very popular as a playmate.

Luna was a pretty four-year-old with summer-tanned skin and long brown hair that hung down her back. She appeared (perpetually) to be silently protesting something. She was quickly moved to tears and at such moments she wailed rather loudly. During my five weeks of observation not a single day passed when Luna did not have a breakdown. I observed that very often it was she who instigated trouble. She would knowingly step on somebody's book, or mess up their work and then cry out aloud if they retaliated. The teachers appeared to recognize this pattern of behavior rather well and would either ignore her cries or ask her to use her words to negotiate with her peers.

Sara was a petite four-year-old with a very serious expression. She appeared to be pondering. Though she was quick to beam a smile if you caught her eyes. During my afternoon observations I found her to be the last to awaken from nap and then she would sit with her blankets in a heap for a long time as she looked around the room with a rather blank expression. A drastic change came over her after she had had some snack and then she would be all over the room playing in a very quiet way. Deejay liked to play with her and they mostly played in silence.

Dennis was an energetic little boy with Down syndrome. An aide usually accompanied him. During my observations he was usually in the periphery . . . doing everything just a little before or after the others in the room. This was so others would not be kept waiting as Dennis took longer to do most things. While not a major protagonist in the conflicts he added an interesting context to the children's experience.

Mandy was a bubbly, blond haired girl. Her hair was usually tied up in two high pigtails that she swung around as she walked. She was among the first to wake up from nap. She was frequently observed smiling and jumping around the room. I never saw her really upset over anything for very long. She was enthusiastic about transitions and was usually the first one to be at the snack table or the circle rug when called.

Sandra was a tiny four-year-old girl with bright blue eyes. She was very talkative and curious and would often ask me what I was doing. She was absent for the last two weeks of the study. While small in size, Sandra was relentless in her pursuit of friends to play with. She was very articulate and had an explanation for everything she did. When ever both children were present in the classroom Sara and Sandra tended to play together.

Leigh was a chubby, four and half year old with long, sun bleached brown hair that hung to her waist. She belonged to the older cohort of children who had already spent time in the room and appeared comfortable with her peers and teachers. She wore long linen dresses that hung down to her knees. She spoke

softly and often complained of headaches and itches that she thought was "chickenpox." Luna used to seek her out for play but Leigh didn't show any particular preference for her company.

Natalie embodied the carefree spirit of a four-year-old. Her dresses epitomized her nature. She usually wore loose all-cotton dresses with dropped waists that allowed plenty of movement and like her clothes she moved and mixed freely in the class. She was at ease with the adults in the room and with her classmates.

The Teachers:

Susan was considered the main Red Room teacher. She was there at 7:00 a.m. in the morning through 12:00 noon and then she worked in her office doing her administrative duties for the daycare. She was a very vivacious woman with curly brown hair and a ready laugh. She has been at the facilities for the past eight years. The children adored her and they seemed to be aware that she was in charge of the room. She had very stringent rules for all areas of the class where there was potential for trouble. For example, one corner of the room had crystal and glass shapes hanging from the ceiling as mobiles. When a child wanted to touch them they were allowed to climb on a stool and "touch with one finger". Since this could lead to a lot of children wanting to climb stools to touch the mobiles there was another rule 'only one set of feet on a stool at a time". These rules took away the ambiguity from certain activities reducing the potential for conflict.

Tiffany was the primary afternoon teacher. She usually came in at 10:00 a.m. stayed till 12:00 noon then came back from 2:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. She was a very lively young woman with tattoos on her arms and legs and very short, spiky, red hair. She usually wore shorts, cotton shirts, and sandals and had a very good rapport with the children. Never once during my entire observational period did I hear her ever raise her voice or see her loose her patience with a child even though she confessed (with a smile) on numerous occasions that she desperately needed a vacation. Her sense of humor helped everyone get over some tough times, like clean up time. "You have a choice, you can clean up the mess you made or you can go home with me and clean up the mess I made". This always got a few laughs and the children did what they were supposed to do. I am not sure Tiffany felt completely at ease in the room. The classroom to all purposes was Susan's room and there were times when Tiffany would defer the disciplining to Susan. I am not sure if this was done because Tiffany lacked confidence in her own methods or whether it was expected of her.

Relationships

     As I sit down to observe, Jane and Debbie walk up to where I am sitting and start talking to me. They want to know what I am writing. If it will eventually become a story about them? Do I know anybody in the class from home? Do I know how old they are? Before I have time to reply to their many queries they take it upon themselves to inform me about who are friends and who are not. First they talk about themselves

Jane: "I am five and next year I will go to kindergarten. I am not coming back after summer is over"

Debbie: "Me too. I am going to school too. Jane and I are like friends . . . but we sometimes fight"

Jane: "That's because she doesn't have sisters and I have two"

Debbie: "And then she won't play with me . . . because sometimes when we are at our fathers house they come too"

Me: "Are you sisters?"

Debbie: "No silly. Just friends. See…our daddy's are roommates that's why"

Jane: "But them . . . Bart and Calvin they are good friends"

Sara who has walked up to us joins in

Sara: "Sandra and I are new and we are friends from the green room . . . right Sandra you are my friend?"

Jane: "But Eric is not our friend"

Eric: "Everybody has to be friends in the Red Room"

All: "Yeah. We like to play together"

Debbie: "Sometimes we don't and that is okay".

Sara: "Sandra and I don't fight, right?"   *(Fieldnotes, 5/22/02)*

From the above conversation it is clear that the children feel the need to talk about their friends and in so doing about relationships. Relationships provide an interesting context for behavior. It has been documented that there is a marked difference in the way conflicts play out between friends and non-friends (Laursen & Hartup, 1989). Conflicts, within the context of relationship, have dual implications for child development. On the one hand disputes can be impediments to the establishment of enduring relationships (Selman, 1980; Youniss & Smollar, 1985) and on the other, disagreements can bring to light the similarities that exist between people, a necessary step towards relationship building (Gottman, 1983). Conflict is a social exchange and occurs between individuals and as such involves contributions from each individual separately as well as a contribution that arises from the relationship they share with each other. In the case of Debbie and Jane, the complex relationship they share outside of daycare plays out in the daycare in ways that would be hard to explain or interpret without knowledge of the relationship they share. The reference to "sisters" in the above conversation is very crucial as the two girls act more like siblings than like classmates most of the time. Like siblings they appear to be feel a necessity to co-exist despite the hurt feelings much like siblings (Bedford, Volling, & Avioli, 2000) instead of avoiding

each other in an environment that could make this avoidance viable. I realized as days went by that their interactions were greatly influenced by whether or not they had spent time together under the same roof during the weekend. They both came from divorced families and their fathers shared an apartment. On certain weekends their visitations coincided and they got to spend time under the same roof. Debbie being an only child looked forward to having Jane to play with but, more often than not, Jane (who had two other sisters) spent more time with her family. This upset Debbie, who felt ignored, and the emotions made its way into the daycare context as Debbie continued to be angry and hurt. The hurt was expressed in various ways and these will be discussed later.

Similarly Sara's need to seek confirmation from Sandra regarding their friendship ("*right Sandra you are my friend?")* arose from them being new in the classroom and the need for Sara to be able to stay close to a familiar face and claim a friend. They were also among the youngest in the room. Sandra who was more outgoing and articulate made friends more easily and didn't seem to require the reassurance of a friend as did Sara.

The reference by Jane to Bart and Calvin's friendship is important. During the course of my observations I realized that the only long-term friendship in the classroom was between the two boys. It was very impressive that the children in the classroom were able to acknowledge this relationship and that Jane saw this particular dyadic relationship as something different from what she and Debbie shared. Bart and Calvin's relationship provided a crucial key to the interpretation

of their conflicts. Often what appeared to be conflict were "rituals" that were enacted repeatedly and within a predetermined script of which both partners were aware.

Eric's declaration that "everyone in the Red room must be friends" too stemmed from the context of relationships. In the five weeks that I spent in the class, Eric was perhaps the only child who actively solicited playmates. Often his solicitations were in vain as children moved back and forth in their interactions often bypassing him. It is also interesting how he defended the potential for isolation by articulating a rule as he often used his knowledge of rules to justify his actions.

While the role of conflicts in friendships has been explored by Rizzo (1989), it is interesting to note how a mere dialogue on the subject of relationships can reveal so much about the embeddedness of behavior in this particular context. Like Rizzo (1989) I found that over half the conflicts observed were not about relationships or friendships. Even so a substantial number of conflicts dealt directly with the subject of relationship and friendship. More importantly these appeared to involve the children's expectations of friends and their behavior.

Friendships:

It would be futile here to pursue the interpretation of conflicts based on friendships without describing the dyads in which individuals appeared to have a long-term relationship with each other. The most obvious friendship in the room

was that of Bart and Calvin. It was one of the very first things that Calvin mentioned to me, *"Bart and I are best buddies. He is coming to my house for a sleep over for my birthday. Look we even wear the same shoes"*. Bart on his part tried just as hard to relate the special nature of their relationship to me. He told me Calvin had given him a *"telescope for my birthday and a real cool super powers watch . . . that um. . . has super powers it can do"*. The teachers in the classroom told me that it was difficult to separate the two and this caused a problem when they decided to "*horse around"*. Their peers at various points in my observation made comments regarding their friendship. Surprisingly theirs was the only long-term relationship that I observed in the classroom. It was surprising since many of the children had been in the same classroom for at least a year and some had even been in the same daycare for three years.

Debbie and Jane played with each other often and even (as mentioned earlier) had occasions to spend the night under the same roof but they still did not always appear eager or interested in playing exclusively with each other. The best way to describe the two girls' relationship would be to say they played begrudgingly with each other. Instead of a balance of power there seemed to be a struggle for dominance in their relationship, which frequently led to disruption of play.

Jane is still sleeping on her cot. The other children have started rousing themselves and putting things away. Debbie comes up to Jane's cot and squats on the ground next to it. Debbie: "Wake up Jane, wake up…wake up wake up"

Jane: turns around and buries her head in her blanket

Debbie: "Wakey, wakey . . . time to wake up"

*Jane: "**Go away** Debbie…leave me alone"*

*Debbie: "Wake up . . . wake **up**"*

Jane: singing softly "you are not the boss of me…you are not the boss of me"

Debbie: "Wake up"

*Jane: "Debbie, **YOU** are **NOT** the Boss of **ME**"*

Debbie: "Alright, be that way" …and leaves

When Jane gets up a little later Debbie is waiting to play with her. The two prance around the room singing "rock and roll girls". There is a distinct change in Debbie's behavior towards Jane for the rest of the afternoon. She holds back a couple of times from giving directions to Jane as they play. (Fieldnotes 6/19/02)

Debbie, who usually waked up earlier than the other children, used to become a little restless waiting for Jane to wake up. On the days that Jane was absent Debbie would wake up early and sit looking out of the window with a brooding expression on her face. On the days that Jane was present, however, Debbie appeared eager to start playing. During my observations I noticed that Debbie did not like being told what to do and liked to take the lead in play, opting out of a play when things didn't go her way. Jane on the other hand was an easygoing child but did not like the way Debbie told her to do things. Her protests were usually mild and she would walk away from play if Debbie got too demanding. On this occasion Debbie clearly wanted Jane to wake up and play

with her but rubbed Jane the wrong way as Jane rebelled by telling her that she "is not the boss." Debbie's potential play partner thus rejected her rather insistent demands to wake up and the play ended before it even started. Though later they appear to have forgotten the incident as they happily dance and sing together. This conflict episode highlights the disharmony in their purpose as play partners. What occurs as a continuum after the conflict reflects an awareness of what meaning Debbie might have made of Jane's outburst as she tries to regulate her behavior in order not to cause further cessation in their play. However, the lack of an apology from Debbie indicates that there is a certain amount of elasticity in the relationship that gives her the confidence or knowledge that Jane will play with her despite what just occurred. It also indicates that there is the same kind of understanding on Jane's side, that the reproach "you are not the boss" would be taken as an indication of her displeasure and that voicing her opinion on the matter was sufficient punishment for Debbie's symbolic straining of the strings of friendship. Disputes such as this one gives children the opportunity to work out the terms of their relationships, thus allowing them to gain a better understanding of what to expect of each other as friends.

Calvin has built a very complex design with the people connectors. The two teachers on duty both commend his work/skill. Bart has been working beside Calvin but has not built anything. He is still trying to keep the pieces from falling apart. Calvin decides to teach Bart how to build a design like his own.
Calvin: "Look Bart, step one . . . step ONE"

Bart: "Stop it"

Calvin: "Step two . . ."

Bart: "Step Stop IT"

Calvin: "Step . . ."

Bart: "Step stop it . . . stupid"

Calvin looks upset but stops . . . later moves away to read a book on his own.

Later that day Tiffany reads a book "Bo & Peter" about friends. Calvin

comments: "Just like Bart and me are best friends".   (Fieldnotes 6/24/02)

Calvin and Bart constantly play together. They are the self-proclaimed best buddies of the classroom. While they continuously play and fight their conflicts never seem to end in any kind of disruption. Only one other time have I seen Calvin walk away from Bart and sit in the 'alone' box to get away from him. Their conflicts to me are like a fencing duel where perfecting a skill takes precedence over malice or the need to hurt. Calvin and Bart seldom had serious conflicts but when they did it involved issues of pride. While equals in age, every once in a while Bart appeared to be a little less confident about certain skills than Calvin. These were the times when he would rebel against Calvin. Use of the word "rebel" may conjure up images of an unequal distribution of power and this was true to the extent that the teachers and children in the class seemed to be aware of Calvin's advanced understanding of certain things like math. Bart too was witness to the numerous occasions in which Calvin's skills had been lauded.

On this particular day both boys had been hard at work with the "people connectors" (inter-lockable pieces of people shaped plastic forms), and while Calvin had made a complex pattern with them Bart was still trying his hands at it. This in itself appeared to bother Bart. To compound matters the teacher's praise of Calvin's figure and Calvin's insistence in trying to teach him how to do it seemed to upset and embarrass Bart.

My interpretation of the incident is that Bart did not wish to have his ineptitude, with the material at hand, to be called to attention and Calvin's step by step instructions did just that. It undermined his abilities and it probably hurt more because it came from a good friend. He wanted the whole thing to just blow over but Calvin did not take his cue and this infuriated Bart. Calvin on the other hand was hurt because his friend who he, perhaps, thought ought to be grateful for the input rejected his well-intentioned guidance. In any case both boys decide they needed time apart from each other. Only on one other occasion had I observed them walk away after a disagreement. The acknowledgement, later in the day, of their special friendship was like glue that hoped to seal the tear that had been made in their friendship through a minor infraction.

Like Tesser, Campbell, and Smith (1984) I found that children have more frequent conflicts with their friends than with non-friends during activities in which their egos are invested. Hartup and Laursen (1993) pointed out that activities may elicit disagreement dependent on the individual's investment in the activity and their relationship with the other individuals involved. They said

"most individuals strive to maintain positive views of themselves, and these self-views rest mainly on performance in relevant activities . . . Outstanding performance by a close friend may be threatening when the activity is specially relevant to one's self esteem, whereas outstanding performance in the same activity by a more distant individual may not be" (p.66).

Bart and Calvin also often engaged in a "play" of name-calling. I have included the next two episodes in this section to illustrate the textural difference in the meaning that children create of similar incidents depending on whether it is between friends or non-friends. Here is an example of name-calling between friends:

Calvin and Bart are waiting by the door for some older children to come spend the afternoon in the Red Room. One of them happens to be Bart's older brother. They are leaning against the doorframe and talking about an argument Bart just had with another child (which I did not observe).

Calvin: "Alex, he called me a doofus"

Bart: "What's a doofus?"

Calvin: rolls his eyes around and sticks his tongue out

Calvin: "You are a tussy"

Bart: "You are a boogger"

Calvin: "You are a snot"

Bart: "Eeeewww . . . you eat snot"

Calvin: "Eeeeww"

They laugh loudly and carry on shoving and tickling each other for a while.

(Fieldnotes 6/25/02)

In this incident neither Calvin nor Bart are upset at the names they call each other yet even as the incident began Calvin was complaining to Bart that he had been called "doofus" by another child in the class. During such exchanges a certain amount of shared understanding is required of the participants, as a sub-conscious control must be exerted in order to keep the exchange within the bounds of what is permissible between friends. Without a keen awareness of the elasticity of the relationship such an exchange could easily escalate into something malicious and embittering.

In the above episode their verbal exchange takes on the form of what has been referred to as "ritual conflict" (Garvey & Shantz, 1993) in which exchanges display a repeatable, prescribed pattern. Dunn (1988) observed "ritual insults" between siblings and Gottman (1986) described "squabbling" between children that had "a teasing, insulting quality to the ritual insult exchanges that can be found among young preadolescent black children" (p. 189). While what Gottman refers to requires participants to follow rigid rules of style and syntax, the exchange in this example is less rigid and it is the deep understanding of the terms of their relationship that prevents it from turning into a serious conflict.

Sara, Amir, and Alex are in the housekeeping area. When Susan calls out for snack, the children start putting away playthings. Sara continues to play and when Amir starts to unpack the backpack and put things away she asks why he is

doing it.

Sara: "Why are you taking it out? . . . don't do that".

Alex: "Because of snack"

Amir: "Don't you know Red Room rules"

Sara: "Yeah"

Amir: "No you don't know them"

Sara: "Yes I do"

Amir: "You don't know"

Sara: "I know"

Alex jumps into the argument

Alex: "Okay smarty pants"

Sara: "I am not smarty pants"

Alex: "Okay, what do you know Fi Fi Pants"

Sara: "I am not Fi Fi Pants"

Alex: "Ok. What do you know Pajama pants"

Sara: "I am not pajama pants"

Alex: "what do you know pee-pee pants?"

Sara walks over to Tiffany to complain. Tiffany sends her back encouraging her to use her 'words' to let Alex know she doesn't like the way he is talking to her. Sara comes back but does not say a word to Alex. She quietly puts things away. Then carrying a basket of playthings she approaches Alex.

Sara: "Where do you put this away? I need to put this away." Amir shows her.

Alex taunts her: "You don't know Red Room Rules".

Sara walks away for snack. Alex continues to put away things by himself.

(Fieldnotes 6/26)

Here the name-calling begins as a taunt by Alex to Sara for not knowing the rules. Had it been between friends it may not have progressed as it did. Throughout this incident Alex giggles and laughs while Sara grows red and angry. Alex fails to read the signs of genuine anger and Sara misses the teasing nature of the exchange. Yet, at the end of it Sara comes to terms with the incident and tries to make a fresh start, but Alex once again fails to read Sara's need for mutual prosocial interaction and continues to call her names.

Teasing and rough-and-tumble play falls into the gray area of conflict behavior. Teasing has been referred to variously as "non-serious" conflict (Garvey & Shantz, 1992) and "playful behavior" (Dunn, 1988). Garvey and Shantz call it the "verbal analog to rough and tumble" (p.101). However, it has the potential to be hurtful especially if the parties involved do not share the same understanding regarding the nature of the teasing. In this particular episode Sara was not receptive of the teasing while Alex appeared to show by his laughing that he didn't mean to be taken so seriously. Maynard (1985) demonstrates how children can use "non-serious" cues to shift a serious conflict to a playful one in order to defuse a dispute. It is not clear from Alex's behavior if he was attempting such diffusion or if he had just been unable to read the extent of Sara's discomfort with his teasing.

Calvin and Bart are having a mock fight (imitating Ninjas). They are arguing very loudly about nothing in particular and then Bart shoves Calvin to the ground. Calvin falls with an exaggerated thump to the floor. Then just as Bart falls on top of him he rolls out from under Bart's falling body and stands up. Bart then lies prone rolling away just as Calvin tries to fall on him. The two continue this for at least five minutes while Eric looks on giggling. Bart and Calvin don't appear to take any notice of Eric. After a while Eric starts imitating the fall and roll routine on his own without joining in. About five practices later he joins the game. Calvin and Bart are still mock arguing with each other (All I can catch are the louder "Oh Yeahs" and "Sez who" bits). Eric takes his cues from the boys and gets shoved down by Calvin. He falls to the ground, meanwhile Bart tries to fall on top of him but Eric who is not in tune with the whole play does not roll away in time and his legs get stuck under Bart and he grabs onto Calvins leg who crashes down on them. The two friends start shouting at Eric, "Look what you did" and "You messed it up". The teacher steps in "you boys will have to find other things to do. I am afraid you are going to hurt yourselves". The game ends. Bart and Calvin walk away mumbling about how "Eric spoilt the fun". Eric who has been having a very rough time getting children to play with him walks away looking confused and ready to cry.   (Fieldnotes 6/18/02)

This conflict play between Bart and Calvin remind me of the "dance of reciprocity", C. S. Rogers (personal communication, 2000) that exists between

persons with a shared understanding of relationships. It is difficult to tell whether

practice made the game perfect or if this was an example of what perfect

intersubjectivity between friends should be, an ability to function at a level where

the psyche is synchronized. Eric did not join the game by force; his intrusion

while unsolicited was not unwelcome. He also joined the game after having

practiced on the sidelines. Yet the breakdown of the game is blamed on him and

total chaos replaces the synchronized activity. This was not the first time that Bart

and Calvin had played this game and it usually ended with distraction or a need to

make a transition. However, it was the first (and during my observation) the last

time a third child had entered the play.

The episode is not interesting because of the conflict in it, but it somehow

jumps out as a model for what a conflict is often like between friends. In my

opinion social interaction often involves trial-and-error for young children as they

begin to understand themselves in relation to others. While an infant, their

interaction with the world is one-sided where everything and everybody is

generally understood in relation to the self. For example, the mother is someone

who feeds and changes diapers, the sibling a source of entertainment, etc. As the

child grows these interactions become complex and it becomes necessary for the

child to adapt to the idea that the self exists in context with others. Perception-

taking evolves out of dialectics and conflict. In friendship one gets the

opportunity to be able to understand and internalize the differences and

similarities that exist between people. This understanding in turn grants friends

the confidence of being able to test the elasticity of relationships without (most often) jeopardizing the fragile balance that has been created out of differences. I use the present example to demonstrate at a very physical level the complex relational process involved in a conflict between friends. Through playing together, tacit understanding of rules, and the mutual desire to accomplish a goal, the two boys have been able to construct a complex and elaborate game. Athleticism and timing are the basic ingredients, beyond that there is the trust they have built, their shared understanding of the rules of the game that make this play into a well choreographed dance. When a third and unfamiliar party joined the play, the intersubjectivity fell apart and the fragile balance disintegrated.

Bart stands up from the platform and stumbles and falls.

Debbie, who is playing with material on the platform laughs.

Calvin: "It's not funny Debbie"

Bart: "Yeah it's not funny if it happened to you"

Debbie continues to smile.

Calvin and Bart start building with the 'people connectors" on the platform sitting beside Debbie.

Bart: "Debbie, can I have a yellow one?"

Debbie: "No!"

Calvin snatches one out of Debbie's hand and gives it to Bart. Debbie is about to yell when Tiffany intervenes: "Do you want the yellow ones just because Debbie

has them or because you really need them?"

Bart: "Because I need it"

Calvin: "Because she has them"

Then Bart decides to work with the red ones and the dispute is settled. Debbie has

the last word: "Calvin and Bart get off the platform. OFF!" (Red Room rule: the

platform is not for sitting on).   *(Fieldnotes 24/6/02)*

This episode represents another interesting aspect of friendship and conflict. Very often when one member of a friendship dyad has a difference of opinion with a third person the other invariably enters to help or take sides. Since Bart and Calvin represented the one truly long-term friendship in the classroom, I most frequently observed the two standing up for each other in such situations. Here Calvin is the first to object to Debbie's laughter at Bart's accident. Later Calvin once again comes to Bart's rescue as he snatches a "people connector" out of Debbie's hand for him after Debbie has just refused Bart's request for one.

I observed that Calvin had a very strong sense of fairness and often intervened in other's conflict, usually with a solution (this will be discussed in a separate section). However, it is also true that both Calvin and Bart would come to each other's aid when the occasion demanded it.

Once when the two were in a middle of a conflict with Eric . . .

Eric kicks Calvin

Calvin: "Eric, you kicked me…that isn't nice"

Bart: still laughing and acting silly "Yeah . . . that's not nice. You don't have to

kick Calvin…you can kick me though . . . ha, ha."

Eric looks perplexed then joins the two in laughter.

Eric looks on smiling as Calvin and Bart start to rough house.

Eric: "Calvin you have to come and get me" (a number of times, each time

getting shriller)

The two boys ignore him and mock wrestle each other. Eric walks away after a

while.   *(Fieldnotes 6/19/02)*

The friendships within the classroom and especially of this dyad (Bart and

Calvin) were an integral part of the peer culture within the classroom. The

conflicts within these relationships reflected the culture of the classroom and the

culture in turn influenced the very process of these conflicts.

Power Dynamics:

Another aspect of the peer culture that was very tangible in the classroom

was that of the power dynamics among the children. Since the class comprised of

some children (old) who had been in the Red Room for over six months and yet

others (new) who had only been in the room for only a week there was a definite

proprietary feeling (on the part of the "old" children) towards the room, the

teachers, and the artifacts within the room. The "old" children took it upon

themselves (with the encouragement of the teachers) to acquaint the "new" children with the various rules of the classroom. On their part the "new" children appeared a little more hesitant in forming friends or approaching the "old" children's games. While the dichotomy of the "old" and "new" was apparent, there were other more subtle hierarchies at work. There were noticeable power issues in a couple of relationships among the "old" children. We have dwelt on one of these briefly in the preceding section. Debbie and Jane, while obviously fond of playing with each other, also showed signs of a power struggle. Sara and Sandra the youngest in the class turned to each other for companionship. Eric was one of the "old" but he had trouble interacting with them and he was not very successful in trying to interact with the "new" either. Deejay was new to the room and only four but his large size made him stand out among the "new" children. Yet, he was unable to identify with the "old" boys. Amir and Mark deliberately and successfully sought out Bart and Calvin to play with but at the same time they appeared eager to do just as Bart and Calvin asked them to. Alex likes to play with almost everybody in the room but he takes special delight in teasing the "new" children. Mandy, Luna, Leigh, and Natalie all played with each other but did not seem to have affiliations to any particular peer. The following episodes illustrate the power dynamics inherent in the peer culture of the classroom.

One of the primary peeves of the "old" children appeared to be the "new" children's apparent lack of knowledge of the Red Room rules as demonstrated very powerfully in an example in the previous section. Through out my

observation there were incidents in which the "old" children went out of their way to explain rules to the "new" children. Thus it appeared that the knowledge of rules gave power and leverage to the children who were older in age than the new comers to the room.

Laurel, Bart, Debbie, Deejay, Luna, Elle . . . are all sitting on the circle rug playing with tracks and trains. They are working hard at putting together a railroad track. But even as they work together there is little communication about what to do or how to go about building it. There are several dead ends that are discovered as one or the other child runs a set of trains down the tracks. Whenever a dead end is discovered the child who has made the discovery sets about correcting the problem while elsewhere too another child rearranges the rails . . . resulting in continuos chaos. Deejay grabbing a bunch of trains and hiding them under his thighs compounds this confusion.

Bart: "Hey you . . . give some to me"

Deejay: "No . . . no I had them first"

Bart: "No you didn't . . . they are for all of us. We HAVE to share"

Deejay: "I HAD them first"

Bart: "Tiffany, Neal won't share the engines with me"

Deejay: "Noooo . . . I had them . . . they are mine"

Bart: "Not from your home . . . they are Red Room toys"

Tiffany: "Remember the room rules . . . one engine . . . two cars . . . that's what each one of you should have . . . then everyone will have some to play with"

Bart: "See . . . I told you to give them to me"

Deejay: frowns as he puts the engines and cars down. "you can't have them all"

Bart: "I know"   *(Fieldnotes 12/6/02)*

The rules served two purposes. They were meant to be unequivocally fair and they helped both teachers and children make smooth transitions. Lists of some of these rules are included in table II.

Table II.   Red Room Rules

<u>Transitional rules</u>	<u>Rules for Play</u>
On waking up all the children had to put their cot choices away and then wash their hands for snack.	No sitting, standing or walking on the platform.
While gathering for group time each child had to find "a shape on the rug by a friend".	One engine and two cars, and five rail tracks for each child when playing with trains.
During show and tell each "special item" was passed around from child to child to the count of 5.	One set of feet on a stool at a time when standing on wooden stools.
All articles held by the children when they came to group time was pushed to the middle of the rug until after group time.	"Tree House" for quiet activities only.
Children were dismissed from the group based on how well behaved they were at that point.	Ten books per shelf on the bookshelf in the "tree house".
Instead of just calling out for children to clean up, each child was assigned a section of the room to tidy up.	Three children to show and tell per group time.
After using the potty before going out all the children had to get a drink of water then find a red square on the floor to sit on.	No touching or spoiling things with the red "Stop" sign on them.

At times the power dynamics became evident when a child desired the company of another and in order to obtain it would put up, as it were, with some inconvenience.

Calvin, Bart, and Amir are playing together. They are carrying sheets of paper with stickers on them and then pulling them out and sticking it on each other.

Amir sticks a sticker on his chest and says: "I don't like this very much"

Calvin: "Then why are you wearing it (sticker)?"

Amir: Looks confused "I don't know" and shrugs his shoulder

Calvin & Bart: "Yeah. Why?"

They move to the writing table and Bart continues to stick stickers on Amir's shirt

Amir: "There… that's enough…that's enough"

Calvin & Bart stick things all over Amir. Amir shows irritation and tries to move away. Bart and Calvin continue sticking stickers on him, until Tiffany intervenes.

Tiffany: "The stickers are choices to make something with. So can you find something else to do with them?"   (Fieldnotes 24/6/02)

Usually Bart and Calvin play by themselves but every once in a while they will allow another child to join their game. Amir, who is an unobtrusive yet friendly child, is often welcomed by the duo. On this occasion the two boys draw Amir into their play. Amir enjoys their attention and the opportunity to play with

them. They are playing with stickers, sticking them on each other as they run around. Amir joins in the play by sticking stickers on his own shirtfront. He confesses he doesn't like sticking the stuff on himself but continues to do it. This seems to puzzle Bart and Calvin who would perhaps stop an activity if they didn't enjoy it. They acknowledge Amir's comment but are curious and want to know why he continues to do it. Amir's inability to rationalize his actions perhaps stems from the realization that his decision to stop may jeopardize the play itself. While his reasons for continuing are not clear, it is fairly plain that the power in this playful (if conflictive) interaction lies with Bart and Calvin, which might be why the most Amir can do when the play continues is to show only mild irritation. His patience with their boisterous playing appears to have fulfilled its purpose when later that day I observe the following.

Calvin and Bart go over to circle rug and Amir follows them.

Amir: "I am tired today"

Calvin & Bart: 'Yeah. Me too"

They talk about being friends (a lot of it is whispered). They say Calvin and Bart are good friends but they like Amir and like to play with him.

Bart: "Amir you are also like our buddy"   *(Fieldnotes 24/6/02)*

It was very interesting that Bart uses the qualifier 'like" in describing Amir's relationship to them. It appears to suggest that Bart and Calvin are aware of the

exclusive nature of their friendship and yet don't want to hurt Amir's feelings by excluding him. While the episode is a reflection on power dynamics that last sentence also illustrates a child's ability to take another's perspective as a magnanimous gesture is made.

Mark and Mandy join the children on the rug to play with trains. Mark a rather quite soul watches as Bart and Calvin play. Since the two boys are good friends they already have very elaborate play in progress. Mark plays by their side…building his own tracks…every now and then he glances their way and smiles at no one in particular. Slowly Mark attempts to join the play. He starts moving tracks around. Calvin whispers something to him and Mark ignores Calvin. Calvin nudges Mark to do as he says. Mark responds with a stony face…Calvin and Bart turn away to play . . . Mark makes another attempt to manipulate tracks in their area.

Calvin: "Well Mark you have to join it"

Mark: "Ok"

Alex looks over and interjects: "Mark . . . You need those"

Mark: "I am going to join it to Calvin's"

Bart adds bridges to the structure. Mark tries to put a track on top of it. Bart and Calvin object. Mark obliges with a very puzzled look on his face "Ok". He never once asserts or attempts to question their motives, but is happy to play along.

(Fieldnotes, 13/6/02)

In above episode a mild mannered Mark concedes to Calvin and Bart's directions as he plays with the rails with them. It is obvious that he (reluctantly perhaps) acknowledges their power. Mark rarely ever made a big fuss over play but he also was not a pushover. The next episode posits a good example of Mark standing up in the face of pressure and conflict as he argues with Sara until she changes her mind.

It is almost time for group-time (Tiffany has called out three times for all children to find a place on the rug). Sara and Mark are still playing with wooden blocks.

Sara: "Put that big one on top of it"

Mark: pretends not to hear

Sara: in a loud whisper, "Quick, put it on top and then, that's the castle . . . do it Mark"

Mark: "No! I don't want to put it there. I want it here (pointing to the side) like a (mumbles)."

Sara: "that is not nice…it will fall and make a mess"

Mark: "But I don't want to put it there like a dumb thing… a dumby thingy"

Sara: "Don't say that word . . . "

Mark: "Look, I will put it here and make it like a 'partment house"

Sara: "Apartment! Let me see. Okay then we can just call it apartment"

Mark proudly sticks the block off to one side. Then they both leave to join the

other children for group-time. *(Fieldnotes 6/10/02)*

It is interesting to see how power dynamics can influence the outcome of a conflict. Mark was the subservient one in the above example as he acknowledged Calvin and Bart's power in the play situation, but with Sara he appears to have the upper hand. It must be remembered here that Sara is new to the classroom and Mark is well aware of this. Had the same conflict of ideas occurred in his play with Debbie or Jane the outcome might have been varied. But, it also must be acknowledged that such an interaction would probably not have occurred since Mark did not usually actively seek out Debbie as a playmate. His choice of play partners revealed his understanding of the social dynamics of the room and I saw him interact with mostly the boys in the room or with Sandra and Sara, who were both younger and new to the room.

Teacher effects:

While conducting the first study as a teacher in the classroom, I was aware that my attitudes and opinions would influence in a significant way my interaction with the children. As the head teacher I was also acutely aware that the student teachers took their cues directly from me. Being thus embedded in the interactions in the room I rarely had the opportunity to observe the patterns that different styles of teaching can impose on classroom interactions. In this particular study I

was able to observe and document the various interaction styles of the two head teachers and one of the substitutes in the room.

It was apparent right from the first day of observation that the students acknowledged the presence of each of these teachers differently. I had noticed that on days that Tiffany was not in the classroom when children woke up there was more loud and raucous behavior than when she was present. While they turned to Brooke (the substitute teacher) for resolution of problems they seemed to think that rules were bendable when they came from her. For example, if Brooke told Debbie, "Books are not a choice for right now," Debbie would never-the-less pick up a book and read it when Brooke was distracted. Justifying her breach of rule (when caught) by saying, "I wasn't reading it. I was looking at the pictures, you didn't say not to look at pictures". It also became apparent, during the course of my observations, that Susan ran a proverbial "tight ship". She had been in the same classroom and managed the same age group for about 8 years and during the time had come up with numerous room rules that minimized conflicts related to sharing and fairness. In the following paragraphs I will illustrate the differences I observed in the techniques used by the three teachers.

It is a warm afternoon and the children are all slowly waking up. Alex is sitting in the middle of the circle rug with a pile of blanket around him. Sara is trying to find a way around him to put away her things in the cubby. After asking

him to move she waits for about half a minute and then steps on his blanket to get

past him. Alex grabs her legs and tries to pull her down shouting.

Alex: "Stop it Sara, stop stepping on my blanket!"

Sara: "Stop grabbing my leg. Ow! That hurts"

Alex: "Get off my blanket!"

Sara: "You should have moved it away. I told you to"

She pummels him with her fists. Alex shouts out to Brooke.

Brooke: "Stop that Alex! You are hurting Sara. Sara, go put your things away"

Alex: "But she started it"

Brooke: "Alex you are supposed to be getting ready for snack. Get up NOW!"

Alex mumbles and gets up. Sara grumbles and moves away. When out of Brooke's

sight Alex shoves Sara towards the cubby and she bumps her head and cries.

Brooke: "Alex, come here. You sit with me till the others are done with their

snack."   *(Fieldnotes, 6/6/02)*

Brooke was a substitute but she was very familiar to the children. The

children knew she was in charge but seemed to know how to get around her. She

appeared hesitant in such situations as the above one and was quick to take action

but rarely tried to find out the cause of conflict or make the children empathize

with each other. She was usually put in charge by Tiffany to get the children

ready for outdoors or snack and she remained preoccupied with it. She was very

friendly with the children, but they appeared to sense that she was not really the

one in charge of the room. When intervening Brooke tended to use redirection as her method of choice. Rules were considered more ambiguous in her presence as even some very grounded rules of the classroom were broken when the other two teachers were not present. She often complained that the children were louder on the days that she had to mange them on her own.

Susan, the morning teacher had a very different approach. She had a rule for every area that had any potential for conflict. She did not leave any gray areas for the children to stumble upon. At group time "show and tell" material went around the circle of children to the count of 5. Instead of letting children pick up their own mess she assigned children to different areas for clean up. She was always outlined acceptable behavior when reprimanding a child for unacceptable ones e.g *"Alex I don't like the way you pushed her out of your way, can you try asking her to move. That is a much nicer way to do it."* Susan kept the children very involved in various activities and I realized during the analysis that very few conflict situations arose during the morning sessions. She did not intervene very often and most of the time just a look from her would quell a noisy dispute. Even Shane and Jacob's rough and tumble was less boisterous in the morning. She followed through with consequences when her warnings were not heeded and that above all else is what, I think, made the children pay attention to her when she spoke. Tiffany on more than one occasion had to ask Susan to intervene on her behalf, especially when things got out of hand.

Tiffany had a very distinct style of guiding the children. When faced with opposition or a trying situation she resorted to humor. When the children dawdled over cleaning up, she suggested they clean up "you own mess or else you will have to come to my house and clean up my mess!" This usually made the children laugh and clean up. She rarely intervened when children quarreled except to stop a situation from getting physically aggressive. The children listened to her but often referred to the room as Susan's room.

Both Susan and Tiffany used part of the group time to talk about emotions. The teachers were very honest about their own feelings and often referred to incidents during the day that had made them "sad" or "happy". Susan often provoked the children to think by posing conflicting information e.g., "Our carpets will be washed on Friday because are really dirty because no one walks on them", the children would laugh and respond, "No! Everyone walks on it that is why it's dirty". Or she would say, "Everybody likes to play with me because I am mean to everyone." This would make the children laugh out loud and respond with the appropriate answers.

Each of the teachers in the room effected the interactions differently. Susan's approach was to minimize conflict situations in the room by doing away with ambiguity regarding sharing and use of resources. Tiffany dealt with it in a matter of fact manner and often with humor, but she did very often let the children settle their own arguments. Beverly's hesitancy in asserting herself led the children into, what appeared to be, a constant testing of limits. While it is fair to

draw conclusions that the teacher's presence had a marked effect on the number of conflicts observed in the room, it is beyond the scope of this study to say if these affected the children's ability to make meaning of their conflicts.

Chapter 6

Discussion

On Studying Conflict:

This study addressed the questions: How are understandings of relationships (social dynamics) played out in conflicts? What meaning do the children make of their disputes with each other? How are the social dynamics of the peer culture of the classroom reflected in conflict processes? How do conflicts evolve and what maintains conflicts? In what way, if any, do conflict scenarios carry over to other activities once the conflict is seemingly over? What role does the teacher play in the meaning-creation process that conflict offers?

Over half of the conflicts that took place in a classroom did not in fact have much to do with the understanding or even testing of relationships. Rather, they pertained to either the organization or maintenance of activities and focused on the ownership of material, space, and direction of play (Rizzo, 1989; Corsaro & Rizzo, 1990). The other smaller though significant number of disputes (which form the bulk of data used for the study) appeared to involve or draw from the social dynamics of the children involved. This was evident either from how the conflict evolved or in the way it was resolved. The meanings that children made from these conflicts were often not immediately evident, but surfaced again and again at different junctures throughout the duration of the observation. Concepts and expectations of interactions were not confined to those between friends. Children who did not share a close relationship also seemed to often be evaluating

the actions of others and as such previous interactions with the same peers appeared to affect subsequent interactions. Conflicts between friends were often moderated by their greater need to maintain continuity in their play but by the same token conflicts were also often moderated by the desire of one child to maintain the present interaction.

In the process of differing in opinion, ideology, view, or notions of how an activity should play out, children appeared to discover the potential for friendship. In cases where close ties had already been formed, it appeared that disputes gave the children an opportunity to work out the terms of their relationship. Children frequently showed by their actions that they were willing to change in order to acquire or maintain a relationship they thought was desirable. The most difficult part of collecting the data was the observation. From the start it was apparent that it would be humanly impossible to track and record every incident of conflict in the room, regardless of whether I was a total observer or a participant observer. Following in Rizzo's (1989) footsteps my observations were, in large part based on my analysis of the previous day's events, and my growing knowledge of the children, their moods, the activities planned, and the changing dynamics of the room. Also, as enduring close relationships and conflictual ones became prevalent among the children, data collection and analysis focused increasingly on these relationships.

One of the fundamental incertitudes of the study was: How does one study a process like conflict in its entirety? As a social constructivist, I believe that

almost all human behavior arises from and is enacted in an effort to communicate. As such, human behavior is an act of communication, and knowledge is derived from the interpersonal world. Researchers can make interpretations of an individual's communicative intent when they understand the context within which action takes place. In order to understand the contexts (as action is always embedded in multiple layers of contexts), I realized that time, relationships, intersubjectivity, and reassessment of bias were necessary. When talking to people unfamiliar with my work I started using analogies in an attempt to describe how what I sought to study was different. When one looks at a face, one is apt to describe the face in terms of features; wide set eyes, furrowed brows, flared nostrils, etc. What I hoped to look at was not the individual features of the face, rather the meaning that the face and its expression conveyed to the other, with reference to the contexts within which the face was observed. In this I was aided to a large part by my familiarity with the children (in the first study) and my ability to communicate in a meaningful manner with the protagonists, teachers and children (in my second study).

One worry that plagued me in the initial stages of my research and data gathering process was my concern with objectivity. I soon learned that the very basis of my research was my interest in conflict, and that while my ideas and opinions informed my observations, my observations in turn educated my ideas. Having thus accepted like Wolcott (1995) that bias "can be good" (p. 164) and like "air" is essential to the performance of research, I applied it to my advantage

by using it to guide my observations on a daily basis. After all, it was my deep and almost intersubjective understanding of the children, their behavior patterns, and relationships in the classroom that helped me to focus on the conflicts and then later to be able to weave the threads of meaning they made of their conflicts from the mass of data I had collected. One particular episode that highlights the significance of my role as teacher and researcher is presented below.

Liam and Pete are playing with blocks in the block building area. They are building a large square structure and appear to be working on what seems like the outer walls of a building.

Liam: "Let's put a window right here so the sun can come from the sky...right here"

Pete: "No . . . but . . . but see we have to make it high all the way up"

Liam: "Yes, but we need to put a window, right here, see, right here . . . like this"

Pete: "Umm . . . well . . . I don't want a window there, okay? We can put it over there (points to the opposite side). We have to build this high . . . I told you"

Liam: "Here is good for the window . . . see, I can make it right here (pulls a block out of the side) . . . there that is a window . . . and the sun can come now and make the plants grow . . . see?"

Pete: "NO! Liam put that back . . . put that back"

Liam: "But Pete . . . the sun can come and make the plants big and strong and it will be pretty"

Pete: "No! Put it back. I don't want to play with you. There is no window there"

Liam: "Yes, there will be"

They continue arguing in the same manner for two more minutes.

Pete: Looking very vexed and at a loss for words, looks towards me for help,

"Liam won't listen"

Me: "Why don't you build the wall high on the other side?"

Pete decides to play along and the dispute appears to be settled.

<div align="right">

(Field notes: 4/10/00)

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My curiosity over the episode is not quelled because Liam is usually a very compliant playmate and I have seldom seen him resist a suggestion from a peer. I remember wondering why he was being so forceful about the placement of the window and also about his curious reference to plants, especially since there had been no previous mention of plants during this activity. A day later during pick up I happened to talk about the incident with his mother hoping she would be able to shed light on it (particularly, since the two children often meet for play dates). Liam's mother was first surprised and then burst out laughing saying, "Oh! He was just being me." When I asked her to elaborate she told me that they were building an extension to their house and she and her husband had argued about the placement of a skylight. She added that her argument had been that a skylight would provide plenty of light for her plants! So the "conflict" turned out to be a re-enactment of an argument and not an actual difference of opinion between

friends. One could suppose that instead of a re-enactment it was an actual conflict arising from learned behavior except that Liam did not show any undue excitement during the course of it and did not appear to even notice the upheaval it had caused in Pete.

This was one episode where being a participant and having the ability to verify what was observed aided my observation. The example also illustrates the need to look at conflicts, not as isolated events but as occurring in a continuum that acknowledges that interactions in a peer culture usually have a past attached to it. The past, in this case, went beyond the confines of the classroom. Keeping track of the multiple layers of contexts within which children exist can either add to the confounding amount of data or (like in this case) help in the interpretation of it.

Once again it was concern with bias that made me hesitant about my ability to conduct a study that involved a shorter amount of time collecting data. I was curious, however, to see how the shorter duration and my lack of complete involvement in the activities of the second preschool classroom would help or hinder my ability to collect and then interpret the data. I was keenly aware that I would have to rely on the teachers to provide me with numerous contextual details that might not be apparent during the brief time I spent in the classroom observing. It was during this study that I realized the privileged position of a classroom teacher as opposed to an outside observer in being able to identify and focus on arguments and disputes that went beyond the routine conflict over

possession. The full significance of the relationship and thus the conflicts between Debbie and Christy could not have been understood without considerable knowledge about their out-of-classroom experience together. Often, during the early phases of my observation in the second study, I felt lost and bewildered as I tried to concentrate on my observations while being intensely aware of myself as an outsider. It was like being an invited guest at a family dinner where everyone is aware of everyone else's history except the guest and there is too little time to really get to know everyone well enough to be able to tell if the conversations held hidden meanings for the other members.

In time I realized that in an ideal situation being a part of the culture can prove to be a very powerful tool, but the shorter study confirmed that when multiple sources are used to corroborate the observational data, it too can provide valuable insights to the phenomenon being studied. In order for this to happen it was necessary to use every moment (whether going in or out of the classroom, during conversations with the director, parents, substitute teachers, or children) to add to the data. During the analysis of Study II, I found myself continuously rechecking the ages of the children, something I rarely did during Study I. Also, in reporting the interpretations of the second study I use short descriptions of the children and realize in so doing that I am compensating for the lack of deeper knowledge about them.

In hindsight, the observations in the second setting proved invaluable in underscoring the patterns in preschool conflicts. Some of the patterns that

emerged were related to conflicts between friends. Friendships and play were rarely terminated as a consequence of conflict between children who shared close relationships. On the rare occasion that this happened the dispute frequently involved self-esteem and pride. Conflict also arose when a third child joined the carefully ritualized play of children with close relationships. Having to explain rules that had tacitly evolved during play was another reason for conflict. The way a conflict was resolved often depended on how invested a child was in the relationship or activity. When there was a strong desire to maintain either a friendship or an activity, the conflict ended with one child yielding. These patterns emerged in both the studies.

Time spent:

One of the major benefits of doing a long in-depth study followed by a shorter study helped to reaffirm the role time plays in the amount of confidence one has in making informed interpretations regarding a phenomenon. As a novice doing qualitative research I believed in the dictum that "it is by intimate, long-term acquaintance with culture groups that one gains insight" (Robert Redfield as quoted in Wolcott, 1995. p. 76). I still believe that it was spending a whole academic year in the preschool classroom that gave me certain insights into children's conflict and, more importantly, the meaning they make of these. Yet, I now realize that time alone does not guarantee one's depth of knowledge or accuracy of information. Having done the initial groundwork, I found it possible

to accomplish a great deal in a relatively short period for the second study. The observations during the second study were intense. Wolcott (1995), doubted that any observer could "sustain attention for any great length of time" and he discussed the merits of capitalizing on the "short bursts of attention" by noting vignettes and short but complete conversations in great detail (p. 98). I found that the first study relied more on these short bursts of energy while in the later study (while still concentrating on capturing vignettes and detailed conversations) I was able to sustain my attention for much longer periods of time. Capturing entire conversations in minute detail was something that had room to develop during the first study. Early in the study I became aware that I was trying too hard to keep a record of everything and ending up with data that had little to report. As the study progressed I was able to write fieldnotes and make "headnotes" (Ottenberg, 1990. p.144) that provided for much more meaningful and interpretable data. If I had the opportunity of doing a similar study again, however, I would attempt to spend a longer period than five weeks in the field. The brief immersion into the culture left me feeling personally dissatisfied and made saying goodbyes difficult.

In search of patterns:

Even at the very start of the study I was fully aware that there was a need to move away from the linear and cyclical models of child interaction. Having observed the complexity of these interactions it was only fair to say that there was not even a remote possibility of establishing causality between any of the factors

that could influence conflict or its outcome. The reason the kaleidoscope metaphor seemed appropriate for this study was because it offered the hope of finding patterns in the infinite variety of children's conflict and in so doing to offer a glimpse of the meaning-making possibilities embedded in them. While it is easy enough to accept that no two situations are ever completely alike, it takes a leap in faith to suppose that there are enough similarities in order to make some generalizations that would be consistent over time and space. This again, is where the need for the second study arose. While I had been able to weave recognizable patterns in my observations as a teacher in a classroom, I began to wonder if these would be apparent in a different population of children.

There were differences in the two populations of children. Yet, the conflicts appeared almost familiar even though the contexts within which they occurred were disparate. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two studies was that in the first, I was unable to objectively evaluate my own effect on the classroom conflicts while in the second, I was very keenly aware that teacher personalities affected conflicts. The most challenging task for a teacher of this age group is to find that balance between providing thoughtful intervention and a secure environment for facilitating autonomous interactions. It is crucial to reiterate that intervention is required to prevent violent and disruptive play. A guide for such decisions should be based on closely observing interactions and assessing individual children's ability to resolve conflicts.

Children's social and cognitive abilities change with increasing age (Dunn, 1987; Selman, 1980). Between the ages of three and five, children's ability to understand the causal link between intention of an act and its outcome increases, along with the ability to use more complex reasoning to evaluate social situations (Astington, 1993; Crane & Tisak, 1995). The growing mastery of expressive language (Dunn & Slomkowski, 1992; Schaffer, 1997), combined with a growing ability to understand their intentions and the intentions of others (Dunn, 1997) enables preschoolers to more effectively communicate their intentions and manipulate situations to resolve their conflicts. There were occasions when, in apparent contradiction to my beliefs, I found some children who did not seem able to resolve their conflicts in a meaningful way. I use the word "apparent" because I still believe that when a child has been reminded and seen modeling of pro-social behavior (by adults) from an early age, they begin to internalize these very behaviors through repeated interaction with peers as their social realm widens. It is perhaps true that there will always be a few who, for various reasons, are unable to process this information to their advantage. These children will need guidance and help in dealing with the various aspects of social interaction. In both the studies I found that the children who had the most difficulty establishing lasting or close relationships were children who were either unable to read the emotional signals of others (e.g. Paul, Betty, and Eric) or unable to control their impulses even when they knew the consequence (James and Debbie). In such scenarios adult intervention is required, but generally I think children three years

and older who have had the opportunity of being in an environment that stresses

pro-social behavior and appropriate conflict management have learned enough

skills to try to solve these for themselves. Once again it must be noted that

children should first have a working knowledge of what is appropriate and

inappropriate. An environment that minimizes conflicts does not solely rely on

teacher intervention though they can aid it. Creating a prosocial environment

entails thoughtful modeling, reflective classroom practice, healthy open

discussions related to emotions and relationships, and plenty of attention,

approval, and affection on the part of the teacher.

Regarding the Use of Social Exchange Theory:

In analyzing the data, I often found myself thinking about how children

"invest" in friends and relationships. Laursen, Hartup, and Koplas (1996) talked

about viewing close relationships using social exchange theories. This view of

relationships assumes that rewards and costs build from social exchanges and the

affective arousal connected with such exchanges. It also assumes that a favorable

balance between rewards and costs elicits efforts to maintain equity and preserve

relationships. Thus human behavior is assumed to be essentially selfish according

to exchange theory. Based on exchange principles, equity theory maintains that

rewards and costs of social interaction are equally distributed among participants

and continuance and maintenance of relationships are dependent on participant's

perceptions of past exchanges (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Exchange theorists

emphasize the importance of social interactions to the understanding of

relationships (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996) and reviewing this theory

provided a way of explaining the need for children to maintain relationships that

were at times hurtful. In 1983, Berscheid modified the theory to include emotional

investment positing that close relationships held the potential to evoke positive

and negative affect. This view of social interaction helped to interpret the

conflictual interactions that often occurred among the children who shared the

closest relationships in the classroom. So while their closeness gave rise to more

affective arousal (negative and positive), it also made them sensitive to the

dangers of angry conflicts and they tried by different means to reduce the risk of

losing the relationship.

I do not for a moment believe that the children were conscious or aware of

these strategies, but I am confident that fear of losing a good friend often

motivated the children who did have close relationships and similar fears

motivated those who hoped to forge lasting friendships.

Saying goodbye:

Merriam (1998) talked about "leaving the field (being) even more difficult

than gaining entry" (p. 100) and this was true for me in both studies. In the first

study the goodbye was at least a part of the school ritual and the excitement of the

upcoming summer vacation dulled some of the pain for both the children and me.

The children, the classroom, and the culture that we had built together were

difficult to let go of. My study had materialized without the children ever being conscious of it. My presence in the room was never questioned. Even though consent for the study had been gained, the study itself was secondary to the other activities in the room. The children opened up to me, as only young children will to their teacher. Parents shared experiences and information that few are privy to. Even now, as I read over my observations, the memory of each child is vivid.

In the second study there were no rituals, my departure was as abrupt as my entry. A brief grouping of the children on the circle rug had marked my arrival, as their teacher explained my presence and I introduced myself, a similar group-time announcement ended my observations in the room. I tried to make it a smooth transition and a pleasant occasion by presenting the class with a bucket of things they needed for the room. In the brief time I had spent there I had noticed that they needed a bucket for their water table, some materials for the art table, books, and licorice . . . so I bought a few of everything and placed it in a big red bucket. I also left behind two fast growing plants as symbols of my relationship with them. All of these did not ease my guilt at having entered and left the midst of welcoming children in such a hurried manner. I timed my departure with the daycare's annual maintenance closing. I figured that ten days of being home would erase what little memory they had of me and my note-taking presence in their classroom.

Reviewing Paradigms:

In this study I wanted to examine conflict among preschool children and

explore the meaning they make of it, within certain theoretical and methodological paradigms. In this I was guided by my research questions. My entire study is based on the paradigms that; a) human thought can be only understood within the context of it's history, b) the key to studying development is in the studying of process, c) one's subjective experience of reality is the nexus of social motivation, and d) explaining social conflicts solely in terms of individuals is incomplete since we construct meaning in interaction with others. During the data collection it became apparent that peer interactions are deeply embedded in context. The context was not limited to the classroom/peer culture but extended into the children's home and their social experience with each other outside of the classroom and school. My participant observer role let me tap into the potentials of these multiple layers without which the interpretations of certain conflicts and their meanings for the children involved would have been limited and incomplete. Being present in the classroom beyond the period of the observations also contributed to my ability to understand the interactions at a deeper level as conflict scenarios carried over to other activities. While the concern with subjectivity was always present I realize now that an uninvolved observer would not have been able to interpret quite as deeply or relevantly. While human actions can be explained in numerous ways and categorized by definitions, human *thought* can only be understood in context. Our understanding of children and their thinking can be enriched by studies that are conducted by researchers who are a part of the classroom culture and as such share a modicum

of intersubjectivity with the children.

The conflictual interaction amongst preschool children offered an ideal opportunity to observe thought in action. Conflict occurs because of opposition and therefore there is a need for change in order for the interaction to continue. Actions and words are our windows to thought processes in children and as such need to be examined minutely while embedding them in context. In page 71, every word, look, and pause are indicators of Nick and Sam's thought. While it is impossible to place ourselves in the minds of young children it is possible, however, to be able to make informed interpretations of what they might be thinking. Being a part of the classroom culture placed me in the privileged position of being able to place interactions not only in their immediate context but to be able to look into the children's shared histories in order to interpret. In their conflicts children demonstrated their ability to understand the causal link between action and its outcome. This was most apparent in their ability to negotiate (not always through apologies) situations so that interaction continued or resumed. Another area that could provide a key to understanding children's interaction (not just conflictual ones) is by examining the "scripts" that develop during their play. Nelson (1986), described "scripts" that developed during symbolic play. I observed a similar "script" in some of the conflictual interactions. At times it felt like I was hearing the same argument over and over again. Towards the end of my first study, I noticed that as the children's familiarity with each other grew so did the script, new understandings and concepts about each other appeared to get

woven into the script. It would be

The examination of relational processes such as conflicts can provide valuable insight into the meaning making process that are involved in children's interactions.

The third paradigm is most apparent in page 83, where James tries to come to an understanding of what is desirable in friends from his own interpretation of events and interactions. As a constructivist I believe that the nexus for social motivation lies in our own subjective experience of reality. This is why linear and cyclical models do little justice to interactional processes like conflicts. There are no direct cause and effects that can be measured here. Subjective understanding and internalizing of information is heavily dependent on the sum total of an individual's past experiences. I observed that children often came out with different impressions after an encounter with a friend. Sometimes what appeared to be serious quarrels ended without a break in play, while at other times a seemingly inane remark from a friend could end in hours of hurt feelings. Motivation for maintaining apparently unequal relationships appeared arbitrary until one probed the deeper contexts of such friendships.

There are efforts being exerted to break away from the positivist mold of looking for one truth that fits all, however, there is still a strong trend towards finding causality. It is time we started looking for patterns instead of definite answers in the infinite variety of human thought and behavior.

The last paradigm looks at children in interaction as part of a dynamic

peer- system instead of an individual who internalizes experiences in isolation and seclusion. We construct meaning in interaction with others and these understandings form the fundamental basis of our social knowledge. Throughout my observations in the two classrooms children would tell me about their friends as well as of others who were friends in the room. I realized that the children had built their notions of who and what a friend was based on their own experiences or from observing others. In their interactions with each other I frequently observed them trying and testing the terms of these friendships and relationships. I noticed too that children at this age were becoming very aware of what they wanted others to think of them. While this was not a conscious agenda on their part it became apparent that they were keenly aware and sensitive about what their peers thought of them. Numerous reprimands, reminding, and consequences later James would show no signs of following classroom rules that stated 'Nobody hurts anybody in this class". Then one afternoon four children complained that they did not like the way James pushed them when he wanted to play and James appeared suitably chastised. There is a need to move away from concentrating on the individual in studying interactions and looking at the protagonist as a team often drawing from other peer dynamics in the room.

The one thing that has been undeniably clear in the process of conducting this study, has been that there is a lot to be gained by being a part and parcel of the phenomenon observed. It is impossible to make interpretations about interactions based only on the observation of an episode. The growing

understanding of the observer of the context, the dynamics, and the participants is very necessary in making these interpretations. As a teacher the need to share an understanding with the children, the need to carefully observe and thus to inform myself was an important part of the study. For as Lois Malaguzzi (1998) said, "Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before".

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APPENDIX A

Letter to the Parents

Date

Dear parents,

I am a doctoral student in Child Development at VA Tech. I would like to conduct my dissertation research in your child's classroom. The purpose of my study is to explore the process by which children make meaning of peer conflict. The study will increase our understanding of the developmental outcomes of conflictual interactions among peers.

I will be in the classroom observing for two hours everyday for the months of April, and May. The procedure involves the observation of children in interaction with peers in a natural classroom setting. I will also be recording some of the conversation children have in the classroom. These tapes will be destroyed after three years. The research does not involve any type of testing or attempt to structure behavior for the purpose of observation. It also does not involve the comparison of individual children. All information gathered relating to the school, teachers, children, and their families will be kept strictly confidential. All participants in the study will be given pseudonyms. You are free to withdraw your child, without explanation from the study at any time or refuse to answer questions at anytime without penalty. At the end of the study you will be provided with a summary of the findings.

I sincerely hope that you will consent to your child's participation in the study. Please sign the enclosed consent form and return it to your child's teacher. Please feel free to call me with any questions you may have regarding the study (phone number)

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FOR THEIR CHILD – FORM

I give my permission for _____ to be included

in the research study "Making meaning of conflict". The study will be conducted during

the April, and May 2002. It has been explained to me that the procedure involves the

observation of my child in interaction with his/her peers in a natural classroom setting. I

have been assured that the research does not involve any type of testing of my child or

attempt to structure his/her behavior for the purpose of observation. I understand that I

may withdraw my child anytime without explanation from the study or refuse to answer

any questions without penalty and that my child may be audio-taped as part of the study.

All audio-tapes will be destroyed after a period of three years.

_____   _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian   Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Vejoya Viren   (540) 951-7786 (h)
Principal Investigator   Phone

APPENDIX C

IRB REQUEST PROTOCOL

Study: Making meaning of conflict: A qualitative inquiry in a preschool classroom
Investigator: Vejoya Viren

Justification of Project

      The main purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of children's conflict as it unfolds within a social and cultural context. Recent studies have forsaken the experimental and manipulated scenarios for studying conflict and moved on to observing children in more naturalistic settings. The length of time spent in the midst of young children observing and learning about their culture helps give a more in depth picture of what the role of conflict really is in the children's scheme of things.

      Conflicts thus far have been looked at as episodes in a child's daily functioning with little consideration to either the antecedents or the ongoing dynamics of the classroom as a whole. I will be studying conflict as a relational process that needs to be observed and analyzed within the multiple contexts within which it takes place. This study will expand our understanding of children's disputes and the meaning they make of them through contextually relevant methods that include natural observations and dialogic interviews.

      In this study I intend to look at children's disputes as situated within the multiple realities of classroom culture, friendships, and other peer relationships and use an interpretative approach to explore the meaning making process that has been found to be implicit in such disputes (see Ross & Conant, 1992).

Procedures

      My research involves the observation of preschool children in their natural setting. The observations will be conducted in a preschool classroom of the Rainbow Riders Childcare Center. The school was selected primarily because of easy access. The participants will be 16, 3 – 5 year olds. There will be approximately equal number of boys and girls in the group.

      The observations will be conducted five days a week for a period of 4 weeks during center activity time (approximately 120 minutes) in the classroom. Detailed field notes taken during classroom observation will provide the main data for the study. I will be focusing on what young children "do" and "say" together, especially on their use of language in negotiating social situations. My study does not involve the comparison of individual children, any type of testing of the children, or attempts to structure their behavior for observation. Only behavior that spontaneously occurs in a preschool classroom setting will be observed. All the data collected will be subject to rigorous analysis, intense reflection, and informed interpretation.

Risks and Benefits

      While there are no known risks to the participants as a result of the study, there could be some unforeseen results. Even though my study is descriptive rather than evaluative, parents and teachers may feel as if their children or classroom practices are being judged. In addition, any intrusion of another individual into a classroom setting can

cause discomfort for teachers or students and may disrupt the normal progress of the class.

Since I already know most of the teachers and administrators from my being a parent in the daycare, I feel any feelings of apprehensions can be overcome. I will also assure them by letting them know the nature and purpose of my study.

Confidentiality/ Anonymity

The participants in this study will not be identified directly or through identifiers. All participants will be identified only through pseudonyms assigned by me as investigator. A list of names and pseudonyms will be kept in a secured place at my house. All access to the field notes will be confined to the investigator.

Informed Consent

As the participants in the study are young children an informed consent will be sought from their parents. A copy of the informed consent form is attached to this request.

Right to Withdraw

The participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice or penalty at any point during the study.

Biographical Sketches

The faculty members guiding the research process are:

Dr. Janet Sawyers, Ph.D.
Child Development
Department of Human Development
College of Human Resources and Education

Dr. Janet Sawyers is currently professor in the Department of Human development. She has been affiliated with Virginia tech for 23 years, during which she has chaired … Ph.D. Dissertations and … Masters theses and served as Director of the Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratories for 16 years. She has presented and published research on play and creativity in young children. She has taught graduate and undergraduate courses related to child development and early childhood education.

Dr. Cosby Steele Rogers, Ph.D.
Child Development
Department of Human Development
College of Human Resource and Education

Dr. Cosby Rogers is currently an associate professor in the Department of Human development. She has been affiliated with Virginia Tech for 30 years, during which she has chaired -- Ph.D. dissertations and – Master's thesis. Dr. Rogers has co-authored two books and over – refereed journal articles related to children's play.

The doctoral student conducting the research is:

Vejoya Viren
Child development
Department of Human Development
College of Human Resource and Education

      I am a third year doctoral student in Child Development. I am currently a University Mentor in the Alternate Graduate Model to teachers in the Post-Baccalaureate Program (K-6) in the Department of Teaching and learning. I have a Master's in English Literature from the University of Delhi, India. I will be designing and conducting this study under the guidance of Drs. Sawyers and Rogers.

APPENDIX D

Virginia **Tech**
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice Provost for Research Compliance
CVM Phase II - Duckpond Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033
e-mail: moored@vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joyce Arditti   HD 0416
      Vejoya Viren   FCD 0416

FROM: David M. Moore

DATE: May 1, 2002

SUBJECT: **Expedited Approval** – "Making Meaning of Conflict: A Qualitative Inquiry in a Preschool Classroom" – IRB # 02-265

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 monthss, effective May 1, 2002.
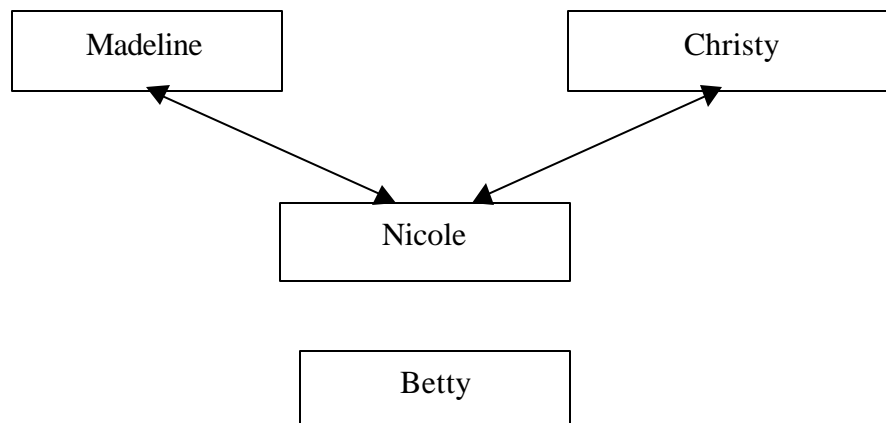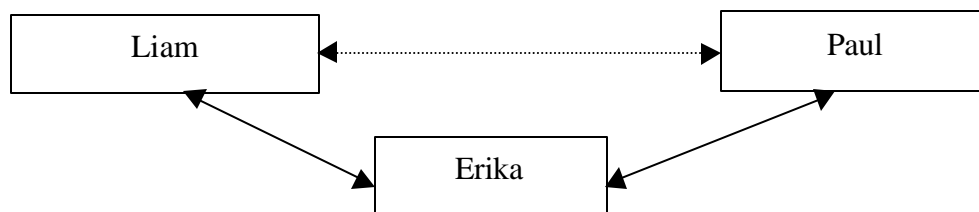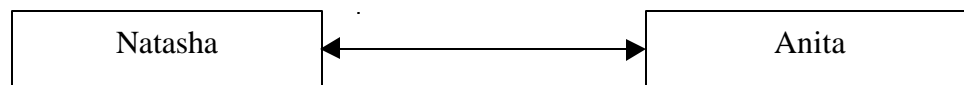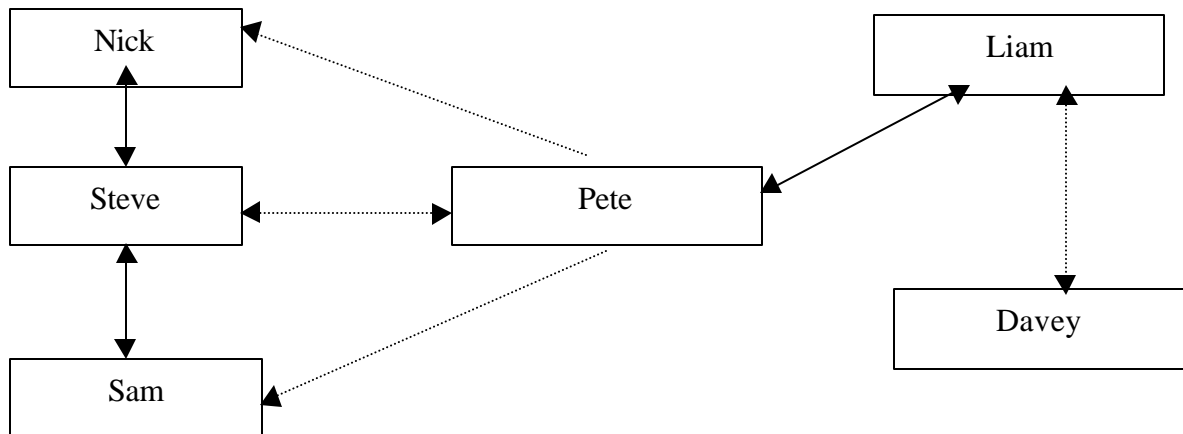
Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. It is your responsibility to report to the IRB any adverse reactions that can be attributed to this study.

To continue the project past the 12 month approval period, a continuing review application must be submitted (30) days prior to the anniversary of the original approval date and a summary of the project to date must be provided. My office will send you a reminder of this (60) days prior to the anniversary date.

cc: File

APPENDIX E

Peer Dynamics after over 5 weeks of school 10/2/99

Nick		Liam
Steve	Pete	
Sam		Davey

Natasha	Anita

Liam	Paul
	Erika	

Madeline	Christy
	Nicole	

Betty

Peer dynamics in 3/14/00

| Nick | ←→ | Steve | ←→ | Sam |

Steve ←→ Pete

Pete ⇢ Liam

Liam ←→ Davey

| Natasha | ←→ | Anita |

| James | → | Paul |

James → Erika

Paul ←→ Erika

Paul → Betty

Erika ⇢ Betty

| Madeline | | Christy |

Madeline → Nicole

Christy ←→ Nicole