



THE ARCHETYPE APPROACH / CASE STUDY LIBRARY

AA-CS-017

Fairness Needs Listening

How Justice Sensitivity Grew Into Negotiation and Leadership



CASE TYPE	Justice Sensitivity, Peer Negotiation & Leadership
AGE / CONTEXT	4-5 years / highly communicative peer-group play
TIMEFRAME	Approximately one term / 12 weeks
PRACTICE SITE	Children of Towan Kindergarten, Cornwall
CHILD	Anonymised child case

EMERGING AA PRINCIPLE

Justice sensitivity did not need to be softened. It needed relationship. Fairness matured as the child learned to express his view, hear another perspective and build solutions with other people.

OBSERVE

What is happening?

RECOGNISE

What pattern is this?

BALANCE

What is missing?

INTEGRATE

What has emerged?

Observe -> Recognise -> Balance -> Integrate

What was happening?

Justice was clear - negotiation was less available



INITIAL PRESENTATION

A highly communicative, outgoing child was strongly oriented towards friendship and group play. He enjoyed being with peers, brought energy and ideas into shared experiences and showed clear leadership potential.

The difficulty appeared when friendships became contested. He could struggle to release control of the rules or direction of play, and he was extremely alert to situations he experienced as unfair. When another child would not share, changed the game or disrupted an agreed idea, he frequently sought an adult to resolve the situation.

RECURRING PATTERNS

- Strong friendship orientation and desire to remain socially involved.
- Clear verbal ability and confidence expressing his own position.
- Strong autonomy and preference for influencing rules and direction of play.
- High sensitivity to unfairness, exclusion and unequal access to resources.
- Frequent adult approaches such as: "They are not sharing" or "They are ruining our game."
- Difficulty listening to a competing perspective once he felt something was unfair.

WHAT WAS THE CHILD SHOWING US?

The child did not lack social motivation. Friendship mattered deeply. The developmental edge appeared when a strong sense of justice and autonomy needed to make room for negotiation, reciprocal listening and shared authorship of the social world.

THE QUESTION BENEATH THE CONFLICT

Could a child who already knew how to identify what felt unfair learn to create fairness with other people - rather than relying on an adult to decide it for them?

What pattern emerged?

Seeing the strength inside the struggle for fairness



ARCHETYPAL LENS

PRIMARY AXIS	Rebel <-> Helper - strong autonomy widening into socially useful responsibility
RELATIONAL CAPACITY	Friend - listening, negotiation and preserving relationship through difference
STRENGTH IN SHADOW	Justice sensitivity could become rule-control or adult-dependent resolution

SHADOW / IMBALANCE PRESENTATION

DEVELOPMENTAL TASK

From identifying unfairness to building fairness together

The strong Rebel capacity was not treated as defiance. He could recognise injustice, hold his own view and confidently seek support. The imbalance appeared when certainty about what was fair left too little room for another child's view, or when an adult was repeatedly needed to settle the dispute.

POSSIBLE UNDERLYING NEEDS

- Practice hearing a peer without surrendering his own position.
- Language for explaining the problem directly to another child.
- Experience that negotiation can protect friendship rather than weaken it.
- Adults who remain available without becoming the judge of every dispute.
- Opportunities to turn fairness sensitivity into leadership and inclusion.
- Shared projects where compromise produces something larger than individual control.

DEVELOPMENTAL UNDERSTANDING

The perception shift was from "He wants everything his way" to "He has a powerful justice detector. Can we help that capacity become reciprocal, relational and constructive?"

What was introduced?

Teaching fairness as a relational skill



ADULTS MOVED FROM RESOLVER TO SCAFFOLD

Staff remained available when the child approached with a dispute, but increasingly resisted solving it for him. The adult role became to slow the interaction down, help both children stay in it and return the problem to the people who were actually playing.

CONSISTENT STAFF LANGUAGE

- "Tell them what you think happened."
- "Now listen to what they think."
- "Can you find something that feels fair to both of you?"

WHAT THE SCAFFOLD WAS TEACHING

The child was encouraged to name the injustice himself, listen to the other child's account and negotiate a solution rather than simply recruiting adult authority. Staff promoted direct eye-to-eye communication, reciprocal listening, fair access and the possibility that two valid needs could exist at the same time.

GRADUAL RELEASE

As his skill increased, adults used fewer words and less direct involvement. The pathway shifted from adult resolver, to adult scaffold, towards adult witness: available if needed, but no longer automatically carrying the conflict.

BALANCING SEQUENCE

Notice -> Express -> Listen -> Negotiate -> Include -> Lead

What became newly available?

From enforcing fairness to creating it together



A CONCRETE SHIFT

During block play, another child was holding the blocks in a way that prevented this child and a friend from accessing the resources they wanted for their own building. This was exactly the kind of situation that had previously prompted an immediate appeal to an adult.

Instead, he approached the other child and negotiated directly. His proposal was essentially: if we play together, we can build something really great. The children joined their ideas and went on to construct a Star Wars-style spaceship together.

WHAT BECAME NEWLY AVAILABLE

- Independent attempts to resolve peer conflict before recruiting adult authority.
- Clear expression of what he believed was unfair.
- Greater ability to listen to another child's position.
- Negotiation and sharing of resources rather than control of access.
- Inclusive leadership, including noticing when another child was being left out.
- Collaborative Builder play emerging from a situation that could previously have ended the game.
- Sustained shared play for approximately 30 minutes following the block negotiation.

TRANSFER OVER TIME

Across approximately 12 weeks, staff continued to see these dynamics develop. Conflict did not disappear, nor did his sensitivity to fairness. What changed was his capacity to do more with it: talk, listen, negotiate, share, include and increasingly create fair outcomes within the peer group himself.

INTEGRATION

Justice sensitivity matured into leadership. The strong voice remained - but it increasingly became a voice capable of making room for other people.



Fairness Needs Listening

KEY INSIGHT

Fairness is not only the courage to say what is wrong. It is the capacity to hear another person and build what is right together. The child did not become less sensitive to injustice; he became more able to use that sensitivity relationally.

AA SNAPSHOT

PRIMARY AXIS

Rebel <-> Helper

CROSS-AXIS CAPACITY

Friend - listening and negotiation

CORE DEVELOPMENT

Justice, reciprocity and collaborative leadership

TIMEFRAME

Approximately 12 weeks

MAIN PRESENTATION

Strong justice sensitivity with adult-dependent conflict resolution

BALANCING STRATEGY

Direct expression, reciprocal listening and scaffolded negotiation

OBSERVABLE OUTCOME

Reduced adult dependency, peer negotiation and sustained collaborative play

CASE CATEGORY

Justice Sensitivity, Peer Negotiation & Leadership

CLOSING REFLECTION

"Justice sensitivity did not need to be softened. It needed relationship. What began as a demand for fairness became the capacity to create fairness with others."

AA TAGS

Rebel

Helper

Friend

Justice Sensitivity

Fairness

Negotiation

Peer Conflict

Listening

Leadership

Inclusion

Builder Play

Adult Scaffolding

AA EVIDENCE THEMES

- Justice sensitivity can become a leadership capacity
- Adult scaffolding can reduce dependence without removing support
- Reciprocal listening can widen strong autonomy
- Negotiation can preserve relationship through disagreement
- Social balance can release richer collaborative play
- The capacity remains; what changes is how it is used

AA DEVELOPMENTAL REFLECTION | EVIDENCE STRENGTH: 4.5 / 5

This is a strong developmental process case: the initial pattern, repeated staff language, approximate 12-week timeframe, reduction in adult dependency and a concrete example of independent transfer are all identifiable. The block episode is particularly valuable because the outcome was not simply less conflict: negotiation opened access to sustained collaborative construction and inclusive leadership. The evidence remains retrospective practitioner documentation rather than systematic research, so the causal claim should remain proportionate.