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Teachers' Understandings of Emerging Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

Scholars in the field of conflict resolution in schools theoretically argued that minor distractions and disturbances are conflicts. In the present study, we refer to them as emerging conflicts. The study has been carried out within the phenomenographic research tradition and used semi-structured interviews. We addressed the professionals – the teachers – who deal with emerging conflicts every day, investigating their different ways of understanding an emerging conflict. The 9 different ways we found make the collective and shared understandings of emerging conflicts visible and form a professional language with which to discuss these kinds of conflicts. These nine could be divided into three groups, *the social practice of the classroom*, something that stems from *outside* the classroom, and something that characterises *all human interaction*. The awareness of the existing understandings could further be discussed in relation to what is actually taught in teacher education in Sweden.

Conflicts of various kinds have always been present in schools. The number of openly expressed conflicts increased when pupils were released from a silent and obedient role during the transformation to democratic schooling (Ellmin, 1985, 2008; Hareide, 2006; Lgr-62, 1962; Lgr-69, 1969). Minor distractions and disturbances in the classroom are often not referred to as conflicts by teachers, teacher educators, and education policymakers. Scholars in the field of conflict resolution in schools have theoretically argued that minor distractions and disturbances are conflicts because the actions of one of the conflict partners prevent, block, or interfere with the other in their efforts to reach their goal (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 2006). We refer to them as emerging conflicts (Hakvoort & Olsson, 2014). Recognising minor distractions and disturbances as emerging conflicts opens the door for discussing what emerging conflicts are about and exploring conflict resolution strategies to deal with them. Many of the emerging conflicts are conflicts that can grow into a more severe form and eventually into an escalated conflict (Glasl, 1999). As escalated conflicts are more likely to have tangible negative and damaging consequences for those involved and require advanced and specialised conflict resolution competences from the teachers, scholars underline the importance of minimising the total number of escalated conflicts (Cohen, 1995). If conflicts are recognised when they emerge, they are often manageable for teachers who have strategies to deal with them.

Internationally, for many decades, scholars in the field of conflict resolution have been interested in contributing theoretical and empirical knowledge to the conceptualisation of conflict. Discussions

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of this concept resulted in a common view of conflict being a multifaceted concept (Bickmore, 2002; Cohen, 1995; Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2006). As a pioneer, Deutsch (1949, 1973) argued that conflict can have constructive as well as destructive potential. Many others followed his line of reasoning (Bickmore, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Tjosvold, Leung, & Johnson, 2006). Within a constructive potential, we can understand conflicts as calls for learning, for personal and social development, as well as opportunities for change; thus such conflicts are unavoidable (Abigail & Cahn, 2011; Bickmore, 2002, 2004; Deutsch, 2006; Johansson & Emilson, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Lederach, 2003; Valsiner & Cairns, 1992). While previous studies in the research field of conflict resolution have contributed with broadening the concept of conflict by including both positive and negative connotations, research aiming at studying conflicts when they emerge, and can be referred to as emerging conflicts, have not been given enough attention.

Empirical studies that have shown an interest in teachers' experiences of minor distractions and disturbances can be found in the research field of classroom management. Wheldall and Merret (1988), for example, asked teachers to identify behaviours that disturbed teachers the most. These were "pupils talking out of turn," "pupils hindering other children," and "out-of-seat behavior," findings that have been confirmed by others (Little, 2005; Samuelsson, 2008; Wheldall & Merret, 1988). Within the field of classroom management, researchers have been interested in adequate actions to prevent minor distractions and disturbances from occurring in the classroom, but not to understand and explore them as emerging conflicts with learning opportunities. Also, the latest Swedish Educational Act (SFS, 2010:800) has given attention to classroom distractions and discipline problems (Chapter 5) disturbing the learning environment for other pupils, and has underlined the important of eliminating such disturbances. There are no references to regarding them as emerging conflicts.

In this article we use an out-of-seat situation as a probe to reveal how teachers understand and interpret emerging conflict. By bringing teachers' complex, in-depth, and pedagogical understanding of emerging conflict to the forefront, the study aims to contribute new knowledge to the field and enable teachers, both novice and experienced, to reflect on different ways to understand emerging conflicts.

Aim of the Study

As we have seen, minor distractions and disturbances have not been recognized as emerging conflicts, and therefore not studied as such. As little is actually known, we addressed the professionals – the teachers – who deal with emerging conflicts every day, investigating their understanding.

As emerging conflicts are expected to be visible in the classroom context for teachers working with pupils in the 7–12-year-old age range, this study focused on those teachers (Laursen & Collins, 1994). To shed light on these teachers' understanding of emerging conflict, the study addressed the following question:

- What are the qualitatively different ways in which primary school teachers understand emerging conflicts?

Learning more about the different ways teachers understand emerging conflicts can be considered to have important didactic value, both for pre-service and in-service teacher education. It can contribute to the development of teachers' professional language related to these often undiscussed and unnoticed conflicts and bring them to the surface for professional discussion (Granström, 2006, p. 1148). Furthermore, it can inform teacher educators on how to address these questions in teacher education programs to better prepare new teachers for such everyday situations.

Research Methodology

This study was carried out using a phenomenographic approach. This approach has been developed and used to reveal qualitative different ways in which people understand a phenomenon (Marton,

1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). In this study, we were aiming to capture, derive, and describe the qualitatively different ways in which teachers of Swedish grades 1 to 6 (i.e., 7–12-year olds) understood emerging conflicts between teacher and pupil within the classroom. Data were collected from interviews with 20 teachers from four public elementary schools in the Gothenburg and Umeå areas in Sweden. The four selected schools differed in the number of immigrant pupils attending the school (i.e., from low to high) and the percentage of parents with a secondary school education degree (i.e., 40–80%). The participating teachers differed in gender (15 female and 5 male) and teaching experience (2 to 38 years). The overall intention was to maximize the variety of understandings of emerging conflict. The interviews were conducted by two researchers between October 2015 and February 2016.

The interview was designed to be in-depth and semi-structured. Within the phenomenograpic tradition, probes are often used to make people talk about the phenomenon in question (Johansson, 1981; Lönngren, Ingerman, & Svanström, 2017; Svenssson, 1984). In the study, we used an out-of-seat-situation as a probe to make the interviewed teachers talk about emerging conflicts. The following questions were used as a starting point for the interview: How do you understand a situation like this? What would you do? Is this a conflict? Why? or Why not? Where does the conflict start? Our intention was to take the teachers to the bridging point for when a situation goes from not being a conflict to one holding a seed for becoming a conflict. The interview continues with trying to take the teachers to different bridging points and by that give them as rich an opportunity as possible to talk about emerging conflicts.

This interview procedure was tested on primary school teachers and with scholars in the fields of phenomenography and conflict resolution before being used with the teachers in the present study.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The answers in the interviews were, in line with the phenomenograpic approach, considered to form a "pool of meaning," and our focus in the analysis was not to hear the voices of individual teachers, but those of the collective (Marton & Booth, 1997). The transcripts were analyzed using recursive readings aimed at uncovering each different way of understanding the phenomenon in terms of their *referential* and *structural* aspects (Marton & Booth, 1997). The former refers to the specific meaning attributed to a particular way of understanding, for example emerging conflict as a *challenge of agenda*. The structural aspect refers to how such a way of understanding is constituted, and is divided in two elements: the *external* and the *internal* horizon. The external horizon denotes what constitutes the background against which the way of understanding appears and to which it relates, for example *the school as an institution for knowledge*. The internal horizon denotes the web of meaning-bearing components or the parts that the way of understanding is built of, for example *limited time* and *content*. The analysis was first done by individual researchers and subsequently through collective discussion. Throughout this analytic process, the original recordings were revisited to authenticate our interpretations. Extracts from interviews were selected, read, and discussed. Preliminary categories of understanding were formed and reformed. The logical and empirical links between categories were explored (Uljens, 1989). Finally, through this iterative process, nine different distinctive categories of descriptions emerged to form what in phenomenographical terms is called an outcome space (Marton, 1981; Marton & Booth, 1997). It should be pointed out that the presented outcome space is not seen as incontrovertible, but should give a solid and empirically justifiable description of the different ways of understanding emerging conflict between teacher and pupil in the classroom.

Results

In this section, the outcome space of the nine different ways to understand an emerging conflict between teacher and pupil in the classroom is described. Table 1 shows a list of all nine categories (A–I). Each way of understanding is first explained with a common word description. This is followed by extracts from

Table 1. Outcome space of nine ways of understanding with respect to referential and structural aspects.

Way of understanding	Referential aspect *Emerging conflict as ....*	Structural aspect, external horizon	Structural aspect, internal horizon
A	a challenge of agenda	The school as an institution for knowledge	Limited time, responsibility, teaching, content, collective, grades, compulsory school attendance, cumulativity
B	a challenge of individualised boundaries	A school for all	Individualisation, knowledge of pupils, differentiated boundaries, agreements
C	an immediate challenge to the authority of the teacher	School as a hierarchy where the pupils are expected to know their position (as subordinated)	Power relationships, the teacher being the one in power, the subordination of pupils, hierarchical positioning, awareness of one's position
D	a lack of adequate organisation	A school for some or none	Deficiency in the organization, inappropriate organization, special needs, general needs, diagnosis, schedule
E	a substitute for another conflict	Classroom as a part of a larger context	Already established conflict, another context, the original conflict is with someone else, substitute, role direction that varies
F	a departure from a professional role as a teacher	Teacher as a human being	Teacher's personal needs, diminished empathy
G	a lack of relationship	Relationships as the grounds for (peaceful) coexistence	Lack of continuity, lack of time, no opportunities to establish relationships, lacking opportunities to create mutual respect, relationship as the only possible way
H	shortcomings in communication	Communication as the basis for (peaceful) coexistence	Lack of a common language, affectation, difficulty to reach the pupils through verbal and non-verbal communication
I	a conflict of interest	People having different interests	Different interests, different focus of attention, the teachers strive to direct the pupils' attention towards the teachers' (schools') interest

the interviews and interpretations of these in relation to the particular understanding. Finally, the understanding is described in terms of its referential and structural aspects (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Understanding A[1]

An emerging conflict is understood as a challenge to the short-term or long-term teaching plan of the teacher. The specific characteristics of this understanding refer to subject-specific content teaching within a limited time as being the main task of the school.

Teacher 7 indicates this understanding:

> ... for me it´s like this when I lecture, it´s almost like a sacred moment, it´s so important from my point of view that when I lecture I never find it OK, it can be more like "no," now it is a lesson. And you are expected to sit down and listen, if you want to say something you have to do it afterwards, that´s what I used to do.

In this extract, the teaching is put at the center. Challenging it is understood as an emerging conflict. In this particular case, the short-term teaching is at the forefront; no direct references are made to the future. Furthermore, Teacher 7 indicates that the collective is in focus by mentioning that the pupil who causes a disturbance should sit down and listen, and wait for the lecture to end.

Teacher 7 also indicates Understanding A in the following extract:

Interviewer (I):   Mmm, is a situation like this a conflict according to you?
T7:   It could become one.

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[1]In the phenomenographic tradition the term "way of understanding A" would be used. We have shortened it to "understanding A." The same is also applicable for the other understandings.

I:	When?
T7:	If I … it could become one if I feel that I might emphasise and that İd rather would … it is a very important lecture so I would like to focus, then it could become a conflict.
I:	Because it takes away your focus?
T7:	Yes, exactly, so it depends a bit on my own feeling, what I believe, if it becomes a conflict or not.

Even here the teaching is central, and challenging it is perceived as an emerging conflict. Also, other important components emerge in this extract. The limited time available is expressed by referring to "emphasise" as well as focus on specific knowledge – even if not explicitly referred to – is evident because the teacher refers to a *very important* lecture. In these statements, it becomes obvious that a school has a teaching responsibility for its pupils.

Teacher 10 also indicates this understanding:

> … then it is most often like this that İm forced to tell the pupil that we have a lesson in here, the rest of the class have a compulsory school attendance, they have the right to learn, and [name of a pupil], you are sitting down and keeping quiet or you have to leave the classroom.

In this extract, the component of "collective" is clearly prioritised over the individual pupil. The teacher refers to compulsory school attendance and explains the other pupils' rights to the pupil who challenges Teacher 10's teaching. It is obvious that Teacher 10 indicates awareness of the responsibility that results from compulsory school attendance. Teacher 4 indicated this understanding in the following statement:

T4:	… sometimes it is also necessary subject content to be able to carry out other tasks afterwards …
T4:	… especially when you need to refer to what you have done the day before, you repeat some of what you did yesterday so you can build on that and sometimes it is also a longer lecture, and it depends a bit on what you are doing within the subject, so …
I:	Do you understand this situation as a conflict?
T4:	More like a moment of disturbance than a conflict.
I:	OK.
T4:	But in some way they are getting in a conflict with me, because I am teaching and they are doing something that they know they should not do at that very moment, but I doṅt perceive it as a conflict in that situation yet.

In this extract, the cumulative component in the way of understanding is apparent through the references to necessary subject content as well as to previous and upcoming teaching commitments.

Understanding A is also indicated by the following statement from Teacher 5:

T5:	Yes, they do not get the education they need.
I:	Yes.
T5:	So it becomes a, it is causing stress, daily, you just watch, time passing, you need to mark the grades in grade sixth, oh …

In this extract, there is reference to grade 6 grading, revealing the long-term component. Teacher 5 refers, as does Teacher 7, to the limited school time and the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that pupils develop specific knowledge and abilities.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding A.
Regarding understanding A, the referential aspect is expressed as an emerging conflict as *a challenge to the agenda*. Here, the emerging conflict is understood as a challenge or a possible resistance to the teaching agenda. The external horizon is described as *the school as an institution for knowledge*, meaning that the emerging conflict is discerned against, and related to, this background. The internal horizon is made up of components such as *limited time, responsibility, teaching, content, collective, grades, compulsory school attendance*, and *cumulativity*.

Understanding B

In this category emerging conflict is understood as a challenge to individualised boundaries for accepted behavior. The teacher sets the boundaries based on the knowledge they have about each pupil. In other words, the teacher develops expectations of what is acceptable for each of them, and when pupils violate these expectations, the situation is recognized as an emerging conflict.

Teacher 1 indicates Understanding B:

> T1: … I have had a child that … finds it difficult to sit down and see all the others, then, if the child can sit and listen at the open door, and listen to everything but doesńt have to see everything. Children who find the situation overstimulating. I can't say that I do in this or that way, it´s totally dependent on the context and what kind of pupil you have.
>
> I: Yes, yes and what about the kind of pupil that starts to walk around?
>
> T1: Yes, and then you know that certain children have a need to stand up and sit down, so, yes, you can give some children more space. Some children are standing up and then you react immediately and say "hello," but for some children, yes that can happen to children, he or she can walk a bit down there in the classroom as long as they do it quietly and that this person still listens and no one seems to mind …

Here, it is obvious that the boundaries of when behavior is seen as an emerging conflict are individualized. One pupil can walk back and forth in the classroom and the conflict emerges only when they disturb someone else, while another pupil will create an emerging conflict just by standing up (because they are expected to sit down). This extract also indicates another important component of this way of understanding, which is that the adaption and differentiation of boundaries builds on specific knowledge about the pupils and depending on the teacher's expectations in relation to each pupil.

Understanding B is also indicated in the following extract by Teacher 8:

> I do find it very disturbing … then it depends on who, who it is who does this … accordingly, if you know your class then you know kind of what it is, so I think that I react in a different way according to whether we might have agreed on something, me and the pupil in question … .

This extract demonstrates that there is an adaption of boundaries based on knowledge about the pupil. Another component also emerges, that of special agreements made with certain pupils that might affect the teacheŕs understanding of the situation as an emerging conflict.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding B.

With regard to Understanding B, the referential aspect is expressed as an emerging conflict as *a challenge to individualised boundaries*. The external horizon of the structural aspect is described as *a school for all*. So Understanding B is discerned and related to a background that informs us that a school and its teachers ought to handle all kinds of pupils, despite different pupils behaving differently in the classroom. The internal horizon consists of the components *individualisation*, *knowledge of pupils*, *differentiated boundaries*, and *agreements*.

Understanding C

In this category, an emerging conflict is understood as a direct challenge to the authority of the teacher. The understanding is characterized by the fact that the authority of the teacher is definitive and when a pupil challenges this in a clear way, an emerging conflict is recognized.

Teacher 2 indicates Understanding C:

> I: Yes, or if anyone stands up and walks around, that you become disturbed in your lecture.
>
> T2: Yes, that would be if that pupil challenges me in my position as a teacher, to test to see who is the one in charge in the classroom, then there could be a conflict, it does not usually happen, but it could happen …

Teacher 2 explains that an emerging conflict is recognized if a pupil tries to defy the position of the teacher who is in charge in the classroom. The extract consists of three conceptual components. First, the teacher emphasizes the prevailing power relationships in the classroom. That is, the teacher owns power and thus is the one that can be challenged. Second, it points to the subordination of the pupil since it is the pupil who is understood to be the one who challenges. Third, it indicates the hierarchical positioning in itself, in which it becomes clear who is being challenged and who challenges.

Teacher 2 continues:

> … here it is [T2] who decides and we have certain things that we have the permission to discuss and be included in, but otherwise it is [T2] who is in control of what we are going to do …

In this extract, the above-mentioned components appear once more, with the addition that the pupils already know who is in charge and so it can be said that they are aware of their position.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding C.

The referential aspect of Understanding C can be expressed as an emerging conflict as *an immediate challenge to the authority of the teacher*. The external horizon can be understood as *school as a hierarchy where the pupils ought to know their place (as subordinated)*. The perceived conflict is discerned against and relates to a school where the role of the teacher as leader is definitive and pupils do, ultimately, have to obey the teacher as well as the prescribed frameworks. The internal horizon consists of the components *power relationships*, *the teacher being the one in the position of power*, *the subordination of the pupils*, *hierarchical positioning*, and *awareness of one's place*.

Understanding D

An emerging conflict in Understanding D is understood to be that the school lacks adequate organization to meet the needs of the teachers and pupils. This deficiency can either be general and affect teachers and all pupils, or be specific and concern teachers and certain pupils/groups of pupils. The understanding is characterized by a lack of organization of the school that, in itself, constitutes an emerging conflict and therefore beyond the control of teachers and pupils.

A teacher who indicates Understanding D is Teacher 5:

> … I have never experienced a school where there's such confusion and it´s so badly organised … these pupils who need support, they dońt get it. And then they get into this situation in the classroom and it doesńt work and then it leads to conflicts …

> … all those who are teachers, they are educated in a certain way and do, they are trying to conduct their lessons at the same time as they are trying to reach these children, but for many of them just to be in a large group in a classroom is destructive, but they are still thrown in there again and again.

Teacher 5 says that the conflict is built into the organization of the school. In this case, it is about the school not being organized in a way that fits a certain group of pupils with special needs. By referring to an organizational inadequacy at meeting these pupils' needs, and teachers trying but failing to handle the problems, T5 shows that the problem is out of the immediate control of pupils and teachers.

Understanding D is also indicated by Teacher 18:

> I think a couple of years ago, when a girl with a certain problem, ADHD … she had a hard time recognising her own part … when she didńt put up with the situation, then it was with all kind of words and actions and everything … . It was enormously frustrating. … Now, she has been transferred to another part of the municipality where children with those kind of problems are brought together. There, they are more isolated, less in number [name of school], less overstimulation … . It was hard for us to handle this. Both for her and for us.

As with Teacher 5, Teacher 18 says that the emerging conflict is grounded in the organization of the school, by saying that the actual pupil has now moved to a school adapted for her special needs.

Apart from Teacher 5, Teacher 18 shows that it is about an individual pupil (the girl with an ADHD diagnosis) and not a group of pupils. The latter exemplifies the variation in Understanding D, emphasizing that the lack of organization also affects individuals. For both Teacher 5 and Teacher 18, the emerging conflict is out of the control of both the pupil and the teacher.

The statement also includes a more general component that is indicated by Teacher 13:

T13:   … Then you have to … sometimes above all there is … . what do you call it? The ghost-hour or the heavy hour, that is between 10 and 11, before lunch, and between … the last 45 minutes. Or the 45 minutes before lunch and at the end of the day, that is the heavy hour for them.
I: Mmm
T13   Then you have to let them know by telling them. Because they are often tired and hungry. You can recognise that many of them have this thing with food. Bad breakfast.

In this context, it is obvious that the emerging conflict is built into the organisation at a more general level, that is, in its schedule, in such a way that it affects the teachers and pupils and their general needs. It becomes clear when Teacher 13 talks about the pupils as a collective (whole-class perspective) rather than referring to individual pupils or to groups of pupils.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding D.

The referential aspect of Understanding D can be expressed in terms of emerging conflict as a *lack of adequate organization*. The meaning that underpins Understanding D can be summarised as an emerging conflict that is embedded in a school lacking adequate organization that can handle managing pupils, groups of pupils, and individual pupils. The external horizon links the way of understanding to a background that can be labeled *a school for some or none*. In this case "some" refers to a group of pupils or an individual pupil and "none" refers to all pupils. The internal horizon consists of the components *deficiency in organization*, *inappropriate organization*, *special needs*, *general needs*, *diagnosis*, and *schedule*.

Understanding E

In this category, emerging conflict is understood as a conflict that a person brings with them from another context and another person becomes the target of. Both teachers and pupils can be targeted and become a substitute.

Teacher 7 indicates Understanding E:

Yes, they can bring things with them, especially if they have had a break just before, it can be a conflict that is still there and this can lead to an agitated situation in the lesson, it gets more difficult to sit still and more difficult to listen, to concentrate and so there is very much that can have an impact.

In this extract the teacher becomes the substitute for a conflict already established in another context. The emerging conflict appears when the teacher has to manage the effects of this conflict. Several components become obvious here. First, Teacher 7 emphasizes that there has been *an earlier established conflict*. Second, the conflict is established in *another context*. Third, *the original conflict is with someone else* other than the teacher. Fourth, one of the antagonists, in this case the teacher, becomes the *substitute* when he/she has to manage the effects of the conflict that has been brought into the classroom by the pupil. Fifth, in this extract, the *direction of roles* indicates that the teacher has become the substitute.

The context where the conflict originates can vary, something that is clear in the following extract in which Teacher 14 indicates that the context where the conflict started was the pupil's home:

But conditions at home, if we just give an example of how it could be. It´s all from divorces, quarrels about alcoholism and drugs, yes you know, no safe conditions at home. This can lead to a need for confirmation … or that someone just shouts right out if they don't get what they want … .

Understanding E also includes a reverse direction of roles, where the pupils become substitutes for a conflict that the teacher has established in another context:

> Yes or what I need in this … if I come from a lesson where I have had lots of conflicts, then it's difficult not to carry them with you to the next class or group that you meet … (T10)

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding E

The referential aspect of Understanding E can be expressed in terms of emerging conflict as *substitute for another conflict*. The core of the meaning in this way of understanding is that the substitute finds themself in the position of being the victim and, at the same time, has to manage the effects of another person's conflict. The external horizon is understood as *the classroom as a part of a larger context*. It refers both to the rest of the school as well as beyond the school, from the home or society at large. The internal horizon consists of the components *already established conflict*, *another context*, *the original conflict is with someone else*, *substitute*, and a *role direction that varies*.

Understanding F

In this category, emerging conflict is understood as a deviation from the professional role as a teacher. The understanding is characterized by the teacher who deviates from their role as a professional teacher and puts their personal needs at the forefront.

Teacher 10 indicates Understanding F below:

> Oh, then the picture builds of how tired I am, my inner threshold for stress, things that are out of my control …

> I would say that I have less understanding. I react with less empathy. I reflect on things less through the pupils' points of view on the situation. I react to my own needs.

These extracts indicate that a deviation from the role as a professional teacher implies an emerging conflict. Two components are revealed. First, Teacher 10 indicates to prioritize personal needs, which are caused by tiredness and sleep deprivation. Second, it becomes obvious that the prioritizing own needs can lead to a less empathic approach towards the pupils.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding F.

The referential aspect of Understanding F is expressed in terms of emerging conflict as *a departure from a professional role as a teacher*. The external horizon is understood as the *teacher as a human being*, that is, shifting from behaving predominantly as a professional to behaving predominantly as a human being. The internal horizon then consists of the components *teacher's personal needs* and *diminished empathy*.

Understanding G

In this category, emerging conflict is understood as a lack of relationship between teacher and pupil because they do not know each other and so this lack constitutes an emerging conflict.

Teacher 11 says, while talking about a class she has met only a few times:

> … but I thought now the boat is rocking. Whoa, what shall I do? Because it was … now when I think about your first question suddenly they stand up or put their feet on the bench in the middle of my lecture. Then I was in a quite different role as the class teacher in my own class. It was like a whole new situation.

In this extract, it becomes obvious that the teacher is suggesting that not knowing the pupils who are acting out might be recognized as an emerging conflict. Teacher 11 is uncertain about how to act

with pupils they don't know compared to their "own class." This pinpoints an important component in Understanding G, namely the lack of continuity and time to establish a relationship.

Teacher 11 continues:

> And I feel that they have to know me and I have to get to know them and I need to get in contact with those who do like this … so we get a relationship in a way. Because it is the only way of reaching them.

Here, Teacher 11 highlights a lack of an established relationship by explaining that to be able to stop unwanted behavior, it is necessary to know the pupils, since it is the only way to reach them. This last part of the extract can even be treated as a separate component, since it establishes that a relationship is the only solution.

The goal of establishing a relationship is also indicated by teacher Teacher 14:

> … Because for those who I have created a relationship with, based on mutual respect I can just have a look, so maybe it´s enough but if anyone else comes in and takes the same pupil, it will not be that easy. So it takes a big effort to get something out of the relationship.

The extract focuses on another component of the way of understanding, that being a lack in establishing mutual respect.

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding G.

The referential aspect of Understanding G is expressed in terms of an emerging conflict as *a lack of relationship*. The external horizon is understood as *relationships as the grounds for (peaceful) coexistence*. The way of understanding is separated from, and related to, a background where human relationships and building relationships are the foundation. It is a good relationship that makes peaceful existence possible. The internal horizon is characterized by the components *lack of continuity*, *lack of time*, *no opportunities to establish relationships*, *lacking opportunities to create mutual respect*, and *relationship as the only possible way*.

Understanding H

In this way of understanding, emerging conflict is understood as verbal and non-verbal shortcomings in communication. The understanding indicates that the teacher and pupil cannot reach each other through communication and this inability constitutes an emerging conflict.

Understanding H is indicated by Teacher 14:

> … But it escalates too fast and too often due to the language, a lack of language I think. …

> Yes, how can you manage a conflict if you cannot communicate with the one you have, sort of … it becomes really difficult.

In this extract, it becomes obvious that there is a conflict if communication is disturbed. Teacher 14 highlights the central component "a lack of a common language" as the source of an emerging conflict.

Teacher 15 indicates the same understanding from a slight different perspective:

> T15: … which I cańt get to know, then when he maybe is extremely upset or has thrown the book away, then they often are just angry and in that way and then you have no possibility of communicating maybe and then you have to …
>
> I: And when the pupil is extremely upset the possibility disappeared.
>
> T15: Yes, then you have to take … . It's the same as when it comes to quarrels and conflicts, both grown-ups and others, it´s easier to talk later when you are not angry. When you are still angry, it's kind of impossible. It´s easier to take care of it later.

This extract points at the component of being upset, which makes it impossible to communicate or severely deteriorates communication. The state of being upset has to be eased before it is possible to seriously regain communication and create a base to re-establish communication.

Teacher 16 indicates another component:

T16:   He kind of … he tried and continued to fool around and but that, I tell him all the time, yes, sometimes
        the whole lesson sometimes.
I: So you can tell him several times during a lesson?
T16:   Yes.
I: And what do you say then? How do you say it?
T16:   Stop playing with that thing and try to catch up! Look in the book! Are you with us? …

The extract shows how the teacher tries to stop or prevent an escalation of an undesired behavior of a pupil but the repeated message does not make the pupil react in the way the teacher wants.

One example, from Teacher 1, indicates that communication is not always verbal:

I even have pupils in my class now, that suddenly say "what", then I usually walk forward and wink at that person and if that doesn't work maybe I start to walk around in the classroom to get that person seated …

Referential and Structural Aspects of Understanding H.

The referential aspect of Understanding H is expressed in terms of an emerging conflict as *shortcomings in communication*. The external horizon is understood as *communication as the basis for (peaceful) coexistence*. The way of understanding is discerned from, and related to, a background where peaceful communication between people is grounded in the potential to communicate. The internal horizon is then indicated by the components *lack of a common language*, *affectation*, and *difficulty in reaching the pupils through verbal* and *non-verbal communication*.

Understanding I

In this category, emerging conflict is understood as a conflict of interest between teacher and pupil. Understanding I involves the teacher and the pupil wanting different things when interacting in the classroom.

Teacher 14 indicates:

I: In situations like we have talked about now, for example that a pupil leaves their place and starts to walk
        around in the classroom, do you regard it as a conflict? Or what do you think it is?
T14:   What exciting questions you are asking! Yeah … it is not exactly a conflict. A conflict is more like …
        yes, in a way it becomes like one, it is, anyway, my interest and their interest that are differing in a way.
        So, in a way, it is. Yes, I have to answer yes to that question then.

In this extract, Teacher 14 indicates an emerging conflict that is related to different interests of the teacher and the pupil. The pupil shows this by standing up while the teacher lectures. The teacher indicates the different interests by referring to "my interest and their interest." Furthermore, the teacher shows a desire to direct the pupil's attention towards the teacher's interest, namely the lecture, whilst the pupil is focused on their own interest.

Referential and Structural Aspect of Understanding I

The referential aspect of Understanding I is expressed in terms of an emerging conflict as *a conflict of interests*. The external horizon is understood as *people having different interests*. Understanding I is discerned and related to a background where people in the same situation can want different things and have different interests. The internal horizon is then characterized by the components *different interests*, *different focus of attention*, and *the teachers strive to direct the pupil's attention towards the teacher's (school's) interest*.

Discussion

Relationships and Dynamics Between the Different Ways of Understanding

The outcome space revealed nine different ways of understanding emerging conflict. This is quite an extensive outcome space in phenomenographic terms and could be viewed as the phenomenon of

emerging conflict being something that the teachers have to deal with in varying ways every day (Marton & Booth, 1997; Uljens, 1989). It could also be interpreted as a sign of complexity of the phenomenon in teachers' everyday experiences.

This proposed complexity also emerges if we look at the relationship between the different categories from the perspective of *tension*. For example, comparing Understandings A and B, it might be reasonable to identify a *difference in starting points* of the emerging conflict. Looking at emerging conflict as a challenge of agenda, and focusing on the limited time and the collective's right to knowledge, the emerging conflict is likely to start earlier than that in Understanding B, as pupils not willing to share the teacher's agenda (Understanding A) can immediately cause trouble.

On the other hand, understanding emerging conflict as a challenge to expectation, prone to individual concern and differentiated boundaries in relation to the expectations of the teacher, indicates a possible postponement of when the emerging conflict emerges. At the same time, this way of understanding risks restricting the progress of teaching for the collective in favor of individual considerations.

Another example of this kind of tension is evident if we compare the understanding in Understanding B with that in Understanding D. If the pupil is in a state of constant emerging conflict with the organisation, as with the understanding in D, the teacher cannot successfully cope with emerging conflict through individual considerations and differentiated boundaries (as in B) because the lack of organization will not enable them to do so. Neither can a school organised for none or just some (Understanding D), incorporate all (Understanding B).

Without giving further examples of this type of tension, the examples given allow us to assert that the outcome space indicates that teachers encounter and have to navigate a complex, dynamic, and often inconsistent environment relating to emerging conflicts.

If we now, instead, focus our attention on the different ways of understanding in the order they are presented in the outcome space, it is possible to arrange them into three large groups. It could be argued that Understandings A–C have a common core, in that they are directly bound to the classroom environment, and in that way they are unique to *the social practice of the classroom*. In those ways of understandings, the emerging conflict arises due to specific details of the classroom practise. It could be argued, however, that Understandings D–F can be characterized as an emerging conflict in the classroom arising from something *outside* the classroom. By contrast, Understanding D is about an organizational dissonance not created within the classroom. Understandings E and F are about the teacher and/or the pupils bringing something that has happened outside the specific classroom into that classroom. Finally, for Understandings G–I, the emerging conflict is something that characterises *all human interaction*, where relationships, communication, and conflicts of interest become central.

This way of reasoning leads us towards a conclusion where Understandings A–C could be viewed as more classroom-specific, while the other ways of understanding are more general and could be associated to other social practices as well. For the teacher then, Understandings A, B, and C are unique and can be directly linked to *being* a teacher.

Individual Teachers and Different Ways of Understanding

The different ways of understanding in the outcome space have been constructed from a pool of meaning. That means that one individual teacher cannot be said to have asserted just one specific way of understanding or even encompassed every aspect of understanding in a certain way of understanding. However, it is possible to associate different empirical extracts that add to each way of understanding with certain individuals, in turn making it possible to deduce if a particular teacher gives indications for one or more ways of understanding. Table 2 shows such a deduction, where Teacher 10 gives indication for as many as seven of the nine different ways of understanding, while Teachers 3, 5, 16, and T18 only give indication for two. Even if this kind of inference does not give an altogether true picture of the teachers at an individual level, it could be used as an

Table 2. Teachers' distribution over categories.

The number of ways of understanding	Teacher
9/9 ways of understanding	
8/9 ways of understanding	
7/9 ways of understanding	T10
6/9 ways of understanding	T14, T15
5/9 ways of understanding	T13
4/9 ways of understanding	T1, T4, T11, T17
3/9 ways of understanding	T2, T6, T7, T8, T9, T12, T19, T20
2/9 ways of understanding	T3, T5, T16, T18
1/9 ways of understanding	

indicator for the possibility that some teachers may have a more multifaceted understanding of emerging conflict than others, and that few teachers are likely to embrace all the different understandings found.

Using Table 2 as a stepping stone, we can now introduce another phenomenographic axiom that states that the greater the number of relevant components simultaneously discerned, the more complex is the understanding of a phenomenon. Often this axiom is linked to a hierarchical arrangement of the outcome space, where the hierarchical order represents an increasing number of relevant components that are understood simultaneously (Marton & Booth, 1997).

In our outcome space, there is no hierarchical order evident; the ways of understanding are organized horizontally, with no understanding being more complex than another. They are just different ways of understanding the same phenomenon (Uljens, 1989). From this kind of outcome space, the axiom, instead, could be viewed as being that more complex understanding is equivalent to the possibility of simultaneously discern more of the different, but equally important, ways of understanding presented in the outcome space. If this line of reasoning is extended, we could argue that it would be of value for the individual teacher to develop an understanding of emerging conflict from as many different ways of understanding (A to I) as possible.

We could go even further with our argument if this reasoning is paired with yet another phenomenographic axiom stating that an understanding of a phenomenon also indicates a person's possible actions in relation to the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). If this axiom also holds true, we ought to say that a teacher with a greater multifaceted understanding of emerging conflict, in terms of simultaneously discerning more of the different ways of understandings found in this study, is better prepared to handle emerging conflict in their professional life, than a teacher with a more limited understanding.

Concluding Remarks

In the introduction to this article, we emphasized that minor distractions and disturbances in the classroom are not referred to as emerging conflicts in steering documents, and hardly by practitioners and teacher educators. Theoretically we argued that minor distractions and disturbances are conflicts because actions of one person (for example the pupil) prevent, block, or interfere with the possibilities of the other (the teacher) to reach their goals. As these conflicts are in an emerging stage, we refer to them as emerging conflicts.

Recognizing situations where pupils are "talking out of turn," "hindering other children," and "out-of-seat" as emerging conflicts leads automatically to the question how the emerging conflict can be understood and, in extension, to discussions about what strategies could be used to deal with them.

As practitioners hardly use the term emerging conflict, a clear probe from the researcher was needed to be able to discuss this phenomenon. Aiming at contributing with empirical research about practitioners' understandings of emerging conflicts, we turned to these professionals. Our

investigation resulted in making a phenomenon that has been unnoticed and undiscussed for quite some time visible and open for discussion.

The 20 primary school teachers demonstrated an extensive awareness when discussing emerging conflicts in a complex way. In our study, we found nine ways of understanding emerging conflict that are distinct and differ from each other through unique expressions. According to Granström (2006), collective and shared understandings can build a professional language among teachers. Consequently, these nine different ways can be understood as the collected and shared understandings of emerging conflict and, as such, be regarded as the professional language to discuss these kinds of conflicts.

Individual teachers in this study gave indications for a minimum of two and a maximum of seven understandings to this professional language. Would it be beneficial for schools if teachers and trainee teachers (i.e., student teachers) learnt all nine understandings? Are some understandings more important for teachers then others? While the three understandings A–C are unique for *the social practice of the classroom*, D–F relate to something *outside* the classroom, and G–I characterize *all human interaction.* We would argue that the three understandings that are related to the social practice of the classroom are necessary for the teaching profession and should be addressed in teacher education. In addition, teachers need to be aware of external influences. Finally, general knowledge and competences concerning relationships, communication, and differences in interest support the role of the teachers in social interactions. In other words, all nine understandings can be seen as relevant for teachers. In future, it would be interesting to find out whether any of these understandings are actually addressed in teacher education.

The teachers we interviewed completed their teacher education before the 2011 reform (SOU, 2008:109) that saw the inclusion of educational leadership, social relationships, and conflict resolution as one of the eight core themes. In this relatively new situation (since 2011), with teacher education that includes conflict resolution, our study can function as a scientific input to the discussion about the content of educational leadership, social relationships, and conflict resolution.

By using the phenomenographic methodology, we have gained insight into the diversity of understandings of ordinary emerging conflicts by professionals (i.e., teachers). We generated one pole of meaning with nine understandings. By sharing their tacit knowledge of emerging conflicts, the interviewees in this study provided us with a rich vocabulary. Emerging conflict has become a concept with multifaceted understandings that opens up discussions about handling emerging conflicts from each understanding.

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