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Running Head: Adolescent Perceptions of Social Support

A Qualitative Investigation Into Adolescents With Learning Disabilities:  
Their Perceptions And Uses Of Social Support

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
PhD in Educational Psychology  
Major in Special Populations of Learners

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive inquiry investigates the perceptions and uses of social support of a selected group of adolescents who attended an English school for students with learning disabilities in Montreal, Quebec. I draw on Vygotskian socio-cultural theory as a framework for understanding how the participants access and use people for social support and how these adolescents provide others with social support. I use three Vygotskian concepts, the zone of proximal development, self-regulation and internalization to examine the differences between those who use support well and those who do not. Data collected and analyzed includes audio taped interviews with focus groups, students, parents, teachers and professional staff, school based and classroom based participant observations. A major finding to emerge is that adolescents in this inquiry use or do not use support well based on what they have internalized through previous experiences and social interactions in their home contexts. The students who use support well appear to have had positive demonstrations of social support within their zones of proximal development, thus enabling them to internalize and self regulate how to access and use social support in other contexts. The students who do not use support well do not appear to have experienced positive demonstrations of social support within their zones of proximal development. This latter group experience difficulties in accessing, accepting and using social support both in home and school contexts. However, these adolescents can learn to self regulate, access and use social support when adults, their peers or significant others listen and validate their concerns and move into their zones of proximal development. Implications for teachers include; (a) Creating open and trusting environments in which students feel comfortable in risk-taking and self-disclosure; and (b) Implementing mentoring programs in which a collaborative environment is created and participants are encouraged to listen, probe, reflect and validate each others perspectives. These suggestions would enable teachers, parents, mentors and friends to move into student's zone of proximal development and provide them with appropriate support, offering students more opportunities to access and use social support.

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my Father who challenged me to think and unknowingly led me to Vygotsky and the theory of social constructivism. We each create our own realities. Reality is a subjective and ongoing construction.

my Mother who read books on tape for me and rang a bell so I would know when to turn the page. In high school she took notes for me from texts books so that I could cover the material.

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the students, teachers, staff, and parents who participated in this inquiry, your voices will remain with me

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of the students who are struggling with Lds, their parents, and their teachers. Trust yourselves and persevere, it is worth the struggle.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'objet de cette étude qualitative et descriptive, menée à Montréal (Québec) dans une école anglaise pour étudiants connaissant des troubles d'apprentissage, est d'examiner les perceptions et l'utilisation du soutien social par un groupe choisi d'adolescents. La théorie socio-culturelle Vygotskienne sert de cadre théorique afin de comprendre comment les participants font appel au soutien social des autres et comment ils procurent aux autres un tel soutien. L'auteure utilise trois concepts Vygotskiens, à savoir, la zone de développement proximal, l'auto-régulation et l'internalisation, dans le but de comprendre en quoi ceux qui réussissent à utiliser le soutien diffèrent de ceux qui n'y réussissent pas. Les données recueillies et analysées comprennent: 1) les enregistrements sonores d'entretiens avec des groupes de discussion, des étudiants, des parents, des enseignants et des membres de l'administration; 2) des observations participantes en salle de classe et à l'école. Il ressort de cette étude que, pour les adolescents qui y ont participé, le succès à employer le soutien dépend de ce qu'ils ont internalisé au cours de leurs expériences passées et de leurs interactions en milieu familial. Les étudiants qui réussissent à utiliser le soutien social semblent avoir connu des manifestations du soutien social au sein de leurs zones de développement proximal, ce qui leur a permis d'internaliser et d'auto-réguler les modes d'accès et d'emploi du soutien social dans d'autres contextes. À l'inverse, les étudiants qui ne réussissent pas à tirer avantage du soutien social semblent ne pas avoir bénéficié de telles manifestations. Ce dernier groupe d'étudiants connaissent des difficultés tant à faire appel au soutien social qu'à l'accepter et à l'utiliser, que ce soit en milieu scolaire ou en milieu familial. Cependant, il semble également que ces adolescents peuvent apprendre à autoréguler et à employer le soutien social lorsque des adultes, leurs pairs, ou des êtres qui leur sont chers sont à leur écoute, comprennent leur soucis, et progressent au sein de leurs zones de développement proximal. Les implications de cette recherche pour les enseignants comprennent: (1) Créer des environnements ouverts, inspirant la confiance, au sein desquels les étudiants se sentent à l'aise de prendre des risques et osent se dévoiler à eux-mêmes et aux autres; (2) Mettre sur pied des programmes de mentorat où soient créés des environnements collaboratifs et où les participants soient encouragés à écouter, à explorer, à réfléchir, à s'approuver. Ces suggestions devraient permettre aux enseignants, parents, mentors et amis de progresser dans la zone de développement proximal de l'étudiant, de lui procurer un échaffaudage et de le soutenir, de sorte à lui offrir davantage d'occasions de faire appel soutien social et d'en tirer profit convenablement.

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## PROLOGUE

I have an empathy unusual to most researchers who have worked or studied students with learning disabilities (Lds). I myself am a student with a language-based Ld. I received a great deal of support in my life, through family, teachers, tutors, and friends. As I read the research regarding students with Lds, I felt that I was not represented. I was a student who was very social and was very successful at hiding my Ld. I realized that I had a problem in grade three when I could not read or write. The following is my most vivid grade three memory.

### *Spelling tests in grade three*

*Twenty years later, I remember Mrs. Comberg powdering her nose at the front of the class before she began her English lessons. I remember the clothing she used to wear and a distinct make-up smell that followed her around the room. What I remember most powerfully, were those dreaded spelling tests. On one particular occasion she decided to yell at me because I didn't write my name on the top of the page; my work was messy. She said, "obviously you did not study!", as I had all of the words misspelled. She would make me stand at the edge of her desk, in front of the class as she yelled at me, ripped my test up in front of everyone and let the pieces drop into the garbage. I did study for those spelling tests, with my mum, every week. I had an equally special French teacher who had a similar routine with me when it came to French dictées. My parents withdrew me from this school in the middle of the year, as they saw their eight-year-old daughter sinking. (1978)*

I was assessed by a prominent male psychologist in grade four. He told my parents not to expect too much from me and that they should withdraw me from the private school I was attending, as it was too academic and I would not succeed. This same psychologist worked with me one-on-one, on my language skills for a year and a half. My memory of him is as follows:

***Someone who was supposed to be helping***

*I thought he was supposed to be working with me? All he does is give me a work book and tell me what page to do and then he gets on the phone. I think the only thing I learned in a year and a half was the word "Shalom", as that is how he ended each phone call. Eventually I told my mum I did not want to go back because, "he ignores me". That was the end of him.*

Two years later I was assessed by another professional at the Montreal Children's Hospital and my life changed. I was diagnosed with a learning disability. The appropriate supports were put in place for me such as an excellent tutor with whom I have maintained contact, as have my parents. I began to soar.

***A new discovery as a adult***

*Only two years ago, at the age of 26, as I was rummaging through my parents basement, I stumbled across the report that had been written by a psychologist at the Children's Hospital. By then I had taken many assessment courses and was assessing children myself. As I read the report I found myself sitting on the floor crying. Maybe I'm not really stupid after all.*

Now, years after those failed spelling tests, that first assessment, the hours of workbook pages, the second assessment, the unending support of my family, and finally the helpful support of a wonderful mentor, I completed high school, then university, and now I am completing my Ph.D. at McGill University. This is, in part, my story.

In pursuing this research project, my goal was to understand who, why, and how adolescents with Lds access and use the social support available to them in their social networks. In understanding the differences which I have uncovered, I believe educators, students, and members of their support networks can develop and provide better programs and support for adolescents with Lds.

## CHAPTER 1

## SITUATING AND UNDERSTANDING MY RESEARCH PROBLEM

## Overview

This study is a qualitative inquiry into adolescents with learning disabilities and their perceptions and uses of social support. I begin with Rebecca a teacher at Vanguard Intercultural High School. Vanguard is a school located in the city of Montreal intended to serve children with severe learning disabilities (Lds). Rebecca and her class went rock climbing. The following vignettes highlight how the students obtained or were provided with support when they needed it. These vignettes emerge from my data sets in an inquiry that aims to understand how adolescents with Lds use significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) in their social networks for support. The following vignettes demonstrate how adept the students are at providing each other with different types of support.

***Fellow peers supporting Donald: With encouragement, strategies, and suggestions***

*Donald was amazing...um, when he went up the first time he just went up a little bit and then he came down. He was methodical, he took his time, waited, and then he went up again and Nancy was belaying him. He went up like maybe four holes and then he stopped and he said that he was very nervous and that his hands were sweaty and he thought that he had to come down. There were quite a few people there, Marianne, Tyler, Nancy, and I. Marianne said, "No Donald, you can do it, just take a break you know and rest". Nancy added, "I know you could do it, there's a big one up there" pointing at a hand hold. They were all really encouraging him. He totally stopped for about a full five minutes and was wiping off his hands and then he went up like another two steps and then stopped and was nervous again. The students who were around him, even on the walls climbing, were stopping...they were all encouraging him and pointing out to him where to go next and telling him he's doing a great job. It took him about a half*

*an hour to get to the top...he went up six times and he waited about fifteen/twenty minutes exactly between each time and he always did the exact same wall, he didn't venture from it. Donald decided he wanted to do it one more time before we left and it was already like two minutes to one and so he asked...he asked Cameron to belay him (the person at the base of the climb who holds the rope and keeps the climber safe is called the belayer)...every single person at some point or another encouraged him or told him and I was over quite far away at a further one (another wall) with Derek and Bruce and I think Tyler, and when he (Donald) made it to the top I guess Marianne or someone started clapping and Derek was on the wall and Derek stopped and asked Bruce to hold him so he could, you know, clap and call out to. It then took Donald so long to come down...Albert was telling him how to come down and telling him just to hold the rope, put his feet on the wall and not to worry it took him a long time to get down as well but then he did it like five more times and each time I belayed him one time and<sup>d</sup>each time he got a little bit faster and he stopped you know being nervous and he stopped complaining about his hands and...(Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

#### ***Having intuition that someone needed support and acting on it***

*One person would be belaying and if the person on the wall was heavier than the person belaying then Bruce and Marianne were often around ...to hold them down. Bruce was amazing cause I remember him like two or three times when someone felt nervous (he would just move in and help out quietly). Nancy, Marianne and Tyler had asked for help you know, like "I need help" or Bruce just knew and he would often hold the rope and help. Marianne like quite a few times helped to hold the rope so that in case she lost the break that he would have it so he would actually squat down beside her and hold the rope below her hands Bruce yeah yeah Bruce was just probably out of the entire group he just did it. It was phenomenal like all the other kids are so athletic (compared to him and he just shined) (Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

#### ***The ability to be honest and vulnerable***

*Derek had gone up (a really tough route and made it part way, but had to stop) the overhang was so difficult. He made it to there (onto the over hang) and then when he had to let go he was saying he was really scared he was saying "I can't let go". I didn't realize that he couldn't come down just against the wall because*

*the belayer was actually like I don't know ten feet further back and the rope that Derek was on was like over that overhang and then to the bar so as soon as Derek would let go he would go swinging so he was like, "Bruce do you have me? Do you have me?" Marianne and I were holding Bruce down and Derek said "Okay here I go". He was so afraid that and he let go and he went swinging right to the rope and grabbed on, he was screaming #@\*\$&# and he came down, in midair...when he came down he thanked Bruce and said, "I was so scared" (Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

***Rebecca's summary of the day: The students are so insightful of the kinds of support they each need. They are respectful of each other and they recognize that they each have strengths***

*...words of encouragement, strategizing for the person...on the wall, someone on the ground was always telling them where or what hold they could do, um or telling it's okay to take a break or ...*

*...the way that they talked depending on who was on the wall, I realized how much they really are aware of (one another) and how insightful they are. Like they only clap for Albert and for Donald even though lots of people made it to the top but they clapped for Albert when he got to the top and for Donald when he got to the top because they knew it was such an accomplishment for them. ...they were so encouraging for Nancy. You know she made it maybe half way up and like she tried it three or four times and they were so encouraging...they were so supportive and so thankful of Marianne that she was belaying because you know I guess that they were aware that she was afraid to rock climb. ...it was just amazing!...the biggest thing that I have noticed from September until now is like the cohesiveness and ...the respect like they've gained a respect for each other. Like Stephen and Derek have a respect for Blair you know or for Bruce or for you know and that they kind of gained over the year. They see each other's qualities and they respect their quality and so there are things about Bruce that you know that the class will always go to Bruce for or will always even though he can be a pain and annoying you know most of the time and they'll be but that's what I find so amazing...(Taken from Field notes and Interview with Rebecca, March 1998).*

In this inquiry I examine different types of support such as: emotional (which includes affection, expressions of caring and concern, intimacy and disclosure),

informational/instrumental (includes procedural advice and material aid, as well as assistance and cognitive guidance in tasks), companionship (participating in activities together), and conflict (having disagreements with others). These vignettes highlight that many students with Lds in a safe environment can support one another, use their intuition to provide support to others, and access support when they need it. I focus on students with Lds who appear to access and use support well and those students with Lds who do not. I define support as anything that can be defined as help (such as, someone on your side, a beneficial resource). Some of the students in this inquiry defined social support in the following ways:

***Student definitions of social support***

*Karen: Someone who cares about you. Someone who's there for you. Someone you can tell your feelings to and will understand you. Like, it has to be a person that you can trust. Like, who won't go out and tell the whole world.*

*Albert: ah, it means somebody to be by your side when you need them the most.*

*Lindsay: Um, well, for me it means, like, someone you can rely on, someone you can trust. Someone you can, like, you can talk openly with. And that like, they're not gonna like think you're negative or they're not gonna think bad of you.*

*Patrick: Well, um, someone who um, you can turn to when you tell them what good happened to you or like who helps you if something bad happens to you.*

*Luke: Someone that you like, back you up in situations and stuff. Someone you can talk to and who won't blab it out to everyone else...*

Research in the area of students with Lds and their social worlds suggests that students with Lds have lower social status as compared to their peers without disabilities (e.g., Asher & Taylor, 1981; Gresham, 1982; La Greca & Stone, 1990; Sale & Carey,

1995; Siperstein, Bopp, & Bak, 1978), and are perceived negatively by their peers and their teachers (e.g., Cardell & Parmar, 1988; Siperstein & Goding, 1985). In fact, studies have demonstrated that students with Lds are more likely to be rejected and neglected and have more social problems than their peers without disabilities (e.g., Swanson & Malone, 1992; Wiener, 1987; Wiener, Harris, & Shirer, 1990). In addition, further quantitative research suggests that students with Lds who have been rejected have a heightened rate of poor social perception (e.g., Bruck & Herbert, 1982), attention deficits and hyperactivity (e.g., Flicek, 1992) and poorly developed conversational skills (Wiener & Harris, 1993, in Heath & Wiener, 1996).

Research has generally suggested that students with Lds have lower self-perceptions of their academic competence than their peers without Lds (e.g., Cooley & Ayres, 1988; Pickar & Tori, 1986). They see themselves as less skilled in the social context of academic learning (Scarpati, Malloy, & Fleming, 1996). Research conducted in the area of self-perception amongst students with Lds in non-academic domains, reveals contradictory findings. Some researchers have found no differences in self-perception of social acceptance between students with and without Lds (e.g., Kistner, J., Haskett, M., White, K., & Robbins, F., 1987). Other researchers have found that students with Lds have lower self-perceptions of social acceptance (e.g., La Greca & Stone, 1990). Yet, other researchers have found that students with Lds have higher self-perceptions than their peers without disabilities (Winne, Woodlands, & Wong, 1982).

Although this quantitative research has provided valuable information about students with Lds, the perspective of the students themselves has been virtually neglected. This inquiry provides the existing research with a new voice, that of the adolescents with Lds. Within this inquiry, I hope that the reader will begin to understand the fears and motivations of the students. Some of the adolescents in this study appear to access and use support well. There are others who do not. The existing research tells us

that students with Lds are more withdrawn and more rejected, but it does not tell us why. The existing research tells us that students with Lds rely on their social networks differently but it does not tell us in any depth how they use their social networks. Social networks can be defined as the number and kinds of social relations individuals have and will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter. This inquiry will attempt to understand who, when, and how the adolescents rely on for social support. As Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997) believe, and I concur, it is how students with Lds envision their social worlds that needs to be investigated. In understanding how students with Lds envision their social worlds, their feelings of social neglect and rejection, professionals, parents, and teachers can better understand their social needs and help them achieve. I may discover that although students with Lds may be more socially neglected or rejected by their same-age peers, there may be other factors that relate to their relationships with family, neighbors, teachers, peers, and other significant adults that have not yet been understood. In this inquiry, I use a qualitative methodology to understand how the students themselves perceive whom they can rely on for social support and how they rely on people in their social networks. From the data collected, I have begun to understand more fully the students' perceptions of themselves and those around them with regard to social support.

Much of the existing research has not differentiated between specific Lds and cognitive delays and have used a mainly elementary school population (e.g., Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). Many researchers use terms such as mild disabilities, cognitive delays, disabled, learning problems, learning disorder, and Lds interchangeably, when in fact these terms can all refer to different types of profiles of students who have learning difficulties. Also, many researchers do not define the terms that they use. Hence, it is difficult to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the students they have chosen to participate in their studies and what labels (Ld or otherwise) might be more appropriate.



In describing the research that has been conducted, I use the terms that the researchers themselves have used in their studies.

In my inquiry, I use guidelines set out by the Ministère de L'éducation du Québec (MEQ) in order to identify my population of students with Lds (See Appendix A). In addition, the student populations being considered here have all been identified as having serious learning difficulties, as defined by the MEQ, and all attend a school for students with Lds. Each student who participated in my inquiry had a full psycho-educational assessment within the last four years and been coded as 02. The code means that the student has been deemed as having serious learning difficulties and is functioning two years or more behind in either the language of instruction or mathematics (See Appendix A for details). The 36 students who participated in this inquiry attend a school for students with Lds. They each have been assessed within the last four years and coded 02 according to MEQ guidelines.

In addition to this, six of these students were selected to participate in in-depth case studies. Each of these met additional criteria. Each had normal range or above intelligence as measured by the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children -Third edition (WISC-III) in conjunction with measured achievement below the 8th percentile (i.e. 1.5 standard deviations below the mean) on one or more measures of achievement in reading, spelling, and/or mathematics. Within the methods section, Chapter two, I explain the selection process I used for each student participating in my inquiry. I focus on adolescents with Lds and how they use the social support available to them, as most of the limited existing research looks at these issues within a positivistic paradigm and engages a quantitative research design. I use the tools of qualitative interpretive inquiry: interviews, participant observation, and document analysis in order to better understand how, when, and why students with Lds use the individuals in their social networks for social support.

Until to now, studies which have used a *qualitative* framework to examine social support and students with Lds are limited. Only a few *quantitative* studies have examined the social networks and social support used by students who have Lds. Of the quantitative studies that have been conducted, they are revealing because they demonstrate the complexity of the students' social world beyond that of their designated social status as learning disabled. Although some may suggest that the term Ld is a label and not a social status, I believe that in the context of schools and peers, "Ld" is a social status. Findings from these studies suggest that children with Lds do not differ from children without Lds in the number of people in their networks and the make-up of their networks (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). However, these studies do indicate that students with Lds and other cognitive difficulties have less contact with their peers outside of educational activities and make different use of their social networks for support and problem solving (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988; Morrison, Laughlin, Smith, Ollansky, & Moore, 1992; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1998; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). Differences in students' abilities to use people in their social networks for support and problem solving has led to training programs in social skills which have been implemented as a way to diminish these differences and to help foster better peer relations.

The use of training programs in social skills for students who have Lds has become increasingly important over the last two decades. The reasons for this appears to be two-fold. First, as noted above, research using a variety of methodologies including sociometrics has demonstrated that students with Lds (as well as other disabilities) tend to have lower acceptance and higher rejection by their classmates who do not have disabilities (Asher & Taylor, 1981; Gresham, 1982; La Greca & Stone, 1990; Sale & Carey, 1995; Siperstein, Bopp, & Bak, 1978). Second, studies have shown that peer rejection during childhood is associated with maladjustment in adolescence and

adulthood (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). To support students with Lds, programs have been developed that claim to improve their social behavior and hence their social relations. These programs are based on a social skills deficit framework in which children are instructed in the specific skills they are thought to be lacking. In examining the social development research (Cairns, 1979), it becomes clear to me that social growth involves a combination of biological, psychological, and sociological factors. The social skills deficit framework looks at social behaviors and cognition. It seems to blatantly ignore developmental factors, and does not consider the perceptions and opinions of the students themselves.

Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) point out that the social skills deficit framework does not take into account the contribution of social networks 'to long-term adjustment'. In addition, both the social development research and the social skills deficit framework have not taken into account cultural variables, such as beliefs or values. I would further suggest that it is not only important to recognize who is in the social network, as Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) suggest, but also to understand how and why the students use their social networks for support. For example, within the context of classrooms, the role of the adults in classrooms has not been taken into account in social skills programs (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Buysse & Bailey, 1993). Perhaps, this is due to these contextual limits in the social skills frameworks that many studies have found limited long-term success and generalizability amongst social skills training programs (e.g., Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996; La Greca, 1993; Zaragoza, Vaughn, & McIntosh, 1991).

Although these studies indicate that students with Lds and other disabilities are often less accepted and more rejected by their peers who are not disabled, this does not necessarily mean that they do not have friends or people with whom they connect and spend time. Many studies have shown that although students with Lds are less accepted

and have poor social skills, they do have friends and close associations with some of their classmates (e.g., Juvonen & Bear, 1992; Perlmuter, Crocker, Cordray, & Garstecki, 1983). What this acceptance means from the students' perspectives, however, is not considered or documented.

My literature search uncovered several studies in the area of social support, social networks, and social skills training using participants with a variety of learning difficulties. However, a consistent problem I found with this literature is that many studies have not isolated particular populations of children with disabilities, and those who have identified an Ld population also use participants with other disabilities in the same group such as "mild disabilities" or "cognitive delays." To me, these labels mean something quite different than a child with a Ld. For example, Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997) discuss students with learning problems. In their study they have included students with Lds and cognitive delays. In addition, they have cited research which used students who were intellectually handicapped (Taylor, Asher, & Williams, 1987; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1996; Zetlin & Murtaugh, 1988). Despite these sampling problems, this research suggests that students with Lds have the same number of people within their social networks, but they use those people differently. In my inquiry, I examine two groups of students with Lds: those who appear to access and use social support well and those who do not.

My inquiry contributes to the existing literature in three ways. It will provide professionals, parents, and friends with a better understanding of how adolescents with Lds envision their social world, thus enabling educators, parents and friends to provide better services/support for them. It will assist in the development of better programs to meet the needs of students with Lds. Finally, it will help to evaluate already existing programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of the students with Lds.

### Focus Of My Inquiry and Claim To Originality

I propose four reasons why it is necessary to examine how adolescents with Lds use their social networks for social support: (a) the social worlds of children have largely been investigated using an elementary age group, whereas in this study adolescents have been asked for their opinions; (b) no study to date has studied adolescents with Lds and who have no other disability; (c) no studies to date have examined the students' perceptions of themselves in the area of social support; and (d) the majority of studies which have investigated social networks and social support have used a more traditional quantitative methodology. My claim to originality is that I am the first to investigate adolescents with learning disabilities from their own perceptions with respect to social support, using a qualitative methodology.

The research questions guiding my inquiry are:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the social networks of students with Lds who appear to access and use social support well versus those who do not? Who are the individuals that make-up each students' social network. (e.g., Parents, siblings, friends, relatives, neighbors? Are there more people in the networks of one group than another? Are there more adults, more peers, in one group than another?)
2. Who do students turn to within their networks for each of the following types of support: emotional, informational, instrumental, academic support and companionship?
3. How do the students use each individual within their social network for support?
4. What is the nature of the social support provided by each individual, in each different type of support? What kind of support does each person provide, depending on the type of support?

### Relevant Background Literature To My Inquiry

Several important areas of concentration are covered in this literature review. First, I examine adolescent development. Within this section I discuss adolescence, adolescents with Lds, and social skills and Lds. Following this I examine social development. In this section the developmental synthesis perspective is discussed briefly. Comprehensive sections then follow in the areas of social networks and social support. Within each of these sections the current literature is reviewed and definitions are provided. Finally, there is a review of the literature in the area of social support and Lds.

#### Adolescent Development

##### Adolescents.

This section describes some of the general characteristics of adolescents and why social support is so vital to their healthy development and well being. With adolescence comes puberty and emotional struggles to cope with all the related changes, as described by Janet Lerner (1995), an educational psychologist. Adolescents must cope with physical changes, develop a new self-image, and learn to adjust to new psychological and biological drives. They become torn between the freedom and independence they think they want versus the security and dependence of the family. It is during this stage in life when adolescents begin looking for a sense of belonging from friends rather than family (Lerner, 1995). Many begin to look toward their peers for social and emotional support. When values of friends differ from those of parents, family confrontation and conflict may arise. Adolescence is also a time when individuals become very conscious of themselves, how they look and how they compare with the perceived norms of their social groups. This self-consciousness can lead to feelings of inferiority and withdrawal.

Researchers have claimed that these changes during adolescence may negatively affect learning (Lerner, 1995). Woolfolk (1995) believes that adolescents face many risks today, including pregnancy, eating disorders, drug abuse, AIDS, depression, and suicide.

Social support becomes increasingly important as adolescents face the challenges of school and home situations. For example, Hartup (1989) described how social competence emerges mainly from the experience of close relationships, and how it is necessary to have both vertical and horizontal relationships in order to have optimum growth. A vertical relationship is one in which a child enters a relationship with someone who has greater knowledge and social power than they do. A horizontal relationship is one in which each person in the relationship has the same amount of social power as the other. Hartup (1989) notes that these types of relationships unfold at different developmental stages and that the quality of these relationships affect the individual in enduring ways. These different types of relationships are important to consider in this inquiry as issues of power and control have long term effects on individuals.

#### Adolescents and Lds.

In addition to the general problems faced by adolescents, adolescents with Lds contend with additional difficulties and challenges. According to Lerner (1995) adolescents with Lds may display four additional characteristics. The first is poor self-concept. Poor self-concept and low self-esteem are the result of years of failure and frustration. Adolescents with Lds have little confidence in their ability to learn or achieve. Often emotional problems develop from their lack of success and frustration. A second characteristic is poor social competence. Some students with Lds will have difficulty making and keeping friends, and social perception problems can create further problems. Social perception can be defined as the ability to understand social situations, as well as sensitivity to the feelings of others. Rourke (1988, 1993) along with many

other researchers (e.g., Brumback, 1990; Johnson & Myklebust, 1967; Rourke, Del Dotto, Rourke & Casey, 1990) would describe these difficulties as part of a non-verbal learning disability (NVLD).

A third characteristic often seen among students with Lds is that of an attention deficit, low attention span and concentration. Pennington, Groisser, and Welsch (1993) were able to demonstrate in their reading research that in addition to a distinct disability in attention and concentration (ADHD), attention deficits and hyperactivity can be secondary symptomology to Lds. Given the long periods of concentration needed for studying and listening in class, these deficits can seriously hinder progress in school.

Another characteristic is that students with Lds tend to become passive learners and appear to lack motivation. They frequently have developed an attitude of "learned helplessness." This means that they have an expectation, based on previous experiences with lack of control, that they perceive their efforts will lead to failure (Woolfolk, 1995). Due to years of failure, they doubt their own intellectual abilities and believe that no matter how hard they try they will still fail. These feelings lead to low levels of persistence. Some students tend to give up quickly when something appears to be difficult. It is this perceived lack of academic competence which is associated with an external locus of control (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Even when the same adolescents experience success, they do not think they were responsible for their success. Frequently, they make comments including the following: "The teacher made the test easy", "I was just lucky." They attribute their success to some outside force not to their own efforts or abilities. They see themselves as agentless. Hence, even success does not bring much satisfaction, or raise their confidence level. Failure is often associated with a lack of ability and a lack of effort (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Therefore, "motivating" these students to exert the effort needed to learn is very difficult.



In summary, students with Lds tend to experience an external locus of control. They feel that in many situations, particularly school related issues, they have few choices and everything is happening by chance or luck. When individuals feel this way, they accept that what is happening to them and how they act is outside of their control; they perceive they have no choice, or something else is in control (L.A.B. Educational Press). A sixth characteristic, Heath (1992; 1993) mentions is the heightened risk of depressive symptomology amongst children and adolescents with Lds.

Researchers suggest that these additional risk factors faced by adolescents with Lds lead to more social and emotional problems (e.g., Forness & Kavale, 1991). According to Kavale and Forness (1996), who used a quantitative meta-analysis to investigate the nature of social skills deficits among students with Lds, about 75% of students (of all ages) with Lds exhibit social skills deficits that distinguish them from their peers. Their findings suggest that Lds and deficits in social skills appear to be interlinked. However, they concede that there are many unanswered questions about their relationships. Their results indicated that perceived differences in social competence were consistent across evaluators (teachers, peers, and students with Lds themselves) as well as across most major dimensions of social competence. Teachers consistently reported their impressions that students with Lds were more poorly adjusted than those students without Lds. This maladjustment may be in part due to some teachers views of students with Lds as being more active and more distractible than those students without Lds. Students with Lds were evaluated by peers as being less accepted and more rejected. This maladjustment in turn seems to relate to students with Lds being less popular, less frequently selected as friends and viewed as less cooperative. The final group of evaluators were the students with Lds themselves. They perceived themselves as having a lack of academic competence. They felt that because they lacked competence in nonverbal communication and social problem solving, their social functioning was negatively affected. Factors

which appear to contribute to this lack of competence were poor self-concept and lack of self-esteem, which in turn created feelings of inferiority.

A quantitative methodology was used in each of the 152 research studies included in Kavale and Forness (1996) meta-analysis. A quantitative approach to research looks past words, actions, and records, and examines their mathematical significance and quantifies the statements and observations. The problem is not necessarily the counting or lack of counting of the occurrences of statements, behaviors, or documents. The problem is that the meanings given to words, behaviors, or documents are explained through statistics or quantitative analysis. In contrast, the patterns of meanings which emerge from qualitative data are presented in the participants' own words (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996). The proposed study will undertake to understand what Kavale and Forness (1996) reported as students with Lds having a lack of competence in nonverbal communication and social problem solving, which negatively affects social competence. I adopt a phenomenological perspective that aims to capture the students' perceptions of their lived experiences.

#### Social competence and Lds.

Each of us needs and uses social skills to succeed in our daily activities. *Social skills* are difficult to define as they subsume a variety of behaviors and values. However, Lerner (1993) defines social skills as the ability to organize one's thinking and behavior into an integrated course of action, which is directed toward culturally acceptable social and interpersonal goals. Social skills include what a person thinks and how a person behaves in a social environment (Vaughn, 1991).

The definition of learning disability has been debated since the term was first used by Samuel Kirk in 1963 (Hammill, 1993). The debate has changed over the years and more recently the controversy is focused on the fact that some definitions of Ld have included

a social skills deficit as a primary characteristic of a Ld (the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1988; the revised National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1988, in Hammill, 1990; and the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 1981). A social skills deficit can affect every aspect of a students' life, as it would mean a lack of sensitivity to people and poor perception of social situations.

As I mentioned in the introduction, difficulties in the area of social skills result in peer rejection and contribute to later maladjustment in adolescence and adulthood. There is much research suggesting the link between problematic behavior and peer rejection. Studies using a sociometric status methodology have demonstrated that rejected students tend to be more disruptive, aggressive, withdrawn, and demonstrate lower levels of positive social behaviors, such as being friendly and cooperative (see Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996 for a review). A second body of growing literature has found that there is a relationship between peer rejection during childhood and later maladjustment (Kupersmidt, Coie, & Dodge, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1987).

The use of sociometric studies (often used to study social skills) does not take into account the developmental and cultural contributions of complex contextual factors that may help us to understand how, when, and why students use people in their social networks for social support. Without understanding the contributions of others, we assume that behaviors or outcomes are solely due to the individual. We must take into consideration the role of nested context (Maguire, 1994), which traditional sociometric status methodology does not. This is not to say that sociometric status research is not valuable. In fact, this is quite the opposite. It highlights the general characteristics that result in being unliked by peers, and thus identifies problematic social features which limit opportunities and types of social relations (Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996). However, limited opportunity is only part of the problem in particular contexts of situations. It is necessary to examine how students with Lds are embedded within their

social networks. In understanding how students with Lds envision their social worlds, we can begin to understand how people in their social networks promote routine social connections with peers who support or compliment their problematic social behaviors. I would further suggest that we indeed need to know who is in the social networks of students with Lds and how each contributes and maintains social behavior. Also, until we understand how, when, and why students with Lds use the people in their social networks for social support, we will only have partial information about adolescents and their social worlds.

Researchers have made it clear that social development is crucial to an individual's well-being, and that with limited or misused social support, adolescents have a higher risk of a limited circle of friends, social withdrawal, depression, and suicide (e.g., Cardell & Parmar, 1988; Rourke, 1988; Rourke, Young, & Leenaars, 1989; Sale & Carey, 1995).

### Social Development

#### Developmental synthesis perspective.

Cairns (1979) outlines a developmental synthesis perspective of social development and stresses the integral nature of individual social-academic functioning throughout life. Cairns and Cairns (1994, cited in Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996) explain how, from this perspective, social growth involves bi-directional contributions of biological, psychological, and sociological factors. Within the context of this study, the developmental synthesis perspective provides us with a framework in which to understand the factors that play a role in changes in behavior development. From this perspective, it is assumed that each individual brings with them their own beliefs, attributes, and behaviors to social situations, or settings that reflect their individual and environmental experiences. In terms of peer relationships, children try to create new

beliefs, behaviors, and values, and recreate old ones. A similar process occurs in relation to social networks, in that social networks seem to promote the creation of new and old behavior and personality attributes. Generally, people choose, or are chosen to become members of social networks that are more similar to ones they have previously experienced. This similarity in social networks, contributes to continued beliefs, values, and behaviors and demonstrates understandings as well as mutuality of feelings. As social networks change, so do the relationships within the network, and enduring novel characteristics or attributes within the individual may develop (Cairns, Leung, Buchanan, & Cairns, 1995, in Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 1996).

### Social Networks

The construct of a "social network" was first used by anthropologists and sociologists as a metaphor for studying the number and kinds of social contacts individuals had (Bott, 1971; Mitchell, 1969). Milroy (1980) contends that the concept of *network* was introduced to sociolinguistic theory in order to explain a variety of individual behaviors which could not be examined or explained in the realm of corporate group membership. Anthropologists used social network analysis to provide qualitative descriptions of concrete living systems in complex societies. Bott (1971), for example, used open-ended interviews in order to examine the relationship between social organization and social class. In addition, he looked at the relationship between personal social networks and individual role functioning in the family. Early work in the area of social networks was primarily descriptive and examined individual relations. Gradually, research began to demonstrate that enhanced social networks were valuable to individuals (Pilisuk & Froland, 1979; Walker, Macbride, & Vachon, 1977) and conversely, the absence of social support could be harmful (Caplan, 1974).

According to applied linguist Gunnarsson (1997) the concept of social network tries to conceptualize the human entity as a social being, one that influences others and can itself be influenced. A network also includes many types of relationships; it is the nature of these relationships that are fundamental to the concept of *network*. Many criteria have been used to describe different types of networks.

Boissevian's (1987) concept of network fits well with the current studies concept of social network as social support systems. He describes eight major components of social networks. The first and second components are that of the size of the network as well as the frequency and duration of the interaction — each contributes to the variation of the network. The third is that of the density of the network. That is the extent to which the individuals within a network are in touch with each other, independent of the person whose network it is. Multiplexity is the next determining factor. Boissevian (1987) differentiates between *uniplex* relations; for example, a teacher and student who have no other connection except as "teacher" and "student". A *multiplex* relation, for example involves a teacher and student who are also neighbors and one tutors the other.

A fifth criterion involved in a network according to Boissevian (1987) is that of clustering. The extent to which members of a network form smaller inner groups that link more closely than others in the network. The sixth criterion, "directional flow", refers to the exchanges between people, exchanges which are more or less characterized as equal. A seventh criterion is that of centrality, meaning that the person at the center of the communication network may be able to influence or manipulate information. Finally, the transactional content is another criterion. This refers to the different types of information that go back and forth between people who are linked to each other.

If networks are looked at from the perspective of the individual, we can distinguish different types (Gunnarsson, 1997). For example Gunnarsson (1997) describes a first-order network zone. These are people with whom the individual has direct contact. A

second-order network zone includes people whom the individual gets to know through his or her direct contacts, or networks in which the individuals are emotionally or instrumentally significant to one another. Most people are members of many networks. For the purpose of this study, first-order network zones will be examined to understand not only the composition of the network, but also how a student with Lds (those who use support well and those who do not) use the individuals within their networks for social support and why they do this.

How we conceptualize children and their socializations, especially those with Lds, influences how we study them and what we say about them. More often than not, mainstream researchers treat students as subjects rather than participants who are or can be engaged in talking about their own perspectives. For example, the social skills deficit framework has been developed largely through the use of sociometric status research. These research procedures can obfuscate important information about social processes that contribute to individuals' social development (Bolger, Caspi, Downey, & Moorehouse, 1988; Farmer, 1994). Sociometric procedures do not tap into the relationships among group members nor peer group structure, nor their evaluative orientations (Maguire, 1999). Sociometric methodology is individually oriented and has been used simply to identify status correlates of specific behaviors and skills (McConnell & Odom, 1986). The term "peer rejection" evolved through the use of sociometric procedures. It was derived from peer nomination, or peer rating procedures that measure how well students are liked by their classmates in general. Both of the above statements, would seem to be considering students as if they were subjects rather than actively involved participants in their own lives who could contribute valuable information about their own social worlds and sense of social and personal agency.

Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) conceptualized classroom social networks as "social boundaries that emerge as the students form, maintain, and modify peer groups"

(p. 241). Within the classroom, peer associations can be identified in many ways. First, "best friend" nominations can be used to identify a students' associates (e.g., Wiener & Sunohara, in press; Hallinan & Smith, 1989; Kandel, 1978). With the use of "best friend" nominations, one must analyze the results in order to identify reciprocal friendship dyads or groups. One must also identify the characteristics of the individuals who make up the dyads or groups. A second method to identify peer associations is to use observational techniques to gather data on the characteristics of the individual and the social groups in which he or she is embedded. Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) suggest that this can be done using ethnographic methodology and refers the reader to researchers such as Adler, Kless, and Adler (1992) and Eder (1985). Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) suggests direct observations of peer engagements or social contacts can be quantified (e.g., Ladd, 1983; LaFreniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984). Although Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) mention an ethnographic methodology as helpful in understanding classroom networks, these researchers do not explain what they mean when they use this term. There are many theoretical orientations and schools of thought within ethnographic research (Denizen, 1996). A third possibility of identifying peer associations is through the use of self, peer, and teacher reports. This technique, known as social cognitive mapping (SCM), identifies peer clusters by having each student respond to probes, such as "Are there any students in your class who hang around together a lot? Who are they?" etc.. Once peer clusters have been identified, the level of similarity of peer associations can be determined, using what researchers call interclass correctional analyses. The SCM technique has the potential of negating the experiences of the individual students. That is, by creating clusters one is examining a unit or group rather than the individual. Thus, an individual's perspective is lost in the analysis.

According to Farmer, Pearl, and Van Acker (1996) the notion that individuals generally associate with others who have similar characteristics, is strongly linked to



classroom social networks. They suggest that it is linked in terms of the following variables, propinquity (similar proximal boundaries), gender, race, aggressive behavior, problem behavior, popularity, and academic characteristics. Their analysis suggests that there are three factors which influence a student's social growth and are also related to classroom social networks: (a) low social acceptance and social isolation; (b) peer associations; and (c) social constraints. These factors can have significant implications for the social development of students with disabilities. However, these researchers do not take into account cultural factors nor socio-cultural issues like class, language or ethnicity.

For the purpose of my inquiry, a social network consists of all the people in an adolescent's life who play an important role for them, from their perspective. I refer to this type of network throughout this thesis as a first-order network zone.

### Social Support

The study of social support has a long history in many disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, epidemiology, medicine and child development. Robinson and Garber (1985) have made an enormous contribution in the field of social support by reviewing and synthesizing existing research in many of the above fields. Their book chapter on this topic was used as a resource for examining the relevant literature on social support.

### Introduction

Durkheim was among the first in 1897 to make a connection between the lack of social relationships and the possible link to an increased probability of suicide.

Epidemiologists formed a hypothesis called social disorganization. This idea was that the

structure and function of an individual's social networks could be used to explain differences in diseases and psychopathology (Murphy, 1977). Cassel (1976) suggested that the best way to prevent disease was strengthening an individual's social support systems rather than trying to decrease their exposure to stress.

The construct of social support is multidisciplinary. Family therapists and psychiatrists have stressed the importance of social environments, in the healthy adjustment of individuals. These social environments include immediate and extended family, the workplace, and community, in the etiology and course of psychiatric difficulties (e.g., Speck & Rueveni, 1969). Community psychologists have documented the importance of health care professionals to the well-being of people who are socially isolated and economically disadvantaged. In the field of developmental psychology, the emphasis has been on the connection between attachment theory and social support and the importance of secure interpersonal relationships (e.g., Bowlby, 1969, 1980). Despite the fact that many disciplines have studied the concept of social support, there is no coherent theory of social support. There is some consensus in the literature regarding the definition of social support and how one measures it but not how one understands it.

Although there is no one single operational definition of the construct of social support, much work has been done in the area. The vast majority of the research that has been conducted, however, is quantitative in nature. Much of the research was designed to predict overall well-being or functioning, and typically used a combination of psychiatric symptoms inventories, job or school performance indexes, global functioning within the social environment, or subjective ratings of emotional or physical distress. Based on this research (e.g., Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 1987), it would appear that there are three important levels of analysis to consider when defining social support: (a) the dimensions or nature of the support measured, (b) the sources or providers of support, and (c) the types or functions of support.

### Dimensions or nature of support.

Dimensions of support is concerned with how support is measured. Barrera (1986) reviewed the literature concerning social support and its relation to life stress in adults. He proposes three dimensions: social embeddedness, perceived support, and enacted support. Social embeddedness refers to the connections individuals have to significant others in the environment, particularly the size of an individual's network. The number of people or organizations a person belongs to is relevant to that person's overall well-being. Perceived support is the subjective estimation of support available, satisfaction with relationships, and perceived closeness to individuals in the person's network. Finally, enacted support is how much help an individual actually receives from his or her network. Wolchik, Sandler, and Braver (1987) have used these three dimensions in order to conceptualize children's social support and its effect on their well-being. It is interesting to note that past research has found these three dimensions only mildly related to one another and differentially associated with stress (Barrera, 1986; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Sarason, Shearin, Pierce, and Sarason (1987) examined the relationship between the different dimensions of support and various personality measures among college students. Their findings suggest that measures of received support and the size of an individual's network were not strongly related to measures of perceived support. This finding suggests that perceiving a supportive social network and positive relationships with significant others, does not ensure that the individual will use them when they actually need help. In addition, Sarason et al. (1987) found that perceived support was more highly correlated with well-being than received support, or the size of an individual's social network. These findings have significant relevance for my inquiry. In particular, I will add to the findings of Sarason et al. (1987) by trying to answer the

question of why individuals do not use their social networks when they need help. Barrera (1986) suggests that when a person experiences a relatively high number of stressful events, the level of stress increases due to these events, and the individual will then seek out, or be provided with, more support by members of their social network. According to Barrera (1986) perceiving the availability to support, whether or not the individual actually uses it, appears to be related to lower levels of distress. Although this is an interesting finding, I am not clear on what constitutes a lower level of distress. I interpret this to mean that those individuals who are coping with some distress may or may not use support, but take comfort from perceiving it as available. In other words, those who chose not to access support, perhaps just knowing where helpful information can be obtained if needed, may decrease the amount of anxiety experienced, and thus allow them to deal directly and more competently with the distressing situation. Also according to Barrera (1986), preliminary findings suggest that measures of social embeddedness may be useful in predicting psychological distress independent of life stress. Perhaps, these results can be interpreted in this way — those who are more distressed seek out more aid than those who are less distressed. Or, could it be that the support received may or may not be effective in relieving distress, and therefore the support actually exacerbates the distress?

#### Providers of support.

Different sources or providers of support have different effects on an individual's well-being (Wolchik, Beals, & Sandler, 1989). Various categories exist in order to classify sources of support ranging from global ratings, (e.g., such as kin and non-kin) to more specific terms, which I use in this inquiry (e.g., such as parents, peers, teachers, friends, siblings, and extended family). These various types of providers have a different effect on adjustment and well-being (Harter, 1990; Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard,

1989). Cauce, Felner, and Primavera (1982) conducted a study using inner-city high school students, and examined grades and school attendance as a way to explore perceived helpfulness. They discovered a link between perceived helpfulness of family members, teachers, and counselors and academic adjustment. On the other hand, high levels of support from friends and other adults was connected with poorer grades and higher rates of absenteeism. Perhaps, students with poor grades and poor attendance use more support from these network members because of higher levels of distress. Studies such as this one suggest the importance of how different providers of support may affect a student's adjustment and may differ depending on age. Research conducted by Lerner (1995) reports that during adolescence, peers play a crucial role in each other's development.

#### Types/Functions of support.

Researchers have used different categories and terminology to define support. The following categories, used in this inquiry, are frequently noted in existing research (e.g., Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989). *Emotional* support includes affection such as hugs, expressions of caring and concern, as well as intimacy and disclosure for example, of the degree of trust and closeness. *Instrumental* support and *informational* support have been combined and include procedural advice and material aid, as well as assistance and cognitive guidance in tasks. *Companionship* includes participating in activities together, such as watching movies, playing games, or "hanging out". Lastly, a category which I use in this project, and which is not often used by other researchers, is that of *conflict*. Conflict includes having disagreements with others such as having an argument with a friend or parent. I am interested in understanding how adolescents cope in conflictual situations.

### Connecting providers and types of support.

Bogat, Caldwell, Rogosch, and Kriegler (1985) introduced the concepts of support "generalists" (i.e., a central member of an individual's network who provides many types of support) and support "specialists" (i.e., a provider of specific and limited support). Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) used these concepts first coined by Bogat, Caldwell, Rogosch, and Kriegler (1985) in a research project that examined the support profiles of five to twelve-year olds. They found that parents of these children serve as support generalists, and friends, teachers, and siblings appear to be support specialists. Researchers have tried to understand which is more useful, providers of support, or the type of support in explaining individual and developmental differences in connection with support and adjustment (e.g., Cauce, Reid, Landsman, & Gonzales, 1990; Wolchik, Beals, & Sandler, 1989). Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) have reported that examining who provides support is more sensitive than the type of support provided when looking at first graders. In a study using eight to sixteen year olds following a stressful event in their lives (e.g., death, divorce, etc.), Wolchik, Beals, & Sandler (1989) analysis indicted that one needed to assess both who provided the support and the type of support offered. In addition, they noted that the distinction between generalist and specialist support providers has a meaningful distinction.

### Development and social support.

Researchers have suggested that a relationship exists between development, social support, and attitudes toward seeking help (Vaux, Burda, & Stewart, 1986). For example, young children are often encouraged to obtain instrumental and emotional support. This accessing of support is deemed as acceptable by society. However, by adolescence the same degree of assistance may be viewed as inappropriate and may affect the adolescent's self-esteem and cause some embarrassment.

Developmental differences appear to exist between children and adolescents. By about the age of six, there seems to be an increase in the amount of time spent with peers that continues into adolescence (e.g., Larson & Richards, 1991). In addition, during the transition from late adolescence to adulthood there is often a change in the amount of time spent with various network members.

Attachment, social support, and perceived support.

Attachment theorists such as Ainsworth and his colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) and Bowlby (1969) provided qualitative ratings information about mother-infant interactions (secure and insecure attachment) that predicted later ratings of the same relationship, social behavior and other aspects of social development. This work in the area of attachment appears to be related to what I am calling "perceived support."

Furman (1989) and Furman and Buhrmester (1985) explored how children's perceptions of relationships with those in their social networks change with development. Fourth, seventh, tenth graders and college students completed Network of Relationship Inventories (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Findings suggest that adolescents tend to have different kinds of relationships and more specialized relationships than children of elementary school age. Adolescents tend to have specific people they rely on for specific kinds of support, whereas children of elementary school age tend to use the same person for many different types of support. Furman (1989) reported that adolescents perceived their parents to be less supportive than did elementary-aged children. The seventh grade students reported a higher parental conflict and punishment than the fourth grade students. In addition, the grade seven and grade ten participants identified having less power during interactions with their parents than grade four students. In other words, Furman's (1989) findings suggest that adolescents perceive greater intimacy and support

from peers. These findings are consistent with other research (e.g., Berndt & Hoyle, 1985). Although much of the research indicates intimacy with parents becomes secondary during adolescence (Buhrmester & Furman, 1984, cited in Robinson & Garber, 1995), the level of closeness with and support from, parents remains high according to Robinson (1996) and Ryan and Lynch (1989). During adolescence, it seems that perceiving peers as supportive is increasingly important. It also appears that perceiving parents as supportive continues to be vital.

#### Enacted/received support

Frequently, research is conducted to examine developmental differences in enacted support among school-aged children. There is evidence which suggests that children seek more support from peers as they get older. However, support sought from parents and other adults appeared to remain consistent through early childhood and adolescence (Robinson, 1996; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). The difference appears to be in the type of support sought. Young children focus on instrumental support (e.g., "make it all better"), whereas older children and adolescents tend to seek support for more sophisticated forms of emotional support, approval, instrumental/informational support (e.g., Kliewer, Lepore, Broquet, & Zuba, 1990). Newman (1990) and Newman and Goldin (1990) conducted a study to explore the differences among third, fifth, and seventh graders to understand the reasons why they seek support in math class. Third and fifth graders reported seeking support for problems that were too challenging, for dependence on the teacher, and for the benefits of seeking help. Seventh graders stated that they sought help depending on how they weighed the costs and benefits. They found that during adolescence there is a fear of embarrassment and awareness of peer acceptance and need for conformity. This may be the reason why the seventh graders exhibited more inhibition to seek support when greater costs were perceived.



Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) reported developmental changes in children between the ages of five and twelve — whom they rely upon for support, and what type of support is sought. All types of support from mothers was consistently high for each age. Fathers were seen as sources of support as the children got older. Older children in the study reported siblings as a source of support more often than the elementary students. Teachers were considered providers of informational support as ages of the children increased. However, they were named as companions only among the younger children. Friends were named as sources of informational/instrumental sources of support consistently across all ages. The older children considered friends as sources of companionship and emotional support more often than the younger participants.

Sullivan's (1953) concept of social needs.

Buhrmester and Furman (1986) and Furman (1989) both discuss Sullivan's (1953) perspective of social needs. Social needs refers to the preferred or central social activity. In other words, social needs are emotional tensions that encourage social interactions. Throughout a child's education, the need for companionship with other children becomes increasingly important. Added to this is a child's need for acceptance by peers, whereas during adolescence the need becomes more complex and is called "chumship" (or intimate exchange). Sullivan (1953) suggests that chumship encourages and promotes social competence. He also suggested that chumship forms the basis for later adult friendships, romantic, marital, and parenting relationships. During early adolescence, opposite sex peers become increasingly important to the individual. When one is a part of a social network, the social needs aid in the developing sense of self. During adolescence, support from, and connectedness to, others must be balanced with the desire for autonomy (Bryant, 1989).

Perspective-taking, empathy, social skills and social support.

Perspective-taking is very important in relation to perceived support. Perceiving support requires an individual to have the ability to perform cognitive abstractions from experiences with others. As children grow up they are able to create more sophisticated perceptions of how much the people in their lives are available when they need support. During adolescence, peer groups appear to be a most important source of support and contribute to self esteem.

Selman (1980) suggests that there are five levels of perspective-taking that develop over time. Children between the ages of three and six are considered to hold egocentric viewpoints. They tend to have difficulty in realizing that others may view a situation differently than they do themselves. By ages five to nine, children are able to display social-informational role taking which is a higher level of reasoning. At this point, they are able to understand that they and others may share or have differing perspectives of the same social situation. Children between seven and 12 years old are able to adopt a self-reflecting role taking once they can reflect upon their own thoughts and feelings. Children between the ages of ten and 15 exhibit mutual role taking once they understand the recursiveness of reciprocal perspectives. By the age of 12 years and older, Selman (1980) suggests that they are able to understand the thoughts and feelings of others without experiencing them themselves.

Feelings of empathy also differ as children grow older. Between the ages of one and two, children are able to share the feelings of discomfort in others who are distressed (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). For example, a child experiencing empathy might bring their mother over to a crying friend in an effort to comfort the crying friend. At the age of six, a child may be able to understand what might be helpful when a peer is distressed. A nine-year old has generally developed an increased awareness of themselves and others which allows them to become concerned

with general conditions of people (e.g., the plight of the homeless, the effects of a natural disaster upon the residents, etc.) rather than simply to distressing situations. It would appear that the ability to empathize with others may be related to important changes in a child's social network, and the perceived quality of the relationships within those networks.

The ability to take perspective and empathize appears to be related to being more skilled in making and keeping friends and to interact within a social network in a positive manner. Certain social skills are believed to be associated with being socially competent and may affect the size and scope of a child's social network. Dodge (1985) discusses the importance of social information processing skills as predictors of social competence. These skills consist of identifying and interpreting social cues correctly, in a meaningful way, formulating possible behavioral responses, assessing the consequences of the different responses, and choosing an appropriate response. These skills have been associated with peer status (Ladd, 1985) for example, popularity, rejection, and social isolation. These same information processing skills may also be important in the ability to obtain social support from a child's social network. Perceiving social cues and interpreting them correctly could be important as to whether or not another person may be willing to provide support.

Therefore, being able to identify potential support and obtain it, depends on the ability to communicate and assess whether the support provided is useful or not. As social information processing skills develop, it may be possible to form and maintain a variety of supportive relationships more easily, thus increasing one's social network. It is further suggested that with these social information processing skills, it may be possible to obtain useful support in times of need (enacted support) and this may affect perceived support. When an individual has achieved the ability to cooperate, compromise, and express competitiveness in a socially appropriate way, these skills will be important in

building a supportive social network. Researchers have found a relatively strong connection between social skills in adulthood and the size and quality of support networks (Cohen, Sherrod, & Clark, 1986; Sarason, Sarason, Hacker, & Basham, 1985). Tyler and Varma (1988) and Newman (1990) suggest that children who are more socially competent are also more likely to be able to seek support when needed. Robinson and Garber (1995) believe that more research is needed before specifically linking social and cognitive abilities to the perceptions and enactment of social support.

### Social Support and Lds

Developing a social network and using it for social support is complex and involves such things as social interactions and meta-cognitive skills. To examine social support, none of these factors should be looked at in isolation. These factors, and others, must be examined at the same time from the perspective of the students themselves, their parents, siblings, teachers, tutors, coaches, as well as all other members of their social network. They must be identified by the adolescent.

A study that most closely relates to this inquiry is that of Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997). In their study, they examined social networks, social support, friendships, and adjustment of 106 students from grades 4 through 6, from Massachusetts, USA. Amongst these students, 40 were receiving special education services for learning problems (Lds and cognitive delays), and 66 students were in general education. Their findings demonstrated that the social networks of children with and without learning problems did not differ in terms of size and composition. They did however find that elementary school age children with learning problems did in fact use their social networks differently for support than their peers who did not have learning problems. For example, the results showed that children with learning problems turned to their family less for problem solving support and turned to peers less for all types of support as

compared with children without disabilities. The findings further suggested that children with and without learning problems did not differ in terms of conflict or competition, such as negative features of friendships. These findings are similar to those of Hoyle and Serafica (1988) and Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998).

Hoyle and Serafica (1988) studied social relations of third grade boys with and without Lds. They used three sociometric measures — peer nomination, multipoint liking rating scale, and a social network questionnaire. Results suggested that children with Lds were less accepted than their peers who were without Lds. However, they were not more rejected than their peers without Lds. Their findings also demonstrated that the size and composition of social networks did not differ between students with and without Lds. This is consistent with other studies in the area of social networks and students with Lds. Three significant differences were also found in the functions and contexts of the students' social networks. They found that significantly fewer students with Lds saw their classmates outside of school, compared to their counterparts without Lds. A second difference was that students with Lds were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, such as clubs. Finally, they reported that students with Lds studied more often with members in their social networks compared to students without Lds. These researchers suggested that this latter finding indicated that the social network provided students with Lds with educational support, or that students with Lds find their social networks among those with whom they study, and or do homework. Further findings showed that teachers rated students with Lds as not necessarily more disruptive, but as displaying more personality problems than their peers without Lds. Significant differences were also found in the conception of friendship in students who had Lds. With respect to reciprocal friendships, students with Lds were significantly less often named as friends despite the fact that the students with Lds expressed a high degree of liking for a particular classmate. This adds weight to Bruinink's (1978) hypothesis that

students with Lds are less accurate than their peers without Lds in assessing their own social status. Although Heath (1995) discusses self-perceived versus actual academic competence in children with Lds who were depressed and nondepressed, her findings extend those which are presented above. Heath (1995) found that students with Lds, who are depressed, are more accurate in their self-perceptions of academic competence than the students with Lds who were not depressed.

Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) examined students with 'learning problems' in relation to stress, social support, and adjustment. A major problem with this study is that they used students with Lds and mild mental retardation in their group of students with learning problems. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, these two labels are not the same type of learning difficulty and should not be placed in one group and discussed as a whole. However, 40 students with learning problems and 396 general education students without learning problems participated in their study. They looked at stresses related to academic study, peers, problems with teachers, and overall feelings of stress. They also explored social support from family, other adults, and peers. Lastly, they examined adjustment. Their results indicated that students with learning problems experience more stress, less peer support, greater adult support, and poorer adjustment, than their peers without learning problems. Finally, they determined that adjustment was related to stress in middle school.

From the above four studies, results indicate that children with Lds, learning problems, and mild learning handicaps, (as the authors referred to their subjects), tend to have people they feel close to and who are important to them, even though they are frequently viewed negatively by peers and others. There were further supporting findings in terms of the students' perceptions of support and friendship. For example, children with learning problems look to "adults outside the home for support in the same way that other students do and they report similar levels of conflict, competition and prosocial

interactions in their friendships" (Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). An additional consistent finding of Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997) and Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998) was that children with learning problems, due to Lds and cognitive delays, perceive their families as less useful for problem solving support than children without learning problems. The interesting question that now needs to be examined is the following: why this is so? These researchers suggest that perhaps children's learning problems (Lds and cognitive delays, as they define it) can be a source of frustration for both the family and the students themselves. For example, perhaps, it is frustrating for the families to find appropriate ways to help the child with learning problems. Perhaps too, for the child with the disability, asking for help exposes their greatest area of weakness.

Another major difference between children with and without learning problems was their perception of peer support and friendship. Children with learning problems were less likely to see their peers as a source of support, especially as a source of emotional support. This finding was also similar to the findings of Morrison, Laughlin, Smith, Ollansky, and Moore (1992) and Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1998). When Wenz-Gross and Siperstein (1997) looked closely at the friendship findings in their study, they discovered that children with learning problems reported less intimacy, loyalty, self-esteem, and contact in their friendships, compared to children without learning problems. According to Pierce, Sarason, and Sarason (1992) social support depends on the ability to behave in a way that prompts support and view the behaviors of others as providing social support. Ladd (1989, in Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997) and McGuire and Weisz (1982) further suggest that developing supportive peer relationships depends on the child's level of social skill, empathy, perspective-taking, and self-disclosure because relationships are reciprocal by nature.

All of the researchers mentioned above used statistics to present and support their claims. They all administered several quantitative instruments to attain information regarding the students' social networks, social support, and quality of friendships, such as "My Family and Friends": Six to 12-year old children's perceptions of social support (Reid, Landesman, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989), friendship interviews (e.g., Berndt & Perry, 1986), peer nomination measures, multipoint liking rating scales and social network questionnaires. In using statistics, the dominant paradigm, and adopting a positivist position, they have chosen to examine social networks and social support as discrete factors rather than as complex interconnected parts of the whole person in particular contexts. None of the research presented in this section actually shows readers how students with Lds or other disabilities actually access or use the people in their social networks differently from their peers without disabilities for social support. The researchers merely say that they do, based on their statistical findings. My qualitative methodology, endeavors to understand how adolescents with Lds access and use the people in their social networks for social support, why they use the people they do, and how they use the people they do. My inquiry is one of the first qualitative studies that places emphasis on understanding secondary school adolescents with Lds, a population that is seldom asked for their opinions. I examine student's perspectives by looking closely at each person's words, actions, and records.

It would appear that the dominant research methodology in the area of learning disabilities, a field that is presumably about individual differences, obscures difference through an overall reliance on normative description; that is, we learn about the mythical "average" student with Lds, but learn little about how individual students with Lds live their lives. This inquiry offers an antidote to this situation by using a qualitative methodology.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL AND APPLIED FRAMEWORK

*The students were each assigned roles to read out loud from the Shakespeare play, Romeo and Juliet. Lara read the part of the citizen. She was having some difficulty decoding, so Karen began to help her, by telling her the words she wasn't sure of, as she was reading. The reading continues with a nice flow until I hear Allen say, "Citizen! It's your turn!!" Lara responds, "I know, I'm reading!!" and she begins to read out loud. I think what might have happened was Karen was helping Lara preview the difficult words in the upcoming section of text and they had not noticed that it was already Lara's turn to read. (Field Notes: John Cummin's English Class; February 4, 1998)*

#### Introduction

This excerpt from my field notes reflects an important Vygotskian principle: That learning occurs in social interactions with others. Fundamental to Vygotsky's theory is the tenet that learning occurs through social interaction with the self, peers, and significant others. Russian developmental theorist and psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, believed that children are active learners in their search to make sense of the world around them, and that the social world affects this process (Vygotsky, 1987). He rejects learning theorists who reduce knowledge to a passive repetition of an external reality. He believes in the intimate connection between learners and their social worlds. Thus, learning is a dynamic, constantly changing, and on-going process of formulation and re-formulation. In this chapter, I situate my inquiry within Vygotsky's development theory.

In the 1930s, soviet activity theory attracted a number of scholars such as Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev. While it is not the intent of this thesis to examine activity theory in depth, I have chosen self-regulation, and the Zone of proximal development (ZPD) as concepts that connect to my inquiry of adolescents with Lds. In this chapter I discuss

relevant theoretical constructs. I examine constructivism, social constructivism, and Vygotsky's activity theory. I discuss the concepts of self-regulation and the zone of proximal development. Next, I introduce the construct of emotional intelligence. Lastly, I link Vygotsky's theory of development and his interests in the social and cognitive development of children with special needs, to the relevant literature in the area of inclusive education. I discuss the differences between the theory of cognitive apprenticeship and discuss the significant differences between this perspective and Vygotsky's.

More than six decades ago Lev Vygotsky theorized about child development. He was interested in the relationship between the social and the psychological aspects of development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Two significant Vygotskian notions, as they relate to this inquiry, are: (a) that learning is primarily social and is focused through social interactions with significant others; and (b) that learning is a mediated process (Vygotsky, 1987). Vygotsky conceptualizes three different types of mediation: (a) mediating structures such as schools; (b) mediating people such as teachers and parents; and (c) mediating tools such as language and other symbolic representational systems. Vygotsky believed that humans master themselves from the "outside" through symbolic cultural systems, and that it is not simply the tools or signs which are important for psychological development but the meanings embedded in them in particular contexts (Moll, 1990). For example, Braille and American Sign Language (ASL), symbolic representational systems, are tools embedded in action and give rise to meaning. These tools allow a child to internalize language and develop higher mental functions in particular contexts of situation.

Vygotsky's "free ranging cross/multi-disciplinary contribution to twentieth century intellectual life" (Daniels, 1996, p. 2) was suppressed during Stalin's Soviet rule. The Stalinist regime persecuted many intellectuals and destroyed research at many

universities and research institutes. In 1934, Vygotsky died of tuberculosis before he was able to replicate and extend his preliminary studies and theoretical positions on development and mediation. Two years after his death the Communist party banned his published work. Vygotsky's work only became known to Westerners in the 1970s, through translations. However, according to Russian researcher Petovsky (1990) poor translations have left Westerners with partial and inaccurate notions of neo-Vygotskian psychology.

Vygotsky was concerned with aspects of educational reform that went beyond the analysis of pedagogy. He was interested in the analysis of the broader social and cultural implications of disabilities, which became known as defectology in the Soviet Union (Knox & Stevens, 1993). He was among the first in the early 1930s to talk about inclusive education, though he did not actually use the term 'inclusion'. He suggested that the context of education may have profound consequences on the developmental process. In his writing Vygotsky discussed the education of students with a variety of disabilities, including what he called learning disorders (Rieber & Carton, 1993). He defined learning disorders as visible in groups of children where behavior deviated from the norm. These children then stood out from the general mass of children with respect to education.

Vygotsky included children with learning disorders within a larger group; children whose behavior is different from the norm as a result of some organic defect. He included children with physical handicaps including what he called, "blind, deaf, crippled, along with mentally retarded or feeble-mindedness" (Rieber & Carton, 1993, p. 175). He believed that children with disabilities should be mainstreamed rather than educated with children with the same disability. He suggested that if children with disabilities were educated together, separated from students without disabilities, then their development would proceed in a totally different and unbeneficial manner.

Vygotsky suggested that if these groups were educated separately it "would inevitably lead to the creation of a special breed of people" (Vygotsky, 1989, p.178). He felt that once a student had been labeled, then he or she would be treated differently because of that label. For example, he wrote, "once branded a fool or handicapped, the child is placed in completely new social circumstances and his or her entire development proceeds in a completely new direction" (Vygotsky, 1989, p.153). Although Vygotskian theorists have examined his ideas in different disciplines such as mathematics (Confrey, 1990; Kroll, 1989; Zack, 1998) and second language education (Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Maguire, 1997; Maguire, 1994) there are few studies of children with Lds that are theoretically situated within a Vygotskian socio-cultural framework.

Foley (1991) wrote about children's writing and how context plays such an important role in their writing development. Although he was not working with students who have special needs, his findings have significant implications in terms of how school settings affect children's development. Foley (1991) argues that patterns of interaction between teachers and students are reflected in writing genres produced by children. The discovery that children use particular genres because of the context in which they are learning, means that when teachers are not conscious of what they are doing, they are having a profound effect, not only on the children's writing development, but on the kind of knowledge that is being constructed in the classroom (Foley, 1991). We could extend this argument to Vygotsky's theory of students with special needs and how the context of their schooling influences their social and psychological development. Vygotsky believed inclusive education would be the most beneficial for students with special needs, such as Lds. As I discuss in Chapter 4 this recommendation may not necessarily always be the case.

The question arises why Vanguard Intercultural High School, my research site, has been so successful in educating adolescents with Lds? I begin to answer this question by

exploring the theoretical constructs of constructivism and social constructivism. The following quote from Luria (1982), highlights the philosophical approach that I chose for this research inquiry:

The basic difference between our approach and that of traditional psychology will be that we are not seeking the origins of human consciousness in the depths of the "soul" or in the independently acting mechanisms of the brain....Rather, we are operating in an entirely different sphere - in humans' actual relationship with reality, in their social history, which is closely tied to labor and language (Luria, 1982, p.27).

#### A Constructivist and Social Constructivist Perspective

A constructivist perspective is grounded in the research of Piaget, Vygotsky, Gestalt psychologists, Bartlett, and Bruner as well as the educational philosophy of John Dewey (Woolfolk, 1995). A constructivist perspective emphasizes the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information. This is in slight contrast to a social constructivist perspective (also known as a cognitive constructivist perspective), that emphasizes that the learner creates or constructs knowledge through acting on, and interacting with, the world. Social constructivism takes on a psychological and social process whereby knowledge is constructed by individual learners through social interactions in particular contexts of situations (Brooks, 1990). That is, individuals attribute meanings to their experiences with others. Cognition then becomes a subjective construction, an individual view of the world, as opposed to "the" search for "reality." In other words, we each create our own realities. Therefore, reality is a subjective and ongoing construction by learners who are immersed in their environments (O'Connor, 1998).

Jean Piaget is cited as the most renowned champion of constructivism (e.g., Bruner, 1986, Brooks, 1990). Piaget's belief was that intelligent thought does not derive simply from perceptions, but from actions taken on objects (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). In viewing Piaget's perspectives on constructivism it would appear that he ignores the influence of a child's social world as a mediating influence and under-estimates children's abilities as socializers and symbolizers (Maguire, 1999). Although both Piaget and Vygotsky believe that learners actively create their own versions of reality based on interactions with the world around them, Vygotsky argues that "the internalization process (is) not the transferring of external activity to a pre-existing internal stage of consciousness but rather a process through which the internal stage (is) formed" (Vygotsky, 1981, p.162). A social constructivist perspective affirms Vygotsky's notion that learning is inherently embedded in a particular socio-cultural setting. Derry (1992) posits that because learning takes place in social situations, the norms of a group and the identity of an individual in a group must be considered. According to Vygotsky's activity theory, the basic unit for studying human psychological process is through practical activity. Humans construct their own meaning from a particular activity in a particular context.

### Activity Theory

Neo-Vygotskian theorists (e.g., Wertsch, 1990) draw from activity theory as a helpful analytical framework to analyze human activity in context (Colpitts, 1998). A fundamental assumption is that human psychological functions differ from the psychological functions of other animals, because they are culturally mediated, historically developing, and arise from practical activity (Cole, 1990). Each of these concepts can be linked to the other and provide a springboard into examining adolescents' social networks within a school setting. Cultural mediation is the notion that human

beings live in an environment in which artifacts from the past continue to exist, change, and influence the present. From this perspective, culture is the unique medium of human existence (Cole, 1990). Culture, and hence human psychological functions are historically developing phenomena, evolving and changing over time. The basic unit for studying human psychological processes is practical activity. Practical activity is what Vygotsky called the "cultural method". His follower Leontiev argues that, "....if we remove human activity from the system of social relationships, it would not exist...the human individual's activity is a system in the system of social relations. It does not exist without these relations" (Leontiev, 1981, pp. 46-47).

Vygotsky's theory of learning conceptualizes language as a psychological tool in the development of higher order cognitive functions. The function of language in this case is to carry out goal-directed **activities**, an essential component of Vygotsky's activity theory. In my research, as socio-cultural activities occur, for example, in the context of a classroom, recess or home, the students construct their own meanings from these activities in these particular contexts. Lantolf and Appel (1994) argue that the student meanings are then "imposed upon the context", rather than the institution imposing activities on the individuals (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p.17). Vygotsky was interested in individual differences and in how children construct their own meanings in particular situations. One of the purposes of this study is to understand each particular situation from the perspective of the students themselves.

Within the context of activity theory, Vygotskian theorists distinguish between **activities** and **tasks**. For example, Coughlan and Duff (1994) define **tasks** as the "blueprint" of action. An example of a task might be what a teacher asks a student to do. An **activity** is what a participant individually constructs. In other words, an activity is what the students actually does, in spite of what the teacher may have asked. In my inquiry, it is evident that some students know what is expected of them; they know the

“right” answer. For example, Michael, one of the case study participants, could tell me what his teacher asked him to do for geography homework. He knew which pages to do. However, students such as Michael frequently could not follow through on what is expected of them, inspite of their knowledge of the directions. Hence, they seemed to construct their own meaning of the directions. So a student like Michael would either do something he thought was expected, but it was not at all what the teacher asked for, or his homework was not done at all. In other words, students are often clear on what the task is, however they create their own activity. Although this appears to characterize the behavior of the students with Lds in my inquiry, the theory would suggest that this is the case for all children.

### Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is a key construct in understanding how adolescents with Lds access and use people for social support from their own perspectives. Vygotsky suggests that human consciousness mediates mental activities, using particular tools and symbolic representational systems. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of these sophisticated tool systems is language (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Díaz, Neal, and Amaya-Williams (1990) define self-regulation as the ability of “obtaining and maintaining control of higher order functions as they come under control of the individual during goal directed activities” (p. 135). Self-regulation can be conceptualized as a child’s ability to plan, guide and monitor their own behavior from within themselves and to flexibly change their behavior based on changing circumstances (Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990). I support the idea that the social context influences children’s ability to plan, guide, and monitor their behavior and I believe this notion will help me better understand adolescence and Lds.



Vygotsky views all higher mental thought as the product of mediated activity (Vygotsky, 1978). A major principle in Vygotsky's development theory is that cognitive development can be understood as the change from basic, biologically determined processes, or material tools, into higher psychological functions. Basic processes (such as perceptual, attentional, and memory capacities) are said to change in the context of socialization and education. This is especially the case through the use of language in order to gain higher psychological functions, which are unique to human cognition.

Vygotsky distinguishes between material tools and psychological tools. Material tools or technical tools orient human behavior externally in mastering the environment (O'Connor, 1998). Material tools, through sensory-motor contexts explain the formation of elementary functions, such as perception, memory, attention, and will. Psychological tools, on the other hand, have a semiotic nature, and are internally oriented.

Psychological tools influence the individual's behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, the change from basic into higher functions occurs in the context of a child's interactions and through the use of culturally determined tools and symbols (e.g., words, signs, gestures). Language, for example, is a psychological tool that is considered to be central to the understanding of higher mental processes or cultural functions (Vygotsky, 1978). This is one example of where Vygotsky can be differentiated from Piaget. Piaget assigns language a secondary role in the learning process. Vygotsky believes that elementary functions are needed in order for higher functions to develop. He posits that higher order functions develop and can be explained by social interactions. Tudge (1990) states that, "words that already have meaning for mature members of the cultural group come to have those same meanings for the young people in the process of interaction" (p. 157).

Wertsch (1985), a western Vygotskian theorist, differentiated higher functions from basic processes in four ways. Higher psychological functions are: (a) self-regulated

rather than determined by the immediate stimulus; (b) social or cultural rather than biological in origin; (c) the object of conscious awareness rather than automatic and unconscious; and (d) mediated through the use of cultural tools and symbols. According to Díaz, Neal, Amaya-Williams (1990) there are three major components of self-regulation: (a) behavior is guided according to a self-formulated plan; (b) behavior, organized as a functional system, is changed and adjusted according to changing goals and situations; and lastly (c) children use aspects of their environments as tools and mediators to attain goals (Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990, p. 130). For the purposes of this study, the first two components of Werstch's (1985) higher functions, self-regulation and their social or cultural origins are most relevant. I argue that self-regulation is a major outcome of development, and accounts for radical changes in a child's cognitive and social skills. Although Vygotsky was talking about his developmental theory in terms of small children, his theory has much relevance to the adolescents with Lds being studied in this project. Many of these students are trying to achieve self-regulation but do so in different ways. I believe that self-regulation must be encouraged and facilitated by parent-child, teacher-student, and student-student social interactions.

There are three Vygotskian stages of the regulatory functions of language (Ahmed, 1994). They are object regulation, other regulation, and self regulation. Object regulation can be defined as a child's ability to accomplish some actions, although the actions are environmentally dependent. Other regulation refers to a dialogic pair, such as a novice (child/student) and expert (adult/teacher) interacting and working collaboratively. An expert guides the novice through language to carry out a particular task in a particular context or situation (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). In my project, there are many examples of the students working together in dialogic pairs. They often use language and gesture in order to carry out a task. Very often one student is seen as an

expert guiding a fellow classmate. One example was provided in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. A second example is highlighted below. The following is an excerpt from field notes taken during a physical education class. It is an example of "other regulation". Stephen in this situation is guiding Donald to learn how to serve a volley-ball using language and gesture. In this situation a fellow student is an expert, modeling and guiding a novice, in this case, his classmate.

***Stephen supporting Donald: An example of "Other Regulation"***

*During this physical education class the students were playing volleyball. At the beginning of the class the teacher reviewed the rules, created teams, and the game began. When a ball came over the net in Donald's direction, he tried to hit the ball but he missed. One of his team mates, Stephen, approached to provide support. Stephen says to Donald, "Use two hands, like this" and models what he means. Donald put his hands together and copies Stephen's motions. Stephen responds, "Hold your hands more like this" and models again what he means. Donald does and Stephen says good. The game resumes. Shortly after Donald makes a good hit, Stephen claps for him and Donald walks over to Stephen so he can hi-five him. Donald calls out to Rebecca (the teacher) to make sure that she saw the play and Rebecca says "good call". Later in the game Stephen makes an excellent hit; Cameron walks over to hi-five him; they smile, then Donald walks over to Stephen and they hi-five. (March 17, 1998; Field notes, Rebecca's physical education class).*

The third and final type of regulatory function is self regulation. When someone is capable of independent strategic functioning, they have accomplished self regulation. These three types of regulation can be seen as a continuum, with a child moving back and forth. Although there is a general progression, object-regulated activities can co-exist beside self-regulated ones.

Self-regulation is established when a child has internally organized a way to respond and relate to the environment. By internalization, Vygotsky refers to not simply a mental image or mental representation of the external relation, but a new level of behavioral

organization which was once only possible with the help of external signs and mediators (e.g., scaffolding by a more capable peer or teacher). Self-regulation is only accomplished once a child is able to actively manipulate the environment through the use of signs. This ability to manipulate the environment ultimately leads to control of a child's own behavior and activities. In other words, they become, "independent cognitive agents" (Wertsch, 1981). However, in Vygotsky's theory the developmental progression is "indeed a culturally determined social process. That is, an interpersonal process that becomes internalized as an intrapsychological function" (Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990, p. 135). One must not forget the importance of social contexts and social interactions.

Studies which have investigated parental teaching strategies and child rearing patterns (e.g., Baumrind, 1973; Hoffman, 1970; Johnson, 1983 in Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990) suggest that three characteristics of caregiver-child interactions aim to promote self-regulatory functions: (a) the use of reasoning and verbal rationales; (b) the gradual relinquishing of parent/adult control; and (c) both in combination with a sense of affective nurturing and emotional warmth. The investigators theorize that these three factors characterize the parents of children who have an internal locus of control.

### Zone of proximal development (ZPD)

#### Introduction

It is a well known and empirically established fact that learning should be matched in some way with a child's developmental level. However, researchers such as Vygotsky realized that scholars could not limit themselves to merely determining developmental levels, if they want to discover the relationship between developmental process to learning and capabilities. Vygotsky talks about development occurring on two planes. The first plane is a child's **actual developmental level**. In other words, the current level

within which the child is functioning, as a result of already completed developmental cycles. Things that a child can do on his or her own are indicative of his or her actual developmental level. The difference between a students' actual developmental level and his or her developmental level with support is called the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as, "...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Vygotsky sees learning as a creative process, that requires students to socially construct knowledge for themselves. The zone of proximal development refers to a range of tasks students cannot yet accomplish without guidance from an adult or a more competent peer. For example, a student can discuss a task with a mentor and the mentor can offer directions and strategies. The student then may or may not internalize the language/strategies and then use them to guide independent efforts. When these "tools" have become internalized one can say that the student is able to self-regulate in this particular area. Vygotsky's classic statement about development assumes that learning always occurs in the potential. "The zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow — that is what the child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87).

### Interpretations of the Zone of Proximal Development

I believe that social interactions using language and gesture provide the necessary step in mutual understanding of what may be very different worlds of the individuals involved (Bruner, 1986). In other words, even though we each have our own perceptions, our own view of the world, language and gesture allow us to understand each other and our perceptions, in spite of our differences. Other scholars speculate that a constructivist

perspective allows for the difference between the understanding of adults and the resultant understanding of children taught by those adults (O'Connor, 1998). Vygotsky (1986) and other scholars such as Barnes (1973) confirm my belief that adult/child dyads have the ability of developing skills and understandings relevant to their cultures, and developing tools needed for developing higher mental functions in particular contexts. Social interaction facilitates cognitive development through apprenticeship. What this means, in its loosest definition, is that social interactions between an expert and a novice facilitate cognitive development. Vygotsky would conceptualize this as working in the learner's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky posited that the dynamics of learning are best observed in the area between what a child can do alone and what a child can do under the guidance of an adult or more capable peer. Consistent with Vygotsky (1986), Barnes (1973), a British educator, argues that learners will always take away something different from the teaching process. Barnes (1973) is in favor of expert (peer or adult)/novice interactions for the purpose of sharing worlds to negotiate meaning, and is a strong proponent of collaborative learning.

Traditionally, learning has been explained as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge. Learning could be discovered, transmitted from others, or experienced during an interaction with others. This concept of a learner as an internalizer does not account for the nature of a learner nor of a learner's social worlds. Furthermore, this notion of a learner as an internalizer establishes a dichotomy between inside and outside. It suggests that knowledge is mainly an intellectual endeavor and considers a learner as the unproblematic unit of analysis (Lave & Wenger, 1996). This concept of a learner internalizing is too easily interpreted as an unproblematic and unilinear process of absorbing the given, simply a transmission and assimilation of information (Lave & Wenger, 1996). In Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, internalization plays a central role in learning of information, however it also includes the

notion of social character. I explore the notion of social character, social interactions, and social processes later in this chapter under the heading of emotional intelligence. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development has undergone many different interpretations. Lave and Wenger (1996) have differentiated between three main interpretations: "scaffolding", "cultural", and "collectivist" or "societal" interpretations.

A scaffolding interpretation, assumes a distinction between support for the initial performance of tasks and subsequent performance without assistance. Second, a cultural interpretation assumes the distance between cultural knowledge, which is taught, and the everyday experience of the individual in a particular context. This second interpretation can be thought of in terms of understood knowledge (as provided by instruction) and active knowledge (as owned by the individual) (Hedegaard, 1988). This interpretation is based on Vygotsky's distinction between scientific and everyday concepts. Vygotsky argued that mature concepts are reached when the scientific and everyday versions amalgamate. In both the scaffolding and cultural interpretations of the zone of proximal development, these scholars do not account for the place of learning in the broader context of the structure in the social world (Lave & Wenger, 1996), nor nested contexts that affect learning (Maguire, 1994).

A third type of interpretation of the zone of proximal development takes a collectivist/societal perspective. Engeström (1987) subscribes to this interpretation and defines the zone of proximal development as the, "distance between the everyday actions of individuals and the historically new form of the societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in...everyday actions" (p. 174). If we use this interpretation of the zone of proximal development, then we go beyond pedagogy and explore the structure of the social world and account for the conflictual nature of social practice among individuals and social groups. Using this interpretation, the focus is on the process of social transformation. In other words, more

emphasis is placed on "connecting issues of sociocultural transformations with changing relations between newcomers and old-timers in the context of a changing shared practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1996, p.144). In this inquiry, many of the teachers appear to be very aware of the need to explore and try to understand the social worlds of their students.

The following vignette is an example of one teacher's awareness of her student's changing social world and her ability to support this student, despite the difficulties early in their relationship. Rebecca (teacher) is aware of the difficult home environment in which Nancy (a student) is living. Rebecca can see some connections to her sometimes difficult school behavior, and can also see how much Nancy has developed since September, when she was very suspicious of Rebecca's support of her, arguing with Rebecca often.

***A students' changing social world and a teacher's openness***

*....I would let Nancy get away with things at the beginning but I wouldn't let others just because (I sympathized with her home life). It was (her behavior) manipulation in a way or intimidation in a way or just I didn't know what to do with it...they (the class) saw us grow through that they saw Nancy and I like our relationship grow and so...*

*...I had I really hard time with it, I went to Angela and I cried...Nancy and Angela and I had a meeting and I spoke with Nancy's social worker on the phone and Nancy's social worker was telling me that yeah Nancy comes home and bitches about you...I knew that I couldn't go a year with her in my class feeling intimidated by her ...she had to figure out that she respected me or I had to gain her respect or something...there were a few maybe explosions ... Sometimes she'll put her head down and sometimes I let her and other times I don't, but I'll I know when it's just because she's you know not really feeling like participating or when it's because she really needs to because she's going through something you know I can sense that....*

*Sometimes....she wouldn't be doing anything and she would be looking at her leg but meanwhile I'm making sure that everyone else is paying attention...I couldn't let her get away with that because it was bad energy in the class. ...I*



*always gave her the choice, I always said you can either face me and participate like everyone else respectfully or you can leave the class if you can't do whatever. Sometimes she would leave the class and sometimes she would stay she'd always roll her eyes and huff and puff ...*

*One day I probably just lost it and said like go to the oasis (time out room) or something and she didn't and she didn't move and she just put her head down and I knew that she was crying. So I didn't force it and this was last period and um and the rest of the class see they're all so okay with that and I find that is what you get in a special situation in regular schools they're so big on this like oh it's not fair, so oh it's not fair and in our school the kids really understand that sometimes people need special treatment you know and that it's okay. (They know that with other students in different situations if a student) refused to go to the oasis, I would have enforced it. But this was an emotional issue so it was different and um....and ah so in this situation she had started crying and I knew she had started crying and she was at the back of the class and we just continued the class but it was kind of a somber energy. Before the end of the class I said Nancy don't leave because I would like to speak to you, the rest of the class left....I had no idea what I was going to say and I was shaking. But this had been I don't know number four breakout ...where she really wasn't following my directions. She was crying and like never once looked up. I just said I know I don't know what's up with you. I said I don't know what approach to take with you. I said I don't know how to make this work. I said, but the only thing I know is that I cannot accept you being disrespectful to me or to the class as a whole or just to the class environment, like not even to individuals. I said, so what I expect is that you follow my directions and treat me with respect and participate like a student ...I started crying and had to leave, like my voice cracked but I said ... I just teach from my heart and I said, you know I love to get to know the students personally and be able to teach from my heart...when I care about students sometimes I have to be hard on them, I can be more free with them and I said right now it's obvious that you don't want to let me do that with you. I said, so that's fine I can just be your teacher, but then you will have to follow the rules that I set as a teacher. I said, and if one day you are ready to let me teach from my heart ...,my voice cracked, and I just said you'll let me know and then I left I walked out. I didn't say anything and then I kind of like gathered myself and it took me about four or five minutes. Then I came back in and I said I'm sorry for walking out. I said, I hope that you're okay, I said that I just don't know what to do, it's up to you now but I will not let you get away with things just because*

*you're going to through a temper tantrum, I said, So now it's up to you and I just like left....*

*so that was in around October,...around almost my birthday ...she made a cake and everything and brought it from the from the group home she made like this chocolate cake and she organized, she told the kids they were amazing they collected money she bought me a cup she bought me a Scorpio mug and um they wanted to get me a chalk holder but couldn't find one and ah she organized who brought in the coke who brought in the chips who brought in paper plates who brought in plastic forks they thought of everything they thought of absolutely everything they had candles they had like they thought of everything they had a card that they had everybody sign they had a present for Derek and a card for Derek, it was amazing it was so well organized and they had it all set up and I didn't even get it. They had Mrs.B ...period before on Friday for English and when I came up the class I was all excited cause Friday last period MRE I know that we're just gonna have a class that we're gonna sing happy birthday and just talk and Mrs.B comes out and catches me in the hall like before the window of the class and says Rebecca, I have to go into with you, I really want to take five minutes of your class, I'm sorry but it was a nightmare class they were horrendous, she said I couldn't get anyone in control. I said, oh Karen I'm sorry I know that they're hyper and I started explaining and justifying and she said they went overboard she was so good she said so I need you there and I want to talk about it so I said okay fine so I came in I came in with Karen and had like my back up and everything and they all shouted surprise and started singing happy birthday and Karen started laughing it was so funny but she did so such a good job like she did such a good job because I was I had already like I was gonna blast them I was just ready to like freak out on them so it was really good anyways...*

This is an excellent example of a teacher trying to understand the changing social world of her student, and yet setting limits for this student. This teacher, Rebecca, was able to validate her student by acknowledging the students' feelings and her own feelings. Rebecca provided Nancy with the space she needed when she was experiencing difficulty at home and yet set limits with respect to the classroom. In doing so, over time, this teacher and student were able to develop a supportive and trusting relationship.

### Scientific and Spontaneous Concepts and the Zone Of Proximal Development

Various scholars support the different interpretations of the zone of proximal development. However, we should not discount the cultural interpretation and the distinction between scientific and spontaneous concepts so quickly. Social interactions in ongoing and everyday activities of a culture, including school activities, mediate the learning process. The question then becomes whether informal learning is categorically different from formal learning. There are contrasting viewpoints on this issue. Vygotsky proposed that this dichotomy can be viewed as the relationship between spontaneous and scientific concepts. Scientific concepts can be explained as those concepts which result from schooling. Spontaneous concepts are those which grow from an individual's own personal experience. The dichotomy, of course, is abstract versus concrete.

Vygotsky views the environment from a social-cultural-historical perspective (O'Connor, 1998). Related to this perspective is the issue of the relationship between spontaneous and scientific concept formation and development, both of which occur in a social context. Vygotsky suggested that concept formation in children grows as their spontaneous concepts meet scientific concepts. When concepts emerge from a child's everyday living experiences and meet with concepts which emerge from classroom instruction/activities, a child's concept formation progresses and evolves. Vygotsky proposes that spontaneous and scientific concepts evolve differently. However, their formation is part of a unitary process where each relates to and is influenced by the other. As the two converge, the scientific becomes more concrete, whereas the spontaneous becomes more abstract.

Vygotsky suggested that spontaneous concepts find their regulation in the zone of proximal development, where through interaction with adults or more capable peers, learners meet and take on the systematic structures of adult thought. The dyad allows the learner to appropriate the strengths of scientific thought characterized by logical structure

and authority, which counteracts the weaknesses of spontaneous thought characterized by empirically rich but disorganized concepts. In reading about the differences between spontaneous and scientific thought, it seems as though Vygotsky places more weight on scientific concepts. He writes that, "Instruction (source of scientific concepts) is one of the principal sources of the school child's concepts and is also a powerful source in directing their evolution; it determines the fate of his total mental development" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 157). This quote provides some credence to the thought that Vygotsky sees spontaneous concepts as subordinate to scientific concepts. However, if we were to consider it necessary for spontaneous concepts to become scientific ones through the mediation of instruction, this would provide a very linear view of learning, one which is reductionistic in nature (O'Connor, 1998). It is my belief that spontaneous thought is necessary in order to provide a student with some background to understand and learn the scientific concepts provided in a classroom setting. For example, if a class is about to begin a unit about volcanoes, it would be helpful if, before beginning to read, the class discussed first what they already know about volcanoes. This type of discussion allows the students to be aware that they already have some background knowledge. This knowledge may stem from family discussions, seeing a volcano erupt on the television news, anything. By discussing what the students already know about a topic, imaginary hooks are created in their minds. As they read or learn more about the topic in school, students can add information to their hooks, create new hooks, and throw away pre-existing hooks which may have contained misinformation.

### Social Interaction and the Zone Of Proximal Development

Social interaction with others is central to the everyday contexts in which cognitive activities occur. Rogoff and Gardner (1984) suggest that social interaction with more capable members of a society in terms of material and conceptual tools are important

'cultural amplifiers' to extend the cognitive processes in children. In Vygotsky's socio-cultural historical perspective, he argues that language is the central mediator of learning. Therefore, within the notion of the zone of proximal development, learners are generally in collaborative activity within a specific social context. As a learner works in a collaborative situation with an adult or more capable peer, the social system is being both learned and created simultaneously (O'Connor, 1998). These interactions are frequently mediated through language, primarily at an interpsychological level and later at an intrapsychological level. Vygotsky places great significance on how learners interact with others in the acquisition of intellectual skills (Moll, 1990).

In the zone of proximal development, a child is not merely a passive recipient of the adult's teachings, nor is the adult simply a model of successful, expert behavior. Rather, the adult-child (e.g., teacher-student) dyad engages in a joint problem-solving activity in which they both share in the knowledge of and responsibility for the activity. Werstch believes that although an adult in the dyad may model a task, the adult must also create a level of "intersubjectivity" about the meaning of the activity (Werstch, 1984). Intersubjectivity, in this case means that a child needs to redefine the problem in terms of an adult perspective. Once the child and adult share the same goals and definition of the problem to be solved, the adult must slowly transfer the task of responsibility to the child (Rogoff & Gardner, 1984). From Vygotsky's perspective on scientific concepts, one assumes that learners take on the adult structures similarly. In other words, during the interaction between a learner and an adult, or more capable peer, a learner internalizes an adult's thought. This is probably too simplistic. In fact, a learner and adult together share worlds in order to negotiate meaning. It is a joint problem-solving activity in which they share the knowledge of and responsibility for the activity. Despite Werstch's (1984) in-depth discussion of adult-child intersubjectivity, we know very little about the process involved in the successful transfer of task responsibility from the adult to the child,

especially from the perspectives of children and adolescents. Based on the works of Werstch (1984), Rogoff and Gardner (1984) and Díaz et al. (1990) two important characteristics promote self-regulatory development. One, is the verbalization of plans and goals by an adult, and the second is an adult's gradual withdrawal from the regulatory role. It is important to note that adults are not the only people in the children's social worlds. Let us consider the role of peers in the zone of proximal development.

### Zone Of Proximal Development and The Role of Peers

The majority of the research that has been conducted and discussed up to this point concerns adult-child dyad relations. However, when Vygotsky introduced his concept of the zone of proximal development, he suggested that more competent peers as well as adults could contribute to a child's development (Vygotsky, 1978). In research conducted by Tudge (1990), he examined the effects of collaboration among peers aged 5-to 9-years-old. He suggests that in class, students act as tutors helping less competent peers learn a straightforward skill. Tudge (1990) suggests that even when peer collaboration is not encouraged, the potential role of peers should not be dismissed. It is important to remember that schooling and learning are part of the socializing process. In my inquiry, I found many instances of peers supporting peers, which I examine in chapter four.

Tudge (1990) poses an interesting question. When an adult provides information within a student's zone of proximal development, we assume that development does indeed result. He asks, can we be certain that development occurs when peers interact? According to research conducted in the area of peer collaboration, the answer is yes. Interactions with more competent peers has been shown to be highly effective in promoting cognitive development in problem-solving in areas such as mathematics (e.g., Zack, 1998; Bearison, Magzamen, & Filardo, 1986). Damon and Phelps (1987 in Tudge, 1990) have examined the types of peer interaction. They claim that the degree of equality

of the relationship and degree of mutual involvement among the peers is important. These researchers distinguished between peer tutoring, peer collaboration, and cooperative learning. They are not certain of the value of cooperative learning, but reported that peer tutoring can be effective in consolidating knowledge already attained. They reported that peer collaboration can have long term effects on the child's understanding of difficult concepts. There is no guarantee that the meaning that is created when two peers interact will be at a higher cognitive level regardless if whether one peer is more competent than the other, or if the information being provided is within the zone of proximal development of the less competent peer. Tudge (1990) suggests that researchers should not assume the cognitive benefits of pairing peers, but should focus on the process of the interaction and what is being constructed in the process. Zack (1998) maintains that what is crucial is how the peers negotiate shared understandings.

### Emotional Intelligence

*Anyone can become angry- that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way- this is not easy. (Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics).*

### Introduction

In his philosophical inquiry in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posed the following question. "How can we as human beings manage our emotional life with intelligence?" He recognized that the problem was not human emotion itself but the appropriateness of emotion and its expression. Goleman (1997) argues that the construct of emotional intelligence is a new and developing area of interest in the field of psychology. He posed the question, "how can we bring intelligence to our emotions — and civility to our streets and caring to our communal life" (Goleman, 1997; p. xiv).

The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) has traditionally been seen as genetic, fixed, and unchanged by life experiences. The notion has been that people are either smart or they are not. People are born that way and there are tests that can determine how smart each one of us is. The Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) test often used for college admissions in the United States is based on the same notion of a single kind of aptitude that determines an individual's future. Goleman (1997) asks what factors count for those people who have high IQs yet flounder, and others with modest IQs who do surprisingly well? He posits that the answer lies in the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence includes self-control, enthusiasm, persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself. He suggests that these skills can be taught, thereby providing children with the chance to use their intellectual potential. I have included a section on emotional intelligence in my dissertation as I believe that it may play a crucial role understanding why some adolescents with Lds use support well and others do not.

#### Academic versus Emotional Intelligence

Traditional studies of learning assume that there is a relationship between IQ and "success" in life. In other words, as a rule those who have very low IQs tend to have menial jobs, whereas those with high IQs tend to work at jobs that pay them well. But Gardner (1995) and Goleman (1997) agree that this is not always the case. Gardner (1995) suggests that only 20% of our life success is determined by IQ. This means that 80% of our success in life remains to be influenced by other factors, such as social class and luck.

How do we explain the different destinies of people who have about the same IQ, schooling, and opportunities? IQ offers us little to help answer this question. Arnold (1995) and Arnold and Denny (1992) conducted a longitudinal study of the life paths of 81 high school valedictorians and salutatorians. Each of the valedictorians and



salutatorians were chosen because they each had the highest grade-point averages in their schools, from the 1981 graduating class. Their findings suggest that in college this group continued to excel in their academics studies. However, by their late twenties, they had achieved only average levels of success. The authors reported that ten years after high school graduation, only one in four had reached the highest level among their same age peers in their chosen profession. Arnold (1992) explains "...to know that a person is a valedictorian is to know only that he or she is exceedingly good in achievements measured by grades. It tells you nothing about how they react to the vicissitudes of life" (Chicago Tribune, May 29, 1992).

Gardner (1983) is best known for his notion of multiple intelligence and his challenge of the traditional view of IQ. What is most crucial in Gardner's theory is the idea of *multiple* intelligences, as opposed to one single standardized concept of IQ. In his book *Frames of Mind*, he introduces the notion that there is not one kind of intelligence crucial for success in life, but rather a wide spectrum of intelligences. He believes that there are seven key varieties, which can each be further broken down. The seven types of multiple intelligences which are included in Gardner's model include two academic types of intelligence, verbal and mathematical-logical. A third type is spatial intelligence, such as an artist or architect would have. A fourth type, kinesthetic strengths, was displayed by Magic Johnson. Next, is musical intelligence as seen in Mozart or Sarah McLaughlin. The final two types are referred to as personal intelligences. They are interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people, in terms of what motivates them, how they work, how to work with them. Individuals who tend to have good interpersonal intelligence are teachers, clinicians, religious leaders, among others. A great therapist like Carl Rogers or a world-class leader like Martin Luther King Jr. would be examples of individuals who possess excellent interpersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence refers to an inner

contentment that arises from attuning one's life to be in keeping with one's true feelings. Intrapersonal intelligence is the key to self-knowledge.

Gardner acknowledges that his seven key components of intelligence are arbitrary; He and his research group have stretched the list to twenty different varieties of intelligence. For example, interpersonal intelligence can be broken down into leadership, the ability to nurture relationships and keep friends, and the ability to resolve conflicts. Gardner's model of intelligence emphasizes cognition — the understanding of oneself and others and getting along with others. However, he has not pursued the role of feelings in these intelligences. His model focuses on meta-cognition, an awareness of one's mental processes, as opposed to the full range of emotional capabilities (meta awareness).

Sternberg (1985), a Yale psychologist, asked people to describe an "intelligent person". Practical people skills were among the main traits listed. Sternberg's (1985) research led him to confirm the opinion of E.L. Thorndike who was influential in popularizing the notion of IQ. Thorndike's opinion in the 1930s was that social intelligence (the ability to understand others) is distinct from academic abilities, and a key part of what makes people do well in the practicalities of life. Salovey (1990), another Yale psychologist, supports the views of his colleagues Sternberg and Gardner that it is important to take a wider view of intelligence. Salovey (1990) includes five main domains in his definition of emotional intelligence . These five are: (a) knowing one's emotions, self-awareness; (b) managing emotions, handling one's emotions so they are appropriate; (c) motivating oneself; (d) recognizing emotions in others, the ability to empathize; and (e) handling relationships, the skill of managing emotions in others.

There are many on-going projects which have implemented some of the main features of emotional intelligence (e.g., Arts PROPEL and Spectrum, (Hatch & Gardner, 1996)). One such program can be found at Nueva School, a private elementary school in

San Francisco, founded by Karen Stone McCown. The subject in Self Science class is about one's feelings. The class focuses on the emotional fabric of each child's life, a topic which is usually ignored in other classrooms across North America. The topics are totally dependent on what the children bring to the classroom. They depend on the tensions and traumas of the children's lives. During an interview November 7, 1993 with the *New York Times*, McCown said "Learning doesn't take place in isolation from kids' feelings. Being emotionally literate is as important for learning as instruction in math and reading" The goal of this program, as it is in the others — (Arts PROPEL and Spectrum) — is to raise the level of social and emotional competence in *all* children as a part of their regular education. It is not just for children who are experiencing some difficulty in their lives. Many school-based prevention programs that target specific behaviors, such as teen smoking, drinking or violence, have found that programs are more effective when they teach a core of emotional and social competence, such as impulse control, anger management, and finding creative solutions to social predicaments (Grant, 1992). There have also been many studies conducted in which interventions have been successfully designed to target specific social and emotional difficulties such as aggression and depression (Dodge & Feldman, 1990; Parker & Asher, 1990; Asher & Williams, 1987). It would seem logical to take the information learned from these highly focused studies and use some of the findings as preventative measures for an entire school population (taught by general and specialized classroom teachers) as Nueva School has done (McCown, 1993; Stone & Dillehunt, 1978). Like good childrearing, the lessons that are taught in the Self Science classes are small, but they are delivered regularly and over a sustained period of years. That is how emotional learning becomes ingrained (McCown, 1993; Stone & Dillehunt, 1978).

Emotional intelligence is a fascinating field of study, but unfortunately it does not have a great deal of empirical research to support it. There are no standardized

measurements which yield an emotional intelligence score. They are probably impossible to create although there is much research on the components. For example, in the area of empathy it is best tested by sampling a person's ability to empathize while they are interacting with others. Such as having a participant read a person's feelings from a video of their facial expressions.

### Vygotsky and Students with Special Needs

Vygotsky is best known as a psycholinguist, a theorist, and a founder of Soviet cognitive developmental psychology. What is less well known is that he played a key role in establishing the discipline of developmental psychology in Russia. One of Vygotsky's main contributions to the discipline was to help provide a strong theoretical basis for teaching children with special needs as a single unified field (McCagg, 1989). Vygotsky's work in the area of special needs was first published in the 1920s and 1930s and continues to influence the field in Russia today. The term defectology, or defektologia as it is known in Russia, is concerned with abnormal psychology, learning disabilities, and special education as it is known in North America. He frequently wrote about the general education of students with physical and intellectual disabilities, the development of teacher training programs and teaching methods .

As Vygotsky theorized about children with special needs in the 1920s, he began to conceptualize his concept of the zone of proximal development, although he did not use the term and fully construct the concept of zone of proximal development until the 1930s. Vygotsky argued that educators "look not only at the plateau or delay in development but at overall potential" (Knox & Stevens, 1993, p. 17). Knox and Stevens (1993) interpreted Vygotsky's writings to mean that schools, "must develop special pedagogical techniques aimed at the positive uniqueness of these children, to create in them the necessary sociocultural superstructure which will shore up development at its point of physical or

mental weakness" (Knox & Stevens, 1993, p. 17). Vygotsky advocated that it was necessary to remove the borderlines between the special schools and public schools. However, we can not be sure that he insisted that children with special needs attend the same schools with children without special needs. According to Knox and Stevens (1993), he insisted on the concept of differentiation, which means "special alternative means of communication and development" (e.g., braille, or some other means of mediation and communication), "more teaching", "special auxiliary means", "special teachers", and "a differentiated education" at every stage of their development (p. 23). Vygotsky points out that although the means of development may be different, the fundamental processes of development are "the same for both normal and abnormal children, and the educational content must be the same for both" (Knox & Stevens, 1993, p. 16). Vygotsky suggested that if these groups were educated separately it "would inevitably lead to the creation of a special breed of people" (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 178). Vygotsky's thoughts regarding inclusive education were progressive. Inclusive education is certainly a major issue today in the field of special education.

## Inclusive Education

### Brief Historical Overview of Inclusive Education

Advocates for students with exceptionalities have different opinions about classroom placement of students with special needs. The current trend in education is an inclusive classroom. Lerner (1993) defines full inclusion as: "The policy of placing and instructing all children, including all categories of disability and levels of severity, in their neighborhood school and the regular classroom" (p. 580). Although all advocates of students with special needs share a hope of creating optimal learning environments for all students, advocates for students with exceptionalities disagree on the benefits of full

inclusion. I provide a critical discussion using the philosophical literature, the research and practical literature, as well as my own experience, on the major rationales for and against the inclusion of students with many different types of exceptionalities. I will describe what inclusive education is in theory versus what is actually occurring in the classrooms.

In the last thirty years, the groundwork for inclusion has been laid within the field of special education. We have moved from segregated learning environments in the 1960s, through mainstreaming and the least restrictive environment (LRE) in the 1970s, to Integration and the Regular Education Initiative (REI) in the 1980s, to inclusive education and the diverse classroom in the 1990s. Although many of these terms have been used interchangeably (Vergason & Anderegg, 1992; in Roberts & Mather, 1995), they all represent different periods of time in the historical development of our education system regarding how children with special needs should be educated. Historically, the term mainstreaming was used to denote deinstitutionalization (Dailey, 1974; MacMillan & Semmel, 1977; in Roberts and Mather, 1995). Mainstreaming refers to partial or total integration of students into a regular classroom based on an individual's personal characteristics, capabilities, and educational needs. In conjunction with mainstreaming came the philosophy and legal rights for all students to be educated in the "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE), which is the key principle of U.S. Federal Law 94-142, and the guiding principle of the education initiatives in Canadian provinces.

This model of LRE offered a cascade of services in which students had to "fit" into the placement. In other words, various services were available within the schools and the students had to adapt to what was provided, as opposed to teachers or educators working with the students to develop a plan which best suits their needs. This model was problematic in that educators were provided with a license to segregate students based on administrative needs rather than on the students' best interests. A push came from parent

and advocate groups for a fuller integration policy in which students with special needs were placed in a regular class with support as a first option. The intent of this "Regular Education Initiative" (REI) was to get special education and regular education to merge together, hence the term integration. The goal was to transfer the knowledge and curriculum of special education to regular education. The 1990s brought with it the notion of inclusive education and diverse classrooms. In other words, the classrooms are designed to meet the needs of all students, at least in principle.

### Inclusion

The term full inclusion means different things to different people (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). However, the notion is that classrooms, and supports within a classroom, should be designed to meet the diverse needs (learning, social-emotional, cultural, mobility, race, etc.) of all students. Sapon-Shevin (1995) highlights the following goals of an inclusive classroom : (a) creating and maintaining warm and accepting classroom communities that celebrate diversity and embrace differences; (b) implementing multilevel, multimodal curriculum and teaching strategies; (c) preparing and supporting teachers to teach interactively; (d) providing on-going support for teachers in their classrooms and breaking down the barriers of professional isolation; and, finally, (e) involving parents in the planning process in meaningful ways. In this model of full inclusion, each child is assessed, not for placement purposes, but for planning and program purposes (Lusthaus, Gazith & Lusthaus, 1992). A team including regular and special educators, parents and the student, plan and implement a curriculum to ensure social and academic needs are being met. Although research findings have not been consistent with regards to the effects of full inclusion programs on students with disabilities and their families (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995), inclusion has become a popular educational trend.

In theory, as has been discussed, inclusion has many wonderful aspects. However, some difficulties have arisen in its practical application. I discuss the major rationales *for* and *against* full inclusion. There are four major rationales supporting inclusive education (a) the prevention of discrimination; (b) the benefits of students learning from each other; (c) learning about the diversity in our communities and; (d) the lack of support for segregated and pull-out models of education. The major rationales against this inclusive model are threefold: (a) teachers being overwhelmed by and unprepared for the diversity of needs; (b) students not receiving the supports and services which they deserve and; (c) the lack of resources made available to optimally implement this model.

### Major Rationales For Inclusion

1. One of the major philosophical rationales for inclusive education is the protection of the basic human right to equal treatment. In the past, students were placed in special education settings based on a label indicating that they were a student with special needs (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988). Proponents argue that excluding any child from general education classes is discriminatory, counter productive and unacceptable (Smith, 1993). Gartner and Lipsky (1988) suggest that we should learn from our mistakes and attempt to create a unitary educational system that incorporates quality education for all students. In Quebec, education is included as a "human right" in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms: "Every person has a right, to the extent and according to the standards provided for by law, to free public education". School boards are required to provide education to all students: "without distinction, exclusion or preference based on....a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap" (Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, 1982). The Education Act of Quebec requires school boards to adapt regular educational services to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities through the use of an individualized education plan (IEP).



2. A second rationale supporting inclusive education is the opportunity it provides for children to learn that everyone has different needs and that everyone belongs in society. In other words, inclusion promotes the acceptance of diversity and the understanding that people have diverse needs. By having all children in class together, children with special needs will not feel isolated and as "different" as they do in segregated environments. The premise here is that inclusion allows all children to belong rather than the need to "fit" into the class. "Belonging" has been found to be essential to fostering self-esteem and self-confidence (Kunc, 1992; in Villa, Udis, & Thousand, 1994). Sapon-Shevin (1995) supports this rationale by stating that the world is an inclusive community and that it is important for children to have an opportunity to learn and grow within classes that reflect the communities in which they live. Halvorsen and Sailor (1990) echo this point by suggesting that the ratio of students with disabilities attending schools should be representative of the community. Special classes become discriminatory with a disproportionate percentage of students from minority and low income families (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988).

Gartner and Lipsky (1988) briefly discuss the importance of treating people with a disability as people, first and foremost. Martha Saxton, a woman with Spina Bifida, is quoted in Gartner and Lipsky (1988) as having said, "...I'm not lucky or unlucky. I'm just the way I am." This statement among many others in the article imply that a disability is only one dimension of a person, not all-defining and not inherently a barrier to being recognized as a full human being.

3. In teacher-supported inclusive settings, children have the opportunity to learn from each other. Many articles discuss the problem of students with disabilities not being able, or more accurately not being given the opportunity, to make friends and interact with peers. They generally have poor social and behavioral skills (Gartner & Lipsky,

1988; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Porter & Richler, 1991; McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager & Lee, 1993). For example, children with behavioral difficulties when pulled out of the regular classroom become immersed in a classroom culture of disturbance and dysfunction with no pro-social models, and this creates and perpetuates a culture of dysfunctional behavior (Kunc, 1992; in Villa, Udis, & Thousand, 1994). Also, research supports the thesis that for students with severe disabilities, the child-child interactions found in inclusive settings enhance verbal, play, and social communication to a far greater extent than the adult-child interactions found in segregated settings (Halvorsen & Sailor, 1990). These findings provide evidence that peer interactions found within an inclusive environment have positive effects on many dimensions of learning.

In addition to the advantages that children with special needs gain from their peers, these interactions have also been found to have a positive impact on their non-disabled peers. Biklen, Corrigan, and Quick (1989) carried out a study with non-disabled elementary school children in an inclusive setting. Students described their experiences, saying they learned to interpret differences in appearance and behaviors in new ways, made connections between the feelings of children with disabilities and their own experiences, and seeing the value that each group had for the other.

In another study, Kishi (1988) examined different types of contact between peers with and without severe disabilities. He found that students who had experienced contact or interaction with peers with severe disabilities retained more positive attitudes than those who had no contact. More recently, Kishi and Meyer (1994) conducted a six-year follow-up study to examine what children without disabilities remembered and reported about the effects of social contact with students who had severe disabilities. They found that students had significantly more positive attitudes, higher levels of currently reported social contact, and more support for full community participation. Unfortunately, no true friendships were supported at the time of the follow-up of these students.

In a year-long ethnographic study of social relations between high school aged students with severe disabilities and their peers without disabilities, students without disabilities described benefiting from the experience, learning from students with disabilities, having the positive experience of supporting another person, and increasing their own ability to deal with a person with disability in their lives (Murray-Seegert, 1989). Clearly, the evidence indicates that many people who participate in inclusive environments benefit, when their own scholastic needs are being met.

4. A fourth rationale for inclusive education is that there is little evidence to suggest that special classes and pull-out programs enhance the academic and social-emotional success of some students'. In fact, some suggest that these programs may actually harm them. Although some people believe that segregated and pull-out programs offer children instruction that better meets their needs, research has found evidence to the contrary. Many researchers suggest that there is very little evidence that supports the need for segregated settings (i.e. Sapon-Shevin, in O'Neil, 1994/1995; Gartner & Lipsky, 1988; Madden & Slavin, 1983). In fact, there is compelling evidence that suggests quite the opposite (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988; Madden & Slavin, 1983). In fifty studies reviewed by Gartner and Lipsky (1988) in which they compared the academic performance of mainstreamed and segregated students with varying disabilities, the mean academic performance of the integrated group was in the 80th percentile, while the segregated students scored in the 50th percentile. In a review of programs for students with academic disabilities, there were no consistent benefits of full-time special education programs. In fact, the studies revealed that full or part-time regular class placements were more beneficial for students' achievements, self-esteem, behavior, and emotional adjustment (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988). Some of the under-achievement findings in the segregated settings may be a result of a lowering of expectations (Will, 1996). This

effect has been documented by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) in their classic study of how labeling a child changes teachers' expectations and in turn affects students' performance. Further, it has been suggested that often when students are pulled-out of class to receive special services (i.e. math tutoring), the regular classroom teachers do not feel responsible for that child's learning in that particular subject (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988). Inclusive education has the potential to prevent that attitude from occurring, as the students will not be leaving the classroom to be taught differently from their peers. These findings suggest that inclusive education would enhance some students' academic and social-emotional success.

#### Problems with Implementing an Inclusive Philosophy

The following are three major rationales that challenge the concept of inclusive education:

1. Research suggests that teachers feel they lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to cope with inclusive classrooms. They also feel that classes will be too large and diverse to meet the needs of each student. Many teachers of students with diverse needs support inclusion in theory. But, they consider the necessary adaptations to be desirable but not feasible (McIntosh et. al., 1993; Schumm & Vaughn, 1991; Smith, 1993; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Teachers considered the following adaptations to be the least feasible: (a) adapting regular material; (b) using alternative materials; and (c) providing individualized instruction (McIntosh et al. ,1993). Many teachers of students with Lds have reported that they lack the knowledge and skills to appropriately plan for and instruct this population (Schumm & Vaughn, 1992; Schumm & Vaughn, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon, & Rothlein, 1994; Vaughn & Schumm, 1994). For an inclusive classroom to be successful, adaptations to curriculum materials need to be made. But

students have reported that such adaptations were not made frequently enough (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995).

In addition to concerns about adaptations, teachers also expressed concern regarding the need for smaller class sizes, the extent to which all students would benefit from inclusion, and the lack of teacher preparation (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher and Saumell (1996) concluded that the majority of teachers had strong negative feelings about inclusion, and that teachers felt that decision makers were out of touch with classroom realities. A majority of teachers continue to favor ability grouping, and only a minority believe that students with special needs are best served in inclusive classrooms (King & Perk, 1992; in Smith 1993).

Convinced — teachers are essential for a successful inclusive class. Yet, some teachers continue to report an inability to cope with such diversity (Madden & Slavin, 1983). Perhaps this is due to a lack of available training or too much is being asked of them. These are two key possibilities that require further investigation.

2. By definition, in an inclusive classroom there will be a large diversity of students' needs that will have to be met. Concerns have arisen regarding the adequacy of inclusive classrooms, and the abilities of teachers to address these needs. In an inclusive classroom students may not get the attention, education, and services they need to become successful. Even some teachers, reported to be effective, have been found to fall short when faced with a multitude of adaptations to the regular curriculum, resulting in some students' needs not being met (McIntosh et al., 1993). In fact, research conducted using students with Lds has shown that these students do not do well academically in general education classrooms (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Fernstrom, 1993). This may be a result of instruction delivered in a traditional manner (i.e. undifferentiated large-group instruction)

(Baker, Zigmond, 1990; McIntosh et al., 1993). Research has found that students with and without Lds were treated the same by their teachers. Few adaptations were made, and although students were included in class activities they participated very little (McIntosh et al., 1993).

Based on the above findings and the findings that some students with Lds report enjoying special education and the extra help they get (Padeliadu & Zigmond, 1996), it has been suggested that inclusion is more beneficial for some students (e.g., students with severe disabilities) than for other students (e.g., students with mild Lds and behavior disorders) (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

3. Many researchers, teachers, and parents have identified the lack of adequate resources as a blockade to successful inclusion (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1994). Schools that have successfully implemented inclusion programs have faced an increase in financial expenditures (McLaughlin & Warren, 1993, in Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Inclusion is often thought of as a way to cut costs; this is certainly not the case. Resources that may be needed for students with special needs include additional teachers and teaching assistants, as well as materials, books, and computers, among other items.

Given the economy in Canada and the fact that in education resources are being cut, there is little money to support any new education models (Smith, 1993). We can continue to talk about multi-level teaching, cooperative learning, but if there is no money to train teachers and provide them with the curriculum and staff resources, then inclusion will be harmful instead of beneficial. I believe that the students in my inquiry have described the lack of effective teaching, lack of resources, and lack of support — as harmful "inclusive" environments. The students in this inquiry explained how they felt unaccepted, not included, isolated and therefore often withdrew in "inclusive settings". In what we, as researchers, call a segregated setting (e.g., Vanguard Intercultural High

School) it is actually one which includes and accepts all its members and creates a safe learning environment.

### My View on Inclusion

I strongly believe that the needs of each child come first. Although philosophically I support the idea that classrooms should be places where all children belong, I also recognize that some children, at certain times in their development, need services which may not adequately be addressed in an inclusive class (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, & Fernstrom, 1993). For example, a Secondary II student with severe Lds who is reading at a grade three level, is likely to require some individual teaching in the area of reading. My view of an inclusive classroom concurs with the model of education known as responsible inclusion (Kauffman, 1995; Kauffman, in O'Neil, 1994/1995; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Responsible inclusion places the students' needs first. The goal is for each child to be in an inclusive classroom, where sometimes academic and social-emotional needs require a continuum of services, ranging from one-to-one resource support to counselling. The issue should not be *where* the child is educated, but *how*. We need to fully understand the effective methods and outcomes that reflect appropriate instructional practices for each child with a disability (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). In order to determine what responsible inclusion means for each child, I propose that the child should be asked what he or she believes to be ideal for them. A plan should be discussed with the student, parents, teachers, and others (e.g., school psychologist). The students need to take ownership of the plan, be involved, and committed to it. The perspectives and opinions of the children themselves have often not been considered or respected. This is what is unique in my inquiry.

I believe that along with considering students' needs first and the much needed continuum of services, the following aspects that are supported in the literature, are

necessary for students to get the full benefits from education: (a) teachers must choose to participate in an inclusive classroom; (b) adequate resources need to be provided; (c) models need to be developed, implemented, and evaluated to meet the needs of the students and their families; (d) the service delivery model should be formative, on-going, and consistently evaluated; (e) on-going professional development must occur; (f) all school members need to be involved in the development of their school's philosophy of inclusion; and finally, (g) curriculum and instruction must be developed and fine-tuned to meet the needs of all students (e.g., Roberts & Mather, 1995).

### Inclusion Conclusion

Inclusion is the philosophy and practical application of a single system of education which supports and includes all students whatever their needs. Some of the major rationales supporting inclusion include the prevention of discrimination, the lack of support for segregated and pull-out models of education, and the benefits of students learning from each other and also learning about the diversity in our communities. Although inclusion has many benefits, some arguments that have emerged against this model include teachers being overwhelmed by and unprepared for the diversity of needs, students not receiving the support and services which they deserve, and lastly the lack of resources made available to optimally implement this model.

One of the ways to counter some of the arguments against inclusion is to offer a model of responsible inclusion, "a single system, special for all students" (Gartner & Lipsky, 1988, p.368). However, even with a model of responsible inclusion and the continuum of services it provides, appropriate teacher education and involvement will be required, as well as adequate resources in order to provide our children with the education they deserve. We need a system that does not deny differences, but rather one



that recognizes, celebrates, and accommodates differences (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989).

Although in principal I agree with the diverse classroom, the funding is not available in the mainstream schools to provide the support that students with severe Lds need in order to be successful. My research provides evidence that within the continuum of services required to meet the needs of students with severe Lds, segregated school settings, such as Vanguard Intercultural High School, are also needed among the continuum. I provide evidence that the students in my study, who did not cope well in inclusive schools, are performing better, feel more competent, and confident in a segregated setting. School settings such as that of Vanguard are therefore a superior choice for certain students with Lds and their families.

### Zone Of Proximal Development Versus "Scaffolding"

#### Versus a Cognitive Apprenticeship Model

Another contribution to the continuum is where the role of the teacher as transmitter or imparter of knowledge is minimal in the framework of the zone of proximal development, for in the learning process both teacher and learner co-create meaning (O'Connor, 1998). Jerome Bruner's concept of "scaffolding" is an early metaphor which characterizes the teacher's, or more capable peers' role in the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding, as the analogy implies, is the gradual withdrawal of adult control and support as a the child becomes more competent in the given task. The scaffolders break the task down into simpler more manageable parts, directing the child's attention to the relevant and essential parts. Lastly, the scaffolder demonstrates and models successful performance of the task while keeping the task at an appropriate level of difficulty for the child, preventing frustration and encouraging independent functioning. One might ask at this point how this concept of scaffolding differs from the

zone of proximal development. This scaffolding approach taken at face value can have imitative or mimicking consequences. Vygotsky talks about the individual as an active learner, an agent in the learning process. Vygotsky believed that only when the child is able to plan, guide, and monitor his or her own behavior from within themselves and be able to flexibly change their behavior based on changing circumstances has learning occurred and thus, self-regulation (Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990).

There has been a significant amount of research done in the areas of cognitive apprenticeship and situated learning. The difficulty with much of this research is that the process is very imitative. The students do not tend to internalize for themselves. In other words, the knowledge is not socially constructed. Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain by enabling students to acquire, to develop, and to use cognitive tools through authentic domain activity (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). When one thinks of the term apprentice, the idea of someone learning a trade or art by practical experience under skilled workers comes to mind (Webster, 1986). Cognitive apprenticeship scaffolds the learner in an authentic activity. Brown, Collins, and Duguid, (1989) offer a paradigm of modeling, coaching, and fading. In this approach teachers or coaches promote learning by modeling strategies for the student, by supporting the students' attempt at doing the task, and, finally, by withdrawing support when it is no longer required. The goal of this model is to help students become more independent learners, possessing flexible "thinking" skills. However, nowhere is it discussed that a learner must internalize what is being taught. Therefore, the learner's behavior can be imitative as opposed to the learner being able to plan, guide, and monitor his or her own behavior from within him or herself.

The cognitive apprenticeship model has been used successfully in many domains. A few examples are tailoring (Lave, 1988, as cited in Brown et al., 1989), mathematics (Lampert, 1986; Schoenfeld, 1985), biology (Lajoie, 1993), writing (Scardamalia &

Berietter, 1985; Scardamalia, Berietter, & Steinbach, 1984), and reading comprehension (Palinsar & Brown, 1984). The findings in the above mentioned studies, as well as many others, suggest that social interaction, collaboration, and social construction of knowledge play central roles in a cognitive apprenticeship model.

Situated learning is often embedded in a cognitive apprenticeship model. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) believe that knowledge is neither separable from the actions which give rise to it, nor from the culture in which those actions occur. In order to situate learning, one must provide authentic (real-world) activities for the student. This learning involves being exposed to sub-cultures (i.e. academics, professions, trades), activities, and tools. Students need to be introduced to cultures where the concepts they are learning are applied. By embedding instruction within a context (i.e. reading, using the reciprocal teaching method, Palinsar & Brown, 1984), learning becomes more meaningful. Students learn how, why, and when to use the information they are learning. They are active participants in the learning process and not passive recipients (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989). The best instruction involves the student in actual problem solving (Anderson, 1990).

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

*Patrick and I had been discussing his difficulty in the area of math when I asked him the following question:*

*Tara: What's the best way for a teacher to help you?*

*Patrick: To show me, like I'm a visual guy, like if you, like lots of people they will read it and if they write it down, like that won't stick, like if I listen to it like when I watch TV or like anything like I'll pick up stuff like that, movies and stuff (Patrick, Case Study Interview, June, 1998).*

#### Overview

In this chapter I situate my study, review the history of Vanguard Intercultural High School and describe its present culture. I describe the pilot study which I carried out and my role as a researcher in and out of the classroom during the varied phases of this inquiry. I describe the data collection methods I employed, including my rationale for selecting specific students for clinical case studies. I present the emergent research design and case-study approach I used to explore how, why, and under what conditions adolescents with Lds use the individuals in their social networks for social support and what their expectations are of the people in these networks.

#### Nature of design

I chose an emergent, descriptive, interpretive approach because I believe such a research stance would help me to obtain a deeper understanding of how adolescents with Lds access and use people for support. In this interpretive study, I examined adolescents with Lds, the events, significant people and interactions in their lives, I then interpreted their intertwined meanings. My assumptions in adapting this kind of approach are based

on four of Maykut and Morehouse's (1996) key features which characterize this kind of qualitative research. The first is an exploratory, descriptive and interpretive focus. It is not possible to generalize the findings but a deeper understanding can be gained from the perspectives of the participants. The second characteristic is that of an emergent design. It was important for me to understand that during early phases of data analysis as the students shared with me how they seek support, the types of information they provided me led me to ask new questions. I also observed new situations, previous situations with new information, and examined what I had previously considered to be unimportant documents (e.g., past and present report cards). This broadening or narrowing of what is important to the study is a common feature of qualitative methodology.

A purposive sample is the third key characteristic of qualitative research. In this study the grade nine classes were recommended by the principal, Mrs. Lavigne. This grade was one of the larger groups of students in the school and Mrs. Lavigne felt it was also the most representative of students with Lds, in terms of the different types of Lds and personalities. Six students were then asked to participate in clinical case studies. These students were carefully selected, based on teacher nominations, an Ld discrepancy, and an MEQ code of 02 (See Appendix A). In other words, participants were selected to ensure that variabilities common to social phenomena were represented in the data. The fourth and final characteristic to be discussed in this section concerns the interests of qualitative researchers in understanding people's experiences in context. Therefore, the adolescents were observed and the data were collected in natural settings, the students' school, and their home contexts.

### Background To The Study And Role Of The Researcher

Since 1992 I have worked with children, adolescents, and adults, all of whom had Lds. I have worked as a teaching assistant, a resource teacher, a tutor, and a psycho-

educational consultant. As a psycho-educational consultant, my clinical responsibilities included: (a) Conducting psychometric assessments of cognitive and academic abilities; (b) Administering affective behavioral assessments; (c) Carrying out family assessments and consultations; (d) Assessment of classroom adaptation; (e) Consultation to academic staff; (f) Leading case conferences; and (g) Providing workshops. These experiences have led me to become curious about people with Lds and how they 'survive' so differently. I worked with and observed students who had extreme difficulty accessing and using the social support available to them. However, I also observed a group of students who appeared extremely adept at accessing and using social support. Why is there this discrepancy? The distinction seemed to be more than simply personality factors. Current research in the area suggests that people with Lds make different use of their social networks for support and problem solving than do their peers without disabilities (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988; Morrison, Laughlin, Crow, Ollansky, & Moore, 1992; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1998; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). Interesting as this research may be, it does not address the question of why there seems to be a distinction within the group of students with Lds themselves. The available research tends to discuss students with Lds as a whole. The difficulty is that students with Lds are such idiosyncratic learners that it is difficult to see them as one group. I have chosen to discuss adolescents with Lds in two separate groups — those who can access and use support well, and those who have difficulties with this. Even separating students with Lds into two groups is insufficient; however, I felt it would provide me with a rich data source and that differences would certainly prevail.

In addition, as I read the literature I noticed a tendency among researchers (e.g., Hallinan & Crow, 1989; Hoyle & Serafica, 1988; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997; Wiener & Sunohara, in press) to obtain information from teachers, parents, and peer rating, using a quantitative analysis. Granted many of these studies focused on students

of elementary school age. However, there are few research projects which tapped the perspectives of the students themselves. My goal in this inquiry is to focus on an emic perspective, that is to hear and represent the voices of the adolescents. I gained information by talking to the teachers and parents of the students, but my main data source were the students themselves.

#### Rationale for Selecting Research Site and Access to Vanguard

Vanguard School is a non-profit private institution in Montreal, recognized to be in the public interest, which serves children with severe learning disabilities. It is non-profit and receives grants from the Quebec Ministry of Education providing both elementary and secondary education. It accepts donations from the New Dimension Foundation for its development. The students who attend Vanguard typically come from public schools in the greater Montreal area, although some travel from as far away as the Laurentians and the Eastern Townships. Others have been educated at Vanguard Elementary School and move directly into the high school. Vanguard students follow the curriculum set out by the Quebec Ministry of Education and write the province wide exams.

I met with Ann Elbourne, a teacher and one of the founders of Vanguard Intercultural High School who shared the history of the school with me. The secondary school began as a Lansdowne Tutoring Center initiative in 1992. The tutors at Lansdowne were concerned that smart students with Lds were getting a very poor education in high school because they were being placed in low level math, English and French courses, and otherwise given non-academic options. The tutors at Lansdowne recognized that there was a need for a school offering enriched, stimulating courses using adapted teaching methods and materials. Small classes and team teaching were key components of this adaptation.

The Lansdowne Tutoring Center engaged Kay Dila and Ann Elbourne to investigate the possibility of starting a Lansdowne secondary school. The search committee grew to include Gail Desnoyers, a parent of a child with Lds, Ellen Duchesne from the McGill/Montreal Children's Hospital Learning Centre, Sheila Donahue, then president of the Quebec Association of Children with LD (QACLD), and Liz Gayda, a woman who was working at an elementary school for students with Lds. The committee quickly realized that there was a need for such a school. However, at the time it would have been difficult for Lansdowne to get a license from the Quebec government for a secondary school. The alternative was to use Vanguard's license and Lansdowne tutors, and they did just that.

With nine students, only one of them from Vanguard Elementary, the Lansdowne tutors rented a classroom on the top floor of Westmount High School. The regular MEQ curriculum was followed for Secondary I. Along with the students' regular classes, they each had two hours of one-on-one tutoring at Lansdowne once a week. Every Tuesday afternoon the students were taught by two French teachers, while the rest of the staff went back to Lansdowne for the regular staff meeting.

At the time of my inquiry Vanguard Elementary, founded in 1973, is located in Ville Saint-Laurent, and serves 168 students. Vanguard Intercultural High School has on its enrollment list 243 high school students, with 129 students in the English sector and 119 students in the French sector. There is a total of about 40 staff members, 35 of whom are teachers. The student:teacher ratio is 1:7, with no class larger than 15 and some classes as small as four or five students. Since July 1992, this intercultural secondary school has been relocated in a commercial building on Metcalfe Avenue in Westmount. This location has been made possible and available through the support of Reader's Digest. As the building was originally designed as an office and not a school, there is no playground. Only last year did the school build a gym on the roof of the school.



The teachers at Vanguard consider the students as individuals with specific characteristics that require specific approaches to learning, different from the traditional learning styles. For example, when Lynn Bernard and Ann Elbourne teach history they do not expect the students to sit in a traditional didactic lesson fashion. They have the students act out different historical scenes and characters. Rebecca Jones is one of many teachers who permit students to hand in assignments in a variety of ways. Students in her class have the option of writing a traditional paper, audio taping their project and handing in a cassette tape, or using their creativity to hand in a collage or sing a song about the subject that they are studying. The school professionals, the teachers and psychologist, along with the students and parents, tease out each student's strengths and weaknesses and develop strategies and a specific program which will help each one attain their own educational goals (I.E.P.; Individual Educational Plan). These strategies and programs are reviewed regularly throughout the year to ensure their continued effectiveness and relevance.

Is Vanguard Secondary school achieving its goal? Each student that I interviewed, without exception, described the difficulties that they had had in schools before they came to Vanguard, and the success *they have felt* since they began at this school. The following are excerpts from interviews with three students who were involved in the clinical case studies, and with a parent of one of these students.

Each of these students are in Secondary III at Vanguard Intercultural High School. Albert is a 17-year-old male. His family is from Barbados. Albert is a first generation Canadian. Albert had many medical problems when he was born. He developed slowly and was placed in a variety of school settings, one of which was Summit School, a school for children who are intellectually handicapped. Albert, a student with Lds, did not feel comfortable in this environment. Albert's parents were not pleased with this school placement either. However, they were told by the school personnel at a mainstream

elementary school, that it was the only school which would admit him. Albert explained his feelings of independence since coming to Vanguard to me this way:

***"Things are a lot better here"***

*Albert: Things are a lot better here (at Vanguard). I'm doing the work that I like to do instead of doing something you know like it was elementary work I used to do. Well I feel like I'm learning something now...I felt like I was wasting my time before. I was doing a grade three math book and now I'm doing grade nine...it's very challenging, even though I didn't pass the grade nine math exam but at least I had a chance to work on something hard.*

*Tara: What do you think has changed for you since you started attending Vanguard?*

*Albert: I feel more dependent on myself and I feel I can accomplish a bit more. (June 22, 1998; Case Study Interview)*

Patrick is a 16 year old male who lives in the city of Montreal during the week with his older brother, who attends McGill University. On Wednesdays, Patrick's mother comes to town for the day and they have dinner together and talk about how the week is going. On Friday afternoons Patrick and his brother drive down to the Eastern Townships where their parents and sister live. Patrick attended both private and public schools before his parents learned of Vanguard. In the following conversational exchange with Patrick in June 1998, he talks about his school experiences before Vanguard and now. He explains how the size of the classes makes a big difference, and that because everyone at Vanguard has some kind of academic difficulty, he is more comfortable asking questions and having his needs met.

***"I went from the crappiest in the class to like the head of the class"***

*Patrick: I went to a French school first. I didn't ask for help because my French wasn't as good so I couldn't like ask. I failed grade five on purpose....because I was doing really bad so I was just like I know I can't pass, I'll try really hard next*

*year..... Then I went to English school. I failed math because the classes were so big...it was like thirty people. I failed English because it was my first year in an English school and I didn't know how to read and I didn't know how to write.*

*Tara: Do you think it would have been easier if you had started at an English school?*

*Patrick: I don't know. If I would have started at an English school I don't think I would have learned French...like my English now, I can't read very good and my writing isn't very good but it's a lot better than it used to be.*

*Tara: How come it's better?*

*Patrick: Because I went to Vanguard. The classes were like classes of thirty people down to like eleven or sixteen... it's like incredible! When you're like in a big class of thirty like if you sit in the right spot they won't notice you, so like you can just sit there and draw or like talk...Here (Vanguard) you're always like, they're always like, 'Do your work' and like they're always on your back, (he said very positively).*

*Tara: Did you ask questions when you were in a class of thirty students?*

*Patrick: no, not so much.*

*Tara: I have noticed you asking a lot of questions in class at Vanguard. Like yesterday in math class you needed Peter's help and you said, "yo yo Peter, I need help over here". Did you think you ask more questions now?*

*Patrick: yeah, because...everybody is pretty much the same, it's like ADD or dyslexic, they might have the same problem as you, like if I ask a question if there's someone who is like a little bit shy they might profit off my question. Yeah, and I might profit off someone else's question too.*

*Tara: Has Vanguard made a difference for you?*

*Patrick: Yeah, I went from the crappiest in the class to like the head of the class in geography and biology. English I'm ok and French I help people. (June 26, 1998; Case Study Interview)*

This excerpt illustrates that Patrick began to feel included at Vanguard in contrast to his feelings of being segregated at the other schools which he attended. He was provided with support and began to experience success. Some people may question how a student moves from the bottom of the class to the top within a few short years. Some may ask if perhaps the curriculum is not as difficult as it is at other schools. Vanguard meets all of the MEQ objectives and the students write the provincial exams as do other secondary

students across the province. I would suggest that Vanguard provided Patrick with the support he needed. This support led him to become "success expectant".

Mrs. Gagnon reported that things began to change for Patrick when he began attending Vanguard. Patrick started out as an outgoing friendly preschooler. He became a child who was withdrawn and had no friends in elementary school as he experienced school failure. Now, since attending Vanguard, he has many friends and contributes to classroom discussions frequently. Patrick's mother, Mrs. Gagnon, offers this background information:

***"Grade One was a disaster"***

*Mrs. Gagnon: In kindergarten he spent an awful lot of time in the hall because there would be reading and he would not be able to sit and listen to the story...if he wasn't in the hallway he was in this listening program with these head phones. Grade one was a disaster because he didn't understand a word of French (June 26, 1998; Case Study Interview).*

Mrs. Gagnon reported that it was in grades three, four and five when Patrick was in English school that the family realized that Patrick was having serious academic problems.

***"There was no pressure for him to prove himself..."***

*Mrs. Gagnon: He just withdrew...just really, really quiet.*

*Tara: Do you think Patrick was able to ask the teachers for help?*

*Mrs. Gagnon: no, he just gave up.....I pushed him to excel physically so at least he would get respect from his peers. Just through the change that he's gone through at Vanguard is that he's a different person. ...maturity is part of it. But I attribute it (the change) in Vanguard too. He has so much confidence. He has confidence in himself. I think the teachers have made a tremendous difference. The first actual comment he made was he felt comfortable because everybody in the class was as dumb as him. There was no pressure for him to prove*

*himself... he was at ease because he was surrounded by people who understood him and everybody else was at his level (June 26, 1998; Case Study Interview).*

Although some may be concerned about Patrick identifying himself as "dumb", I feel it was indicative that he could relax and start to learn. His mother reported, "he was at ease because he was surrounded by people who understood him." I would suggest that this comfort level would allow him the freedom to learn and excel. He no longer felt segregated and different. It would appear that he now felt included.

Matthew is a 16 year old male who lives with his mother and step-father in Pincourt, just off the island of Montreal. Matthew has two older siblings, a brother and a sister, who are currently living in the Dominican Republic, as is his biological father. Matthew was born and raised in Pincourt. He reported experiencing a difficult childhood. His parents had a difficult divorce when he was in elementary school. He experienced considerable violence from his older brother. He hid this to help maintain as much peace as possible within the family unit. Matthew attended several public schools on the West Island before attending Vanguard in Secondary I. Matthew has a language-based Ld. He offers the following self report of how he experienced school before Vanguard.

***Life before Vanguard: "They (teachers) didn't help me"***

*Matthew: I didn't like myself much. Because I was a fat kid and I wasn't very nice to people...I was scared to be with people. I didn't like the teachers and I did nothing at all because they didn't spend any extra time to help me out when I didn't understand it.*

*Tara: Did you ask for help?*

*Matthew: Yeah, but they didn't help me...they got mad at me.*

*Tara: What kind of help were you expecting from them, do you think?*

*Matthew: To re-read stuff and to explain questions and stuff, that's about it. (June 30, 1998; Case Study Interview).*

The founders of Vanguard believe that students with Lds are just as capable as their peers without disabilities as long as their individual strengths are being capitalized on and

not their weaknesses (Personal Communication, Ann Elbourne, teacher at Vanguard, April 1998; Wilkie, 1994). As reported by Patrick and other students in his grade, Vanguard provides students with smaller student teacher ratios as well as a safe place to ask questions and learn. All of the teachers have been formally educated to understand what it means to have a Ld, as many of them have special education certificates and all have taken part in workshops and training courses offered at the school. Karen and Allen, both 15 year old students describe what school was like for them before they entered Vanguard Intercultural High School. They both attended public schools on the island of Montreal before entering Vanguard. These next excerpts emerged from their focus group interview in which they were being asked to discuss who and how they access and use people for social support. It was during this group interview that their pre-Vanguard experiences evolved through informal conversation.

*"I used to like keep it in (questions, problems)"*

*Karen: I used to like keep it in (questions, problems). I used to not like ask questions, because I would feel like it was a stupid question....My mom would tell me to ask questions if I didn't understand, but I didn't.*

*Tara: So when your mom would suggest that you ask questions, did that help you to ask them?*

*Karen: No, it put more pressure on me. (March 4, 1998; Focus Group Interview)*

In the next excerpt, Karen and Allen explain what it was like when they began elementary school and felt like they were the only student in the class with Lds.

*"If you ask the teacher a question, then like they'll think you're stupid. Cuz like everybody else doesn't have a learning disability..."*

*Karen: Well, like in elementary, like, like people don't know you have a learning disability, so if they ask you...If you ask the teacher a question, then like they'll*

*think you're stupid. Cuz like everybody else doesn't have a learning disability.... So like here, (Vanguard High School) everybody like, has difficulties somewhere. Allen jumped in: It's a better environment here*  
*Karen: I used to be called names*  
*Tara: What kind of names?*  
*Karen: Like stupid*  
*Tara: Wow, and now?*  
*Karen: Here I like better 'cuz....I'm not*  
*Allen: We all know that we have weaknesses here . It's like in my old school, a lot of kids were smarter and you could see that they're smart. And then they get like... If I start asking questions they'll wonder, what kind of an idiot am I. It makes yourself stand out if you start asking questions. Ya, they just look at you like you didn't get it. (March 4, 1998; Focus Group Interview)*

As in the excerpt taken from the interview with Patrick's mother, a consistent message that the students have reported is being conceptualized as "stupid". For instance Karen said, "I used to not like to ask questions, because I would feel like it was a stupid question." Or Allen reported wondering if others in his class would ask, "What kind of idiot am I" if he asked a question. It is not uncommon for adolescents to worry about asking questions. As we know, peer acceptance at this stage of life is crucial. However, among these students with Lds in this inquiry the question becomes, do the students feel better about themselves in this school or are they just more at ease? I would suggest that both viewpoints are valid.

Each student with whom I spoke, in either a focus group interview setting or in a one-on-one clinical case study interview, described their difficult school experiences before attending Vanguard. I have chosen these few excerpts to highlight for the reader the extreme difficulties which these students faced in 'regular' schools which were not experienced in understanding students with Lds. In these conversational exchanges, the students were clearly able to describe how they felt in the schools they attended before Vanguard and how they now perceived themselves.

Vanguard was selected as the research site because all of the students who attend the school have Lds. Each of the students upon entrance into the school have had a full psycho-educational assessment within the last two years, which documents their learning difficulties. There are three advantages in choosing this school as a research site. It is one of the few schools in which all students have documented Lds. The expertise of the teachers in the school working with students who have Lds provides an additional source of information to understand how students with Lds use people in their social networks for social support. Finally, Vanguard provides the students with additional academic support, and I was interested in finding out when, why, and how the students access this support (e.g., extended time on tests, an after-school tutoring program, school psychologist).

My driving question remains: Are there differences among students with Lds in terms of how they use support? The current literature suggests that there are more students with Lds who have lower social status as compared to their peers without disabilities (e.g., Asher & Taylor, 1981; Gresham, 1982; La Greca & Stone, 1990; Sale & Carey, 1995; Siperstein, Bopp, & Bak, 1978), are perceived negatively by their peers and their teachers (e.g., Cardell & Parmar, 1988; Siperstein & Goding, 1985), and are more likely to be rejected and neglected and have more social problems than their peers without disabilities (e.g., Swanson & Malone, 1992; Wiener, Harris, & Shirer, 1990; Wiener, 1987). The goal of this research is to understand the differences among students with Lds. Although the majority of students with Lds have these areas of difficulty (i.e., a lowered social status as compared to their peers, are perceived negatively by their peers and teachers; and may be more rejected and neglected than their peers), there are students with Lds who do not have a lowered social status, who are perceived positively by their peers and teachers, who are not rejected, not neglected, and do not have additional social problems. The students themselves in this inquiry reported many of the same negative



findings as the research reports when they were attending schools which were not tolerant or trained in the needs of students with Lds. The students report differences when they are in a school environment where they feel understood and respected. To my knowledge no one as yet has looked at students with Lds as a group, and looked for similarities and differences in terms of how they use people for support.

### Gaining Access: To the School, Classrooms and Students

During the months of November and December 1997, I contacted the principal of Vanguard, H       Lavigne and asked her if the school would be interested in being involved in such a study. I presented the goals of the study to her and provided her with a written description of the project. Ms. Lavigne asked me several important and practical questions, such as how I saw myself being involved in the classroom and how much time I anticipated the focus groups would take. She expressed an interest in my study and said that she would contact the Director General, Alain Bougie, and forward a copy of my proposal to him. Ms. Lavigne called me the following week to inform me that the school would be delighted to be involved in such a project. The principal recommended that the Secondary III students and their teachers become involved as it was one of the larger groups of students in the school. She also felt that the students were representative of the different types of students with Lds that were members of the school community. Once the school had provided consent, Ms. Lavigne arranged for me to meet with the Secondary III homeroom teachers in her office. I met with them in order to tell them about the project, explain their potential involvement, tell them how the project would be useful and relevant to them, and ask if they would be interested in participating. The three teachers, Rebecca Jones, John Cummin, and Peter Crow were very excited by the project and agreed to participate. John described a situation in which he provided one of his students with every opportunity to help him with a book report. However, the student

never followed through, and the report was never completed. John said that he would really like to understand why this student would not accept the support he was offering him. Rebecca suggested that a study such as the one I was suggesting would really benefit the teachers and the students John and Peter agreed. I presented the project idea to the entire English sector staff at one of their regularly scheduled after school staff meetings on January 14, 1998.

### Pilot Study

In November, 1997 and then again in early January 1998, Yvan, a 15 year old male student who attends a private school in Montreal and his family agreed to participate in a pilot study. Yvan had been assessed as having a Ld and met the Ministry of Education's definition of a Learning Difficulty (See Appendix A). Yvan and I met on a Friday afternoon in November at my house to determine whether or not the questionnaire that I had created was getting at my research questions. During our first meeting in November, it became clear that the way I had designed the questionnaire, as a sentence completion task, did not get at how students with Lds use the social support available to them, nor did it get at the nuances and subtle influences. It became evident quickly that this sentence completion task was not a natural way for students to respond to questions. For example, a question probing instrumental support was: When I need help doing my homework... One of the questions looking at emotional support was: When I want to share my feelings (like feeling happy, sad, or mad) I... Yvan answered "I don't know" to both of these questions. I chose Yvan as an excellent candidate for a pilot study as I have worked with him for two years and thus had already established a trusting relationship and rapport with him. It was my sense then (and it still is) that he is a student who does not use the support available to him.

Yvan and I then met in January 1998, again at my house, at which point I had re-designed the questionnaire. The questionnaire became a protocol for a series of scenarios based on five different types of support (Emotional, Instrumental, Informational, Companionship, and Conflict) (See Appendix: B and C). For example one of the scenarios regarding emotional support and the follow-up questions is as follows:

***Sample Scenarios:***

***Emotional support***

*If someone in your class won a contest on the radio, you know they could name the right song and they won concert tickets or a shopping spree at their favorite store. What do you think is the first thing they would do?, And then? Do you think they'd want to share their news with anyone? Who? What would they expect of that person? How would they want that person to react? What if you had won the contest, what would you do?*

*(If a student says they would never enter a contest, answer, What if every student in your school had their name entered automatically, and your name was picked...).*

An example of Instrumental support is as follows:

***Instrumental support***

*When someone in your class is having trouble, maybe in math or reading, something in class. What do they do?*

*If the student indicates that they seek support, the student would be asked the following follow-up questions: What do they expect of the person helping them?*

*What would that person expect of them? (i.e. tell them the answer, explain..)*

*(Case study only: What would you do in the same situation?).*

After an analysis of Yvan's audio tape and a discussion with him, I learned that the scenarios seemed to be well presented and needed no adjustments. I was able to get a glimpse at how Yvan uses his social support network. I learned *who* the individuals were

that made-up Yvan's social network, **from his perspective** (e.g., Parents, his tutor, and friends). Here are two excerpts which highlight whom he uses for academic support in the area of math, and then for companionship.

***Informational/Instrumental support***

*Tara: What would you do if you were having trouble with math?*

*Yvan: Sometimes I go up to the teacher. Other times I try figuring it out and I don't*

*Tara: So what do you do*

*Yvan: Usually, I ask my father. Science for example, I sometimes I have a hard time with*

*Tara: What do you do when you have a hard time with science?*

*Yvan: The teacher isn't usually all that supportive so again my parents*

*Tara: How do they help you*

*Yvan: Usually they answer the questions I ask. Usually the questions are like What does such and such mean*

***Companionship***

*Tara: When you want to hang out and do really fun things what do you do*

*Yvan: I go to films*

*Tara: What else?*

*Yvan: skiing is usually fun*

*Tara: Do you ever do some of this fun stuff with other people?*

*Yvan: Yes I've gone with an old friend (from an old school), or Luc*

*Tara: How long have you known Luc?*

*Yvan: Since grade 1*

*Tara: Wow, where does he go to school?*

*Yvan: He goes to Brebeuf*

*Tara: Oh, so he's older*

*Yvan: No it's a high school, he's 15.*

*Tara: Do you consider him a friend?*

*Yvan: yeah*

*Yvan: Sometimes we go to each other's houses and play computer games*

*Tara: How often to you get together?*

*Yvan: Usually once a week or once every two weeks. Which isn't much, since we live so close.*

I learned *who* Yvan relies on for different types of support (e.g., he relies on family for all types of support except emotional support for which he relies on himself, and when he is in conflict he relies on himself). I was able to gather information on *how* Yvan uses those people in his network. Yvan has great difficulty accessing the support available to him. He reported that he does not feel comfortable approaching his teachers. Instead he tends to pretend the assignment doesn't exist, in his words, "I forget about it, until it's due, then I worry." He reported that he feels comfortable working with his parents and his tutor and would rather not approach teachers. This is a problem because neither his tutor nor his parents are in school or in class with him. It is difficult for one of them to clarify assignments or due dates and help Yvan if he is not sure what he needs to do. It became evident that when something becomes too overwhelming, Yvan appeared to "shut down." If it is a school related problem or if he requires clarification, he doesn't ask anyone. However, his parents and tutor try to help him with the information he has. In conflictual situations, he usually withdraws.

***Yvan reports how he copes during conflict***

*Tara: What happens if you get into a fight with someone?*

*Yvan: I don't fight, I haven't been in a fight since I was in grade 3.*

*Tara: What do you do when you get into a fight with your parents. What do you do?*

*Yvan: I sulk, I sleep*

*Tara: Do you remember the last time you got into a fight with them?*

*Yvan: Yes it was a couple of weeks ago. But I don't remember why. We fight too often, which isn't good. We fight over little things.*

*Tara: So what do you do to get over them?*

*Yvan: Not much*

*Tara: So you go into your room and you sulk. When you come out of your room is it over? What happens?*

*Yvan: Nobody talks about it, everyone just forgets about it after a while*

*Tara: If it were your dream world, how would you cope with it?*

*Yvan: I don't know I'm not good with dream stuff.*

This pilot interview confirmed for me that the scenarios asked during interviews with students who have Lds would provide more authentic data than a sentence completion task. The pilot also demonstrated the importance of case studies for this type of research as rich data was shared.

### Gaining Access Into The Classroom

The tools of qualitative inquiry which I used were: (a) participant observation; (b) field notes; (c) focus group interviews; (d) clinical case interviews; and (d) review of documents. The participants in the study were the 36 students in Secondary III at Vanguard Intercultural High School, their three homeroom teachers, Rebecca, Peter, and John, and in addition, the physical education teacher, Sarah Shake. During a later phase in the study seven students and their families were asked to take part in a series of one-on-one interviews. These were the clinical case studies. I began as a participant observer in the Secondary III classes, writing field notes in January 1998.

### Meeting the Students

There are 36 students in Secondary III at Vanguard. On the first day, I introduced myself and told the students about the project that I was hoping to carry out with their support. I told the students that the research that has been published in the area of students with Lds suggests that they use support differently from their peers without Lds. I said that some students use support well sometimes, and not at other times. I told the students that I wanted to understand what they did when they needed information or help with something. I told them that I would be taking notes during class and gave them

examples about the types of interactions I was interested in. Such as, if the teacher gave out an assignment and the student didn't understand, what would they do? Would they ask the teacher during class to explain? Would the student ask the teacher for clarification after class? Would they ask a friend? Would they wait and try to figure it out on their own, ask their parents, or maybe just not do it? I explained to them that there are lots of different ways of getting information. All three teachers had already told the students that I would be joining some of their classes from January 1998 until June 1998. Therefore, my arrival was not a surprise to anyone and hopefully did not disrupt normal routines, although I acknowledge that the presence of a researcher in any classroom-based study is a disruption. The students did not have questions on the first day of my arrival but they did a few days later as I became more immersed in the research site and their lives.

#### Participant Observations and Field Notes

In this section, I discuss my role as a participant observer, but more importantly the students' responses to my research activities. In mid-January, 1998 when school finally resumed after a major ice storm which left schools closed for several weeks, I joined the three Secondary III classes three days per week as a participant observer. I scheduled my time in order to observe all of the students in a variety of classroom contexts (see Table 1).

Table 1

Researcher's classroom schedule while engaged as a participant observer in the secondary III classrooms.

Time	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
8:13	Geography: Rebecca's Class	English John 's Class	Phys. Ed. Peter's Class
9:06	Phys.Ed. Rebecca's Class	MRE Peter's Class	Phys.Ed. John 's Class
RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS
10:14	Math John 's Class	One-to-one with Dan	ITT Rebecca's Class
11:07	English Peter's Class	Math Peter's Class	Student's in FSL Teacher's available for conversation
LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
12:50	Student's in FSL Teacher's available for conversation	ITT: John 's Class Geog.: Rebecca's Class	
13:43	Biology Rebecca's Class	Biology OR Geog. Rebecca's Class	Math:Alternate: Rebecca,Peter, John

My role in the classes was to observe all of the students and get a sense of who, when, and how they accessed and used support. Consent forms were not sent out until after I had developed a rapport with the students in each class. The students who are referred to in this document all gave their consent to participate in this study as did their parents. I had made the assumption that most of the support within the class would be provided by the teacher. However, this proved not to be the case. Certainly the teachers provided many forms of support. However, I had not anticipated the rich data that I would obtain regarding how the students were able to support each other. For example, in the following excerpt Karen, who is a stronger reader, was able to support Lara in English class, as the students were taking turns reading different character roles in Romeo and



Juliet. This is an excellent example of a student providing another student with informational support.

***Supporting and Anticipating on Behalf of Your Neighbor***

*Lara was reading the part of the Citizen and she was experiencing difficulty decoding. Karen began to support her by reading the words she was stumbling on. As someone else in the class was reading, Karen leaned over to Lara and showed her that she had a big speech coming up. When it was time for Lara to read again, Karen continued to support her (February 4, 1998; John 's English Class; Field Notes).*

I observed that frequently Lara was able to ask for support when she needed it. This is different from the above excerpt in which Karen observed a need for support and provided it on her own. The following narrative segments highlight Lara requesting support from Karen.

***"Where are we?"***

*It was Lara's turn to read and she had lost her place. She turned and asked her neighbor, Karen, 'where are we?' (February 11, 1998; John 's English Class; Field Notes).*

*During the English class on February 18th Karen was supporting Kathy, by helping her sound out words which she found difficult and she was telling Allen the words that he was having difficulty sounding out. Kathy and Karen were sitting towards the back of the class, Kathy was sitting in front of Karen. Whereas Allen was sitting at the front of the class. As the other students were reading Lara was practicing reading her up coming speech. Lara leaned over and pointed to a word in the speech and asked Karen what it said. Karen answered Vendetta. Lara said thanks and continued reading on her own (February 18, 1998; John 's English Class; Field Notes).*

### Researcher's Negotiating On-Going Access

It is important for researchers to understand that they can not assume access as a given when first entering a site, especially for this type of inquiry. I had assumed that since the school and teacher's had given me permission to be in the particular classrooms and since I had spoken to the students and told them about my study, that I was free to observe and begin the process of recording field notes. I realize now that I should not have made that assumption.

On February 4th, one of the teachers, Rebecca, brought to my attention that a student in her class was very concerned about the field notes that I was writing. I had discussed with the teachers that they could read my field notes at any time but I could not provide them with copies for reasons of confidentiality (as I was recording students' names and events relative to each class). However, I had forgotten to take into consideration any concerns the students might have about this research activity. On February 5th, 1998 I met with each of the three classes individually and provided them with the following explanation:

#### *Explanation of what I was writing*

*I went to each class and explained that I was writing down what was happening in the class because so much goes on without us really realizing it. I told each class that I was writing things for my own information and if I were ever going to use any of the information, I would ask for their permission. I assured them that it was unethical for me to use anything they said without their permission and that I would not. I also told them that if I asked for their permission to use something that they said, they could make up their own pseudonym, to ensure confidentiality. I explained that I was writing a thesis, 'a huge paper' which was already close to 100 pages and it would probably be close to 400 pages when it was done and that they were helping me out by allowing me into their classes. I reiterated that I really wanted to understand how they support one another and cope in different situations. Finally, I encouraged them to read my field notes as I was writing*

*them. I assured them that there were no secrets in what I was writing and I would be happy to read to them whatever they wanted or they could read the notes themselves. (February 5, 1998; Field Notes)*

On that day some of the students in Rebecca's class asked me to read some of my field notes. I did. Two of the students commented on how boring the field notes were, "It's just what happened in class, that's boring" said Anderson. The other two classes did not appear to be concerned about what I was writing everyday and did not want me to read from my field notes. At the time their only comments were, "You must go through a lot of pens in a year" said Jeff and "Doesn't your hand start hurting?" asked Lara. However, there were students in each of the classes who read my field notes every now and again. ITT and Physical Education seemed to be the classes where the students were able to be standing up and walking around. Therefore, those were the classes that they would ask me about my field notes or read them. The following conversational exchange took place during an ITT class, during which Cameron and Derek showed an interest in my field notes.

***What are you writing?***

*I had been talking with Cameron about how he had hurt his hand. He told me that he had hurt it bench pressing the night before. He trains for hockey. Derek then joined the conversation, as he works out too, training for kayaking. The two of them talked about their training routines and how much they could each bench press. As I was not a participant in the conversation I decided to jot down a few notes. They both were interested in what I was writing, as they were peering over my shoulder. I showed them what I had written and read it out loud to them. When I was done reading they resumed their discussion regarding how much they could each bench press. It was a noncompetitive conversation, they each seemed to be providing the other with information. There was a supportive tone in their voices and some of the comments, like Derek said, that's pretty good. Later in the same class Bruce and Donald approached me and looked through my notes.*

*Bruce was scanning the pages looking for his name. When he found it he asked, What did you write about me? I read the excerpt to him (February 5, 1988; Rebecca's Class; ITT taught by John ).*

Often when the students read my field notes they would elaborate on the situation as they had experienced it. The student's reading of my field notes turned into an excellent way for me to be sure that my notes are accurate. Some of the students corrected my notes along the way. A narrative vignette illustrating this is as follows:

#### ***Field note accuracy***

*I had written in my field notes that Karen had finished her poem and had gone to sit with her friend Tanya and they were chatting. Karen read my notes and said, "No, that's wrong. I was helping her with her poem". (March 1998, John's Class, English, Field notes)*

The students were also very helpful in terms of clarifying information or situations as they occurred, to ensure I was capturing relevant events from their perspective. The following vignette highlights a student clarifying information for me.

#### ***Field note clarification***

*It was the first few minutes of physical education class. There seemed to be a lot of action, as there usually is during this class. By action I mean some students were shooting hoops at one end of the gym, others were standing around the benches chatting, while others were setting up the volleyball nets and the stereo. Rebecca had come into class and asked Stephen and Anderson join her outside the gym so they could talk. There had been an argument earlier in the morning which had spilled into the last class and I presumed that she wanted to make sure this argument was resolved. I asked Marianne why she thought Rebecca was talking with Stephen and Anderson and she confirmed my thought. She explained how Stephen and Anderson had been bickering and down on each other in the last class, saying things like, "Don't be stupid" when one tried to answer a question, or "yeah right" in a sarcastic tone. She said something had happened earlier but she wasn't sure what. As we were chatting I decided to take the opportunity to*

*ask Marianne about the "taxing" that had occurred two days earlier between her classmates and some students at Westmount High School. Marianne described what had happened and suggested I speak with Patrick, if I wanted more information, as he had been there. (April 15th (or 22nd), 1998, Rebecca's class, Phys.Ed., Field notes)*

It is important to note that Marianne told me what she could about an incident and referred me to another student whom she felt would provide additional information. The issue becomes whose evidence counts as providing an accurate picture of a given situation. At this point in my analysis, the students' and teachers' information had been complimentary. However, I predicted that data would be contradictory when one compares the case study interviews of the students and their parent reports.

#### Role of Researcher

A critical component of qualitative research is the concept of 'human-as-instrument'. 'Human-as-instrument' is a concept that was coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to exemplify the unique position taken by qualitative researchers. According to this concept, a person can be considered an instrument, flexible enough to capture the complexity, subtlety, and constantly changing situation which is the human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this particular study, I am responsible for not only collecting the data but also for finding meaning from the data.

The subjectivity of the researcher is an issue in qualitative research. As mentioned above, qualitative data includes people's words and actions. To capture the adolescent's words and actions I used several methods such as participant observation, group interviews, in-depth interviews, and the collection of relevant documents. I collected data primarily in the forms of field notes and audio-taped interviews. Data collected and analyzed includes 32 audio-taped interviews (6 audio taped focus groups, 9 case study interviews with students, 7 with their parents, and 8 teacher, tutor, or professional staff

interviews), 70 days of participant observations and school artifacts such as class handouts. Interviews lasted between fifty minutes and three hours. During this study, I observed all of the Secondary III students in various aspects of their everyday school life. This included observations in various venues such as the cafeteria, classrooms, at recess, hallways, and field trips, in which they were engaging in school related activities with people who were in their social networks. I wrote my field notes during or immediately after observations were made, whichever was most appropriate to the situation.

Qualitative research is emergent and recursive in nature. When one has a subset of data, one can begin to look for important aspects of the phenomena under study. These initial findings allow us to pursue relevant people, settings, and documents. In this study I was constantly analyzing my field notes looking for important aspects and preliminary patterns. The data were constantly being analyzed, while further observations were taking place. Participant observation continued throughout the eight month study.

Being physically present in the classes and attempting to be unobtrusive took time. Certainly at the beginning of the participant observations, the students in one class in particular reacted to my presence, despite the fact that I assumed what I considered to be an unobtrusive presence. The teacher of the class, Mr. Cummin, noted that one of the students was misbehaving more than usual and "acting-up." Mr. Cummin, explained that Drew was fiddling, playing with the stapler, and tapping his pen on his desk more than usual. Through prolonged presence in the classroom I can conclude that this particular student is extremely disruptive in all of his classes. For example, I observed him taking the staple gun in technology class and shooting it at the wall and pretending to shoot his peers, getting angry at a student in gym for no apparent reason and threatening him. I heard from many sources that this student exhibits extremely problematic behavior.

### Obtaining Consent From The Adolescents And Parents

Obtaining consent from the adolescents was not something I took lightly. I was well aware that the adolescents were minors and hence parental consent was absolutely necessary. However, adolescents are at a stage in their development when they are seeking their own independence and autonomy. My goal was to ensure that the students were comfortable with me as part of their class and understand the project that I wanted to carry out and their possible roles in it. I wanted them to know that I required not only the consent of their parents but of themselves.

I waited for three weeks for the students to become comfortable with me, get to know me and ask me questions, before I spoke to them about participating in focus group interviews and the study as a whole. I learned something important about wait time. I explained what would be involved and that a consent form was being sent home and if they wished to participate both they and their parents had to sign it, and then it was to be brought back to school. By the time the consent forms were sent home, I was well integrated into the school and classes and I felt that I had assumed a relatively unobtrusive role as a participant observer.

I took on various roles as a teaching assistant, fellow student, and researcher at the back of the class. I acted as a teacher's assistant at times, for example helping students with Geography or Biology questions and answers, acting as a reader and or scribe during tests. At other times I took on the role of student, for example when the students were reading from Romeo and Juliet and reading different characters' parts I was asked to take on parts, and in gym class when there was an odd number I filled in and played badminton and basketball and whatever else was going with the students. At others times, I was an observer at the back of the class, quietly taking notes. The following vignette is an example of a role that I took on in the class that made me feel uncomfortable.

***Exposed as a poor reader***

*As the teacher and students were deciding who was going to read which characters part for the next scene in Romeo and Juliet, Patrick said to the class, I think she should read, pointing to me. If you are going to be a part of this class, you should have to work to. The students agreed with him. I responded by saying, No, no, you guys read, I'm not a very good reader. Patrick responded immediately, Don't worry, we're no good either. Although very nervous, as I have not read out loud since high school and even then I always managed to be in the bathroom when it was coming up to my turn, I agreed to read. I was feeling extremely vulnerable, I was about to be exposed as a poor reader. As the teacher assigned me a part I said, I'm going to read the Modern English, not the Old English (one was on the right of the page, the other was on the left of the page). Pam, a student who reads at a lower elementary level, said, You have my permission, that's the one I read. (February, 1998; Field notes and Researcher's Journal).*

I had not revealed to the students that I too had difficulties in particular areas of academics. Until that point it had not come up. When an occasion presented itself in that class, I did not feel comfortable, nor did I see the timing as appropriate to share my difficulties with them as an entire group. I later discussed the above classroom event with the teacher, Peter, and wrote the following notes in my researcher's journal.

*Peter and I were talking when I revealed how uncomfortable that situation had made me. He had no recollection of the event. This highlighted for me how significant situations are for the person or people involved and not for others (Researcher's Journal, September 1998).*

Before the consent forms were sent home copies were provided to the principal and teachers for their approval and they were asked to make any changes they felt would be useful. No changes were made. The response rate was excellent; 71% of the students returned their consent forms within a week (only one parent who returned the form did not want their child to participate). The focus groups began with the students for whom I



had obtained consent. Regarding consent, there were difficulties with three students. One student wanted to participate and she asked me to call her mother to explain the project. I did. However, consent was not granted by this parent. It was unfortunate that she could not participate as she had wanted to and she was the only student in her class for whom permission was not granted. Rebecca confirmed that this parent was often difficult and did not permit her daughter to participate in activities which she did not consider important.

Another student, Antonio, had told his mother that he did not want to participate. Therefore, he returned the consent form with a negative response. However, when he spoke to his classmates about the project and they were all participating and excited about it, he reconsidered. He approached his teacher, Rebecca, and told her that he had misunderstood and asked if he could have another consent form to take home. The next day he returned with the new consent form signed and he joined a focus group interview. A third student, returned his signed consent form and he was placed in a focus group. On the day the group was to meet this student decided to remain in class and not join the group. When asked why, all he would say is that he changed his mind. I assured him that was no problem and that if he wanted to talk to me about the focus groups or the project I was available at recess, lunch and after school. This student and I never spoke one-to-one again.

The above examples all highlight the importance of informed consent and the freedom to withdraw from a project at any time. One student's mother did not want her to participate. Even though the student herself wanted to, she did not. Antonio did not think he wanted to participate but was permitted to change his mind and take part. A third student withdrew despite the fact that his consent had been offered. It is crucial to any project that it is clear that the participants may freely withdraw from the study at their own discretion and for any reason, at any time. This message was repeated to the

students, by me, during the information meeting held with the students and at the start of each focus group discussion and interview.

### Headnotes And Field Notes

It was during this gaining access into the school phase that I felt I had become a member of this school community. As I approached the school in the mornings and students were congregated outside they would say hello as I walked by. In classes I walked by or entered someone usually shouted hello, showed me something, asked me to read something, or asked me a question such as, what had I done on the weekend. I also felt comfortable in the staff room at lunch, eating with the teachers.

At first I recorded my initial impressions, "headnotes" and jottings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The initial impressions included things available to the senses (e.g., sounds of the physical environment), the physical setting (e.g., shapes of the classrooms differed, noise), and people in the setting (i.e. number of students in each class, there were far more boys in grade nine than girls, appearances of the students in terms of their 'street clothes' VS uniform). The following excerpt from my field notes describes the classes and students as I experienced them in early January 1998.

#### ***First Impressions: The school, a classroom, students and their uniforms***

*As I had worked in the school in the past, the school itself was familiar. I arrived one morning before the bell had rung, which meant that the students were all in the cafeteria chatting, getting ready for their day. As I walked in the direction of my first class I was struck by how quiet it was and noticed some of the renovations which had taken place over the summer, which I hadn't noticed in November. My first class was in Rebecca's room which the year before had not been a classroom. It was an odd shape, almost triangular, with enough desks for the eleven students in the class. There was a phrase written at the top of the board which caught my attention almost immediately, it read: "Children should*

*be seen, heard, and believed". I later understood that in Rebecca's class they chose and discussed a phrase of the week and left up on the top of the board for the week. All of the phrases that I saw were about empowering the students (re: self esteem, challenging racism, etc..).*

*The posters up on the walls were depicting, environmental awareness, which I later learned was a passion of Rebecca's which she shared often with her class. There were also posters of the students favorite bands, such as Nine Inch Nails, as well as some of the student's work which they had created in ITT (Information Technology) class. When the bell rang almost immediately the noise level increased and continued on an upward swing, until each student had found a classroom and the teacher had settled them down. I noticed right away that there were more boys than girls in the class (10:2 respectively). This was also true of the other two classes as well (10:2 and 8:4).*

*The next observation I made is that some students were wearing the school uniform and others were not. Many were wearing very baggy jeans, some were wearing sweatshirts and athletic tops. Shortly after arriving in class they started to peel off layers revealing their uniforms underneath. Anderson stood up, unzipped his pants, took off his jeans and voilà he was in uniform. As others took off their street clothes, I noticed that some students were wearing white shirts and others were wearing blue, I was not sure what the significance of this was (as this was the first year of uniforms). I leaned over and asked Stephen, a student I had known for three years, and he explained students could wear either color, it was part of the uniform.*

*Other students chose to be bold. For example, Charles, a student from one of the other Secondary III classes was wearing a hunter green sweatshirt with his white Vanguard polo shirt on top of it. No one seemed to comment at that time. As time went on I became aware of what a big problem the uniform was. Students often pushing the limits and some teachers followed the rules arguing with students about the correct uniform and others did not seem to (Field notes: January 1998).*

I then began to write more detailed field notes (See Appendix F). It was during this phase and collecting this type of observational data that I hoped to gain a general sense of the school, students, and teachers. I had not anticipated that I would begin to find answers to some of my research questions so soon. However, right from the start I began

to see to whom individual students turned within their school networks for different kinds of support, as well as how they use each individual for support. It became obvious to me that the students, on the whole, felt very comfortable asking questions and seeking support in class. Of course, there were students who were quiet and did not seek support, but the majority I observed did. The following narrative describes a student receiving instrumental support from his teacher and classmates.

***Desk re-arranging day***

*Anderson says that he does not want to stay where he is! He explains to the class and to Rebecca, She always sits on my desk and shows stuff, especially in Biology and I can't see! Anderson then got up and modeled what he had just explained. Rebecca and the class laughed. Rebecca then said, You're right, I'm sorry. Anderson's desk was then moved. Derek complained that he was now in Anderson's spot but said that he would try it. Homeroom period was over and Geography class started. Towards the end of class Anderson yelled, See, I told you, now Cameron can't see! Sure enough Rebecca was standing ahead of Cameron's desk and he couldn't see the litmus paper she was holding up. The class laughed, Rebecca moved and apologized to Cameron (Homeroom & Geography; Rebecca's class, February 3, 1998; Field Notes).*

This next excerpt also demonstrates that within the first few weeks of data collection I was observing students' comfort level, in that they were able to share worries with the class as a whole and obtain support when they needed it.

***Different strategies to obtain support in class***

*During an English class Alex is asked to read, he says, C'mon guys, you know I can't read! Peter says, Try, let's go. Alex begins to read and it is difficult for him to decode, his reading is choppy. When he comes across a word he doesn't know he has several strategies he relies on in order to obtain support. Often he would say "what?" in mid sentence and Peter would read the word for him (words such*

*as: gentleman and wrapper). A second way he obtained support was to pause until someone jumped in and told him the word (it was usually a student who jumped in). The final strategy Alex used was to say, "whatever that says" and continue reading. Alex had read the modern English version and he had not understood what he had read. He said out loud, I have no idea what I just read. Jill, responded to his subtle request for support. She explained the content to him without prompting from the teacher, in a very direct, supportive way (English, Peter's class, February 3, 1998, Field notes).*

During this initial stage I had hoped to have the opportunity to observe individual students in conflict with peers or teachers, but that opportunity did not present itself.

A research question that I had not considered, yet one that became clearly evident concerned the types of support the students with Lds provided to each other and to their teachers. The limited research that exists in the area of students with Lds and how they use social support, suggests that this group of students experience less social support from peers than their non Ld counterparts (Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996; Siperstein & Wenz-Gross, 1998; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997; Wenz-Gross, Siperstein, Untch, & Widaman, 1997). I am not comparing the students I observed to those without Lds, and my participants are in a segregated setting as opposed to general education. However, the students I observed supported each other often and without hesitation. There were many examples of students supporting one another constantly in all three classes where I collected my data.

### ***Supporting one another, while informing the class***

*The class was reading about forms of urban pollution. The topic of oil spills was introduced. Anderson, who had been lying with his head on his desk, appearing not to listen, popped his head up and began to speak. He told the class of a way he thought that oil spills could be prevented. He tried to explain the concept of using a rubber bladder. He was having difficulty explaining what he meant, so Derek jumped in to help. Derek was able to clarify and add to what Anderson had said. He explained how a rubber bladder works and that they do use them on*

*some boats. This addition by Derek was done in such a way that they were adding to each other's knowledge, Derek was not trying to up-stage Anderson with his knowledge, as he sometimes did, he was supporting his knowledge. I make this assumption based on my observation of both student's tone of voice and body language (Geography, Rebecca's class, taught by Rebecca, February 3, 1998; Field Notes).*

In Peter's MRE (Moral and Religious Education class) the class was discussing legal versus illegal drugs. The class was going to begin a module on marijuana. This particular day was what I would call a brainstorming day, understanding what the students already knew about marijuana, whether accurate or not. The following excerpt is another example of one student supporting another, while they both inform the class.

***Jeff began to add details***

*Jill described how helicopters were used in the Eastern Townships to identify marijuana plants. She explained that they used radiation and infrared cameras. Jill contributed to the best of her knowledge and then Jeff began to add details. Jeff added that when looking for marijuana it shows up as hotter on these cameras. Someone asked why. Jeff continued by saying, ...marijuana takes more humidity to grow, so they grow the plants close together to keep the heat in (MRE, Peter's class, Peter teaching, February 4, 1998; Field Notes).*

Physical Education class seemed to be the class that I was able to gain incredible examples of students supporting one another. It appeared that the students' who were the frequent receivers of support in content classes, were more often the providers of support in physical education. Certainly in the case of Stephen, he excelled in physical education and he was able to support his peers. His classmates were often reading for him and sometimes acting as his scribe during content classes. In this setting, he could provide some of them with instrumental support in physical education, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

***Stephen as the teacher***

*This was the first Martial Arts class Rebecca taught the class the first punch. While the majority of students caught on quickly, Donald had more difficulty. At this point the students were still in rows facing Rebecca. After the students had practiced on their own, punching in the air, Rebecca divided the students into two groups and asked Stephen to lead one group while she led the other. Stephen and Rebecca put their hands in the air and the students used their hands as targets. Stephen spent the time to ensure that each student was punching correctly. He was quickly able to zone in on where the students' punch was problematic and provide them with suggestions on how to improve it. He generally showed the student what they were doing and then showed them the correct way to punch, highlighting the spot that was difficult for them. Then he would ask the student to try again. As the student punched he would fine tune it. In other words, after the student had punched Stephen would say, "good, but a little more like this" and he would model. Stephen was really helpful, supportive and an excellent model. Stephen really spent time with each group member ensuring that they improved. Rebecca then joined his group as she had finished with hers and took over.*

*The students then were taught and practiced kicks. The students were practicing independently. However, Stephen noticed that Donald was having difficulty, so they started working together. Stephen showed him that it was important not to lean forward or backwards when he kicks and Stephen demonstrated why. He kicked and leaned forward and he explained that your kick doesn't have as much power and you can fall because you're off balance. Then Stephen showed Donald what happens if you lean back while you kick. Again no power and you can be easily pushed off balance by who ever you are fighting with. Then Stephen showed him the correct way to kick and he and Donald practiced side by side, with Stephen providing tips after each kick. Meanwhile Donald had a big smile on his face and listened carefully and tried to make the adjustments Stephen was recommending (Physical Education, Rebecca's class, taught by Rebecca, March 2, 1998; Field Notes).*

Here are some additional examples of students providing their classmates with support in such open, non-judgmental, and non-competitive ways. In the following excerpt Jeff and I were playing doubles against Patrick and Pam in a round robin of badminton. The

games that Jeff and I had played up to this point had been quite competitive, we wanted to win. When we were paired with a team who had a weak player the competitiveness virtually disappeared.

### ***Teaching and supporting a weaker player***

*Jeff and I had won our last two matches, we were ready to maintain our lead and advance. As we began our next match with Patrick and Pam it became evident that Pam was not a strong player. Almost immediately the tone of the game changed. Patrick trying to teach her how to serve. He modeled for her how to hold the racket and hit the bird. She was having difficulty getting the bird over the net. Next, Patrick stood behind her and practiced the motion of swinging the racket. All the players allowed her to re-take serves as often as she needed, without ever saying a word about making this exception. When the bird came over the net it didn't matter if it was directed at the correct person, we just played. The game was gentle and fun! I was extremely impressed by the students' patience, compassion, and teaching methods (Physical Education, Peter's class, Sarah taught, February 19, 1998; Field Notes).*

### ***Respectful and unobtrusive support***

*The class was playing hockey today. As the students' were finding their positions and getting ready, Donald stood in position waiting for the puck to be dropped. Marianne walked up to him and they had a little chat (I could not hear what was said from the side lines). When Marianne came back to the bench I asked her if she would mind telling me about their exchange. She explained, Donald really knows how to play defense now, but he sometimes gets confused about his job as a forward and sometimes he forgets which direction to go in. So I was just making sure that he knew what he was doing and that he was O.K.. I was shocked at her intuitiveness and her kindness, even her tone as she explained what she had done. When she was talking to me her tone was very matter of fact, no judgment! Later when I spoke to Rebecca I asked her if she had set up this pattern of students checking on fellow students, she said no. She added that Marianne quite frequently checks in on Donald, as do other students, as he has the most difficulty in physical education. During this exchange, Rebecca reported that she is*



*particularly proud of Stephen. He will take the time to explain things to others or show them how to do something. He is helpful and kind. She added that at times he will do something and she will have tears in her eyes because it was so spontaneous and self-less. Stephen has been very helpful to Donald, modeling appropriate teenage behavior for him. In fact Stephen won an award this year for his positive role modeling (Physical Education, Rebecca's class, taught by Rebecca, February 17, 1998; Field Notes).*

In Rebecca and Peter's classes students at times would be in conflict, but it was rare to see a student putting down another student in an academic area, or not supporting one another. In other words, I observed the students as very supportive of one another in relation to school. In John's homeroom, the dynamic was quite different. Although many students were supportive of one another, there were a few students who were disruptive and they received no support from the other students, except from other 'disruptive students'. The following excerpt highlights this dynamic. The following was observed during an English class. The students had been assigned characters from Romeo and Juliet and they were reading aloud their respective parts.

*"Matthew, come on!!" "Matthew, hurry up!!"*

*Kevin moved his chair so he could sit with Matthew. He told John that he had forgotten his play, so he was going to share with Matthew. (The next day in Gym, Charles A. disclosed to me that Matthew, Kevin, and Charles T. usually have their books for English, but they hide them so that they can share a book with a friend and chat or goof off). Matthew is not reading his part, he is fooling around and not following. John snaps his fingers and says, "Get it together Matthew". Matthew responds, "I'm only human sir".*

*At first when Matthew didn't read his part, his classmates would remind him it was his turn. When his attention did not increase, the students began to remind him that it was his turn, in a less than supportive manner. Whining at him, "Matthew, it's your turn" or "Matthew, come on!!" "Matthew hurry up!!" At which point, Matthew needed to figure out where in the play he was supposed to read. To compensate for Matthew not paying attention and not reading his part,*

*the other students chose to then read his part for him or they would skip his part altogether and read their own. When Matthew realized he yelled at Allen, "How am I supposed to read when you just keep going?!!" Matthew then read his part and John thanked him.*

*Matthew, playing with liquid paper again, continues to miss his cue when it's his turn to read. Students call out to him each time. John tells Matthew that it's his turn, Matthew turns to Kevin, with whom he is sharing a book, and yells at him for not telling him it was his turn. John interrupts Matthew and says, It is not Kevin's job, it's yours! Matthew says, Yeah, but he said he would tell me. John replies, Stop playing with the liquid paper and follow along. Reading resumes. It was Lara's turn to read, she has lost her place. She asks her neighbor, Karen, where they are. Before she has a chance to find the line and start reading, Matthew yells, Where have you been, it's your turn!!! and then smiles, Lara just looks at him and gives him an angry stare (English, John 's Class, John teaching, February 11, 1998; Field Notes).*

This lack of support observed in John 's class extended to physical education as well. In this next excerpt, the students were arriving, waiting to begin the class. Lindsay had hurt her ankle in the class before, hence there was a short delay. While the students were waiting to start the class some were playing basketball, others were chatting, others, as this next excerpt highlights were being destructive and rude.

#### ***Destruction and rudeness: Unsupportive behavior***

*Charles T. threatens Allen with the ball, Charles has hold of Allen's shirt, Allen runs away. Seconds later, Kevin, Charles T. and Michael are laughing in the corner. They comment to Scott, Weren't your glasses here? Scott looks concerned he had taken them off and placed them on the bench, so they would not get damaged during physical education, where did they go? Scott tries unsuccessfully, to get Sarah's attention (the teacher). I watched as the three boys struggled to put one of the lens back in the frame, they were successful. When the boys move away from the corner, Scott's glasses were back on the bench. They looked bent. Scott picked up his glasses and asked me to hold them. I said to him, they look bent. He responded, Yeah, it happened a while ago. This had been one of those awful situations as a researcher, when you want to intervene, but doing so would compromise your role as a researcher. Immediately following the*

*disbursement of the three boys in the corner, Charles T. is back bugging Allen, Catch the ball he said as he whips it at him. Allen runs away. Kevin goes up to Allen and taps him on the head and says, The ball is your friend, in a really condescending, mean way. (Physical Education, John's class, Sarah teaching; Field notes).*

I am unsure of why John's class is so different from the other two classes. John, Rebecca, and Peter each have their own unique teaching and classroom management styles, no one style is better than the other. There are more girls in John's class than in the other two classes but I did not observe gender differences as causing classroom difficulties.

However, in John's class there are a handful of students who are particularly disruptive and they appear to be close friends. In the other two classes there are disruptive students however, they do not seem to "feed" off one another. I am suggesting that John's class is more difficult than the other two due to the classroom culture which has evolved over the year.

### Focus Groups

I began holding focus group interviews (three to five students at a time) in order to begin to understand how these Secondary III students conceptualize social support. The three homeroom teachers grouped the students to ensure group cohesiveness and helped with the scheduling of each group so that students would not miss classes that were most difficult for them. The students were provided with a series of scenarios and asked how they or their friends might handle themselves in particular situations (see Appendix C, Social Support Scenarios). These focus groups were audio-taped and later transcribed. The use of focus group interviews is a technique which is largely used in marketing research. The groups can be composed of as many as 12 people or as few as 3 (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). There are many advantages associated with using focus groups. In terms of my research, I posed my scenarios in such a way that the students were asked what they think their friend or classmate would do in a given situation. Therefore, the

questions were non-threatening as I was not asking them about themselves personally. As a group, they could discuss scenarios without any one person feeling like they were on the spot. It was interesting to note, however, that in many of the groups when I asked a question about what a classmate or friend would do in a given situation, they would often answer, "It depends who? Like X, he'd..." (Allen, March, 1998, Focus Group). The students would often choose the most disruptive or the most extreme student in the class, which more often than not did not represent their own behavior. This is contrary to the marketing research which suggests that if you ask people about their neighbors or their friends, you get a more realistic response, which would have a high correlation to their own behavior in contrast to asking the person about themselves. The students that took part in the focus groups appeared to be very comfortable with each other. Many students came from classroom cultures which had spent a great deal of time building up a trusting and safe environment. It appeared to me the students felt comfortable together. When I asked a question about what a classmate or friend would do in a given situation the students often answered what they would do. The following is an excerpt from the focus group held with Allen and Karen. This excerpt highlights Allen's comfort in answering what he would feel in a particular situation.

*Comfortable talking about his own thoughts and feelings*

*Tara: Ok, think of something that makes either you or someone in your class really mad.*

*Allen: Something that makes me mad?*

*Tara: Something that makes you mad or a classmate mad.*

*Allen: Somebody who picks on you. Everybody used to pick on me, then Scott came and they started really bugging him and that took the pressure off me...(Allen and Karen, Focus Group, March, 1998)*

It appeared that Allen was comfortable talking about himself in front of his peers and me and hence did not talk about a classmate but chose to talk about himself. After I had spoken with the other member of the focus group, Allen added:

*A peer's insight*

*Allen: Well, what really bothers me is when we're in class and student X is disturbing the class. It really bothers me. And sometimes I say to him, Why do you act like a baby? It's so obvious he just wants attention. Yesterday... (Allen and Karen, Focus Group, March, 1998)*

In one of the focus groups, an interesting discussion took place regarding people's comfort level, in terms of sharing personal information in the group, before the interview began. One student, Nancy, said that she needed to go to the bathroom, but she would wait. I suspect planting the seed of escape so that, in case I asked a question she didn't want to answer, she could legitimately leave. A second student, Stephen, was able to verbalize his own concern about maybe not wanting to share information with the group, which I suspect was also Nancy's concern that she was not able to voice herself. The following is an excerpt from their discussion.

*"...like if I wanted to answer a question but I didn't feel comfortable in front of everyone"*

*Tara: Ok, just before I turned on the tape Nancy said something interesting, could you repeat it Nancy with the tape on?*

*Pause*

*Tara: I think you said you needed to go to the bathroom, but you were going to wait. Why?*

*Nancy: Yeah... pause, I forget.*

*Derek: So she could run away.*

*Stephen: You should hide this.*

*Tara: Hide what?*

*Stephen: So people won't know that you have it.*

*Derek: No she has to show it so people know they're being recorded, otherwise it could be held illegal against her.*

*Tara: Right,....I re-explain the role of the focus group and that I will ask their permission if I would like to use something they have said, and how they can change their name.*

*Stephen: What happens if I want to ask a question or say something but you don't want to say it because you're afraid of other people in the room.*

*Tara: That's a great question. What do you guys think? What should we do if you want to say something, but you don't feel comfortable in front of the group?*

*Stephen: Yeah, like if I wanted to answer a question but I didn't feel comfortable in front of everyone.*

*Tara: What do you think you should do? Or what do you think you could do?*

*Stephen: Ummmm*

*Derek: Ask us to leave?*

*Tara: Yeah, totally.*

*Stephen: Or else we could leave and go somewhere else.*

*Derek: We could run and hide.*

*Albert: If someone tells me to keep a secret I can keep a secret.*

*Tara: It sounds like there are lots of options. No one has to answer any question unless they feel comfortable. If there is something that you want to answer but you don't feel comfortable in the group we can talk just the two of us another day, like at recess, or we can step outside and leave the group in here. What we discuss in this group is private. I can not use anything that we discuss unless you give me permission and I would hope that you all will keep this meeting private so everyone feels comfortable. Is everyone ok with this plan? Answer only if you are comfortable and if you want to talk about or answer something privately we will leave the room or talk another time. Ok?*

*Everyone says, Yup or Yeah (Stephen M., Nancy, Derek, and Anderson, Focus Group, March 18th, 1998).*

It is interesting to note that this interview lasted 55 minutes into the second period. The students were so involved in the conversation that they were all late for their next class. The discussion flowed without interruption and I am sure we could have spoken for a lot

longer. It appeared that everyone was comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with the group, no one asked to meet later or leave the room.

Beginning at the end of February 1998 until early May 1998 students were brought together to form focus groups. The homeroom teachers of the Secondary III's volunteered to help me form groups of approximately three to six students each. The teachers helped in the scheduling of these groups so as students would not miss classes which were their most difficult and to ensure cohesive groups (see Table 2).

Table 2  
Information Regarding the Make-Up and Scheduling of Focus Group Interviews

Group	Students	Date	Length	Class
Group 1	Karen, Allen, & (Brendan)	Date	60 minutes	Mr. Cummin's Class
Group 2	Michael, Scott & Lara	Date	45 minutes	Mr. Cummin's Class
Group 3	Stephen M., Nancy, Derek, & Anderson	Date	55 minutes	Ms. Jones's Class
Group 4	Lindsay, Patrick, & Luke	Date	55 minutes	Mr. Crow's Class
Group 5	Donald, Bruce, Blair, Cameron, Antonio, & Albert	Date	80 minutes	Ms. Jones's Class
Group 6	Charles L, George, & Stephen B.	Date	45 minutes	Mr. Crow's Class

Each group met during class time in an office which is shared by the Vice Principals, Peter Crow and Lina DeBlasio. This was an ideal location as both of these people taught

for most of the day and hence did not need the office. At times the groups were interrupted as the phone in the room was needed by one of these individuals or a teacher. Generally this was an excellent space for conducting focus group interviews and not be interrupted.

When the students and I met in this office, I explained the purpose of the focus group before beginning the session, to ensure that informed consent had been given. Next, I asked the students questions about who makes up their social network (See Appendix B). I then provided the students with a series of scenarios and asked what their friends or their classmates would do in the given situations. Depending on the students' answer, a variety of follow-up questions were asked (See Appendix C, for Social Support Scenarios and follow-up questions).

It was during this focus group interview phase of the study, that I had hoped to get a general sense of who the students actually used for social support. The focus groups tended to become social venues, where the students were comfortable discussing themselves. During this phase I wanted to understand who the students included in their social networks. Secondly, I hoped to determine **who** the students turned to or relied on within their social networks for particular types of support — emotional, informational, instrumental, academic support and companionship, if anyone? In addition to whom the students relied on a third factor to be understood was, the nature of the social support provided by each individual, in each different type of support. In other words, what kind of support does each person provide, depending on the type of support?

Fourth, during this phase I also hoped to gain some initial insights as to **how** the students use or don't use the people in their networks for support. In other words, when the students were provided with different scenarios, the question became not only **who** the students name as people they could call on for support, but also **how** the students use



or do not use their support. Follow-up questions included; what do the adolescents expect from individuals in their network? Do they have any preconceived expectations?

The following excerpt is from a focus group of three students. They all reported coping differently in conflictual situations. Lindsay and Patrick have been observed in class accessing support well, whereas Luke accesses support less well. By this I mean that Patrick and Lindsay ask for and receive support when they need it. Luke tends to not ask questions and wait for support to be given by the teacher.

### *Coping with conflict differently*

*During the focus group interview with Luke, Lindsay, and Patrick it became evident that they all respond differently in situations. The students were asked, Everyone gets into fights and they cope with fighting differently. What are some of the things that either you or your classmates do when you get into a fight?*

*Lindsay reported that she swears and engages in verbal fights. She reported that she uses her cousin for support, by calling her or going over to talk with her. "I expect her just to listen".*

*Luke said that he tries to get out of fights, by walking away. "I don't really get into fights". He said that he usually coped on his own and watched TV. He reported that he does not seek support from anyone.*

*Patrick reported that he copes in a variety of ways. "I either watched TV or call someone". He said that when he seeks support he usually calls a friend. He expects his friend to listen and tell him about similar experiences that they have had. (Lindsay, Patrick, and Luke, Focus Group, March 5, 1998).*

(Please note that direct quotes were not used throughout the above excerpt as the dialog would have been close to two pages).

A fifth criterion was **how** the people, within the students' social networks, support the students in different situations. The students were asked **how** each individual supports them. (e.g., verbal support, an explanation, a demonstration, etc.). In the case studies these types of questions were followed-up by asking the particular individual **how** they see themselves as supporting the student in different situations. A follow-up

question was: What do they think each individual expects of them, what do they consider to be each person's role? Finally, I hoped that the students' voice during the focus groups would provide insight into with whom the students have conflicts and over what.

### Preliminary Analysis of Focus Groups and Continued Observation

During the months of February through May two of the tapes from the focus groups were transcribed and a preliminary analysis began, using techniques recommended by Morehouse and Maykut (1996). I began by first "unitizing" the data, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) call it. I set aside the original data and used photocopies for unitizing and subsequent data analysis. I read through each transcript looking for units of meaning. In other words, I looked for meaning through the words and actions of the participants, looking for information which would help me begin to understand how adolescents use people for social support. Each statement made by the students was analyzed in terms of the essential concepts they convey. The scenarios themselves were divided into five different types of support and each of the students' statements fell within one of these support types. Table 3 illustrates the themes that were explored and the questions that I was trying to answer and a template was made. As each unit was identified, I drew a line across the page to separate the one unit from the next. These units of meaning were then cut from the photocopies and attached to a cue card. On each cue card the type of support was documented and a summary of the interview portion was written. Every piece of the transcript was unitized, there were no stray pieces.

Table 3

Themes and Questions Being Explored during Analysis of the Students' Statements

Students' Name	THEME	THEME	THEME	THEME	THEME
Allen	Emotional Support	Conflict	Companion-ship	Instrumental/ Informational Support	Definition of Support
Who					
How					
Why					
What					

The second step in this analysis process was to create a matrix for each student. In other words, the summaries on the cue cards were then used create a matrix which was a visual representation of the data, so that student responses could be examined in terms of commonalties and differences.

Triangulation

There are four types of triangulation as defined by Denzin (1978). In this study I used two out of the four types of triangulation. They are: data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The first, data triangulation, refers to the use of a variety of data sources. In this study the students with Lds themselves, their teachers, families and other relevant significant others were all included as data sources. The following excerpts highlight data triangulation. Patrick's mother describes her involvement in her son obtaining his snow boarding instructors' certification. Patrick acknowledges his mother advocated on his behalf, but suggests that he could have done it without her support, but it would have taken longer. I had spoken with Patrick's physical education

teacher, Sarah Shake, earlier in the school year about Patrick and his athletic ability, as he was trying to organize a class trip to the Trapezeum and Horizon Roc. This earlier conversation with Patrick's teacher provides additional information and corroborates information provided by Patrick and his mother. In speaking with Patrick, his mother and his teacher, one gets confirmation and a full picture of a process involved in Patrick obtaining his certification and one gains insight into the slightly different perceptions that exist between mother and son about how he was able to take this certificate.

### ***Obtaining snow boarding certification***

*Mrs. Gagnon: Yeah, he's a snow boarding instructor. Yes, he got his instructor's this January. ....I pushed him to get his snow boarding certification. I do all the leg work because he wouldn't have done it on his own. I had to go with him because he was a junior (too young). I had to take the course, too, and I already had my certification. But my husband and myself, we both did the course with him. Sometimes that's what it takes. When it came to snow boarding certification, I knew he had the ability to do it, so I signed him up. I do the leg work so that there will be no obstacles. If there's an obstacle he'll give up. (Mrs. Gagnon, Case Study Interview, June 1998).*

### ***Patrick confirms, how he obtained his snow boarding certification***

*Patrick: yeah I used to, I had a job last year. I was a snow board teacher. I had a lot of help from my mom with that...like...she did a lot of it actually...she shouldn't of but she did...like yeah...like there's a clinic for to see like every year there's a clinic for the snow board for the new people who want to become snow boarders (instructors) and she signed me up for that and like she signed me up to get my level one and she did all this stuff that I could have done but I didn't. I would have done it but it probably would have taken me longer to do it.....yeah...I appreciate it but I wish like I feel like I....I need to get more independent, do it all by myself...(Patrick, Case Study Interview, June 1998).*

***Sarah talks about Patrick's initiative and athletic ability***

*I had heard the students talking about the possibility of going to learn the trapeze as a physical education outing. I approached Sarah during physical education class to ask her about the possibility. She said, Patrick is trying to organize a field trip to the Trapezium and to a rock climbing gym, they're in buildings beside each other. His mum (Mrs. Gagnon) is into the trapeze and has taught Patrick. Patrick's parents are very supportive of him. They have encouraged him to excel in sports. He's a rock climber as well. Patrick is trying to organize the class to go to a trapeze place to learn the trapeze and then go next door and go rock climbing. (A talk with Sarah, Sarah's Physical Education class, Peter's Homeroom students, May, 1998).*

The second, methodological triangulation, involves using multiple methods to study a single area of interest. In this study, I used participant observation, focus groups, in-depth case studies which involved semi-structured interviews with the students and their significant others. In the following excerpts Patrick reports on how he copes when he is having difficulty in class. The first excerpt was taken from Patrick's focus group interview, the second from his case study interview, and the third is from my field notes which were taken during one of Patrick's math classes.

***"I would go ask the teacher...or I'll ask another person who does understand it."***

*Patrick: Well, um, if there's someone who's doing good in your class, they'll help. That's what I do if, if I'm doing good and I understand, I'll help someone who doesn't understand.*

*Tara: What if it was you that was having trouble? What would you do?*

*Patrick: I would go ask the teacher and tell them I don't understand this and, or I'll ask another person who does understand it. (Patrick; Patrick, Lindsay, & Luke Q., Focus Group Interview, March 1998).*

***"...I'll probably ask someone who is really good at..."***

*If I'm having trouble in class, well I'll probably ask someone who is really good at math like just to show me like the first answer, and to see if I can get it from there (a peer) and if I still don't understand I'll ask the teacher. ...like he (a peer) would explain me how he did it, like I don't like it when people like, like if I want to learn how to do it and there like here's the answer I'm like no show me how you did it. ...like if I have to get the homework in (hand in homework) in like five minutes then I'll just write down the answers, but if I have the time like I'll ask them to show me how to do it...(Patrick, Case Study Interview, June, 1998).*

***Observing Patrick when he is having difficulty***

*Patrick is frustrated today (in math class). He's having a difficult time figuring how to use the chart in the textbook and even when someone tells him which numbers to use he's not sure where the numbers should go in the formula. He keeps turning around to ask Luke M. for explanations. Luke M. is doing his best to explain but Patrick doesn't understand. He's being very vocal at the front of the room, huffing and puffing and saying, "I don't get this" "This is too confusing". Then he raises his hand and calls Peter (the teacher) over to help him. ...Peter approaches Patrick when he finishes with another student. They speak together privately (I can't hear). Then I hear Patrick say, "What? That makes no sense Peter!". They continue working together. Meanwhile, I wander around the room and start working with some other students who are also finding the task difficult. (Peter's Math class, Field Notes, February 1998).*

These excerpts highlight the importance of triangulation. Each data source adds to our knowledge of how Patrick was able to achieve a snowboard certificate and how he copes when he is experiencing difficulty in class. In addition each method used in this inquiry, participant observation, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews, contributed to an understanding in a single area of interest such as how one copes when experiencing difficulty in class. Both data triangulation and methodological triangulation are ways to minimize threats to validity.

## A Case Study Approach

### Case Studies

In contrast to deductive researchers who “hope to find data to match a theory, inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 4). Case studies by definition “get as close to the subject of interest as they possibly can, partly by means of direct observation in the natural setting and partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, and desires)…” (Bromley, 1986, p. 23)

The disciplines of anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology have influenced case study research in education. There are four main characteristics of case studies. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, holistic, and inductive. The case study method offers a means of investigating the complexities inherent in adolescents' understanding of how they use people for social support. The case studies produce holistic accounts of the phenomenon as it is situated in real-life. Each case offers insights which can create tentative hypotheses which help to structure future research, and thereby advancing the knowledge base in the area of adolescents with Lds. Case studies are particularistic in that they focus on a specific situation or phenomenon. In this research project I refer to seven adolescents with Lds.

I have chosen to use a combination of descriptive and interpretive case studies. *Descriptive case* studies provide detailed accounts of how (in this research) adolescents with Lds use people in their social networks for different types of support. These case studies are not guided by established or hypothesized generalizations. This type of case study presents information in areas of education where little research has been conducted. Although there has been considerable research in the area of social support, very little has been focused on Lds and even less in the area of adolescence.

*Interpretive case studies*, like descriptive case studies are descriptive; however, these descriptions are used slightly differently. They are used to develop conceptual categories, to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data collection. The literature which existed at the time of the data collection, categorized students with Lds as one group and suggested that they use their support networks differently than their peers without disabilities (e.g., Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997). Although this may well be accurate, I felt that there was a second group of students with Lds who were not being represented in the literature, those who access and use support well. Researchers who use an interpretive case study approach gather as much data about the phenomenon as possible with the intent of interpreting or theorizing about the phenomenon. In this study I analyze the data and develop categories that conceptualize the differences among these two distinct groups of students with Lds, those who access and use support well and those who do not.

In order to obtain the most accurate image of the participants experiences and perceptions, the same scenarios and open-ended questions used during the focus group interviews were asked during in-depth interviews with each student, one-to-one. These scenarios and questions were used to explore the participants and their parents experiences. This case study approach has been suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (1990), and Yin (1989) as an appropriate methodology for an in-depth study of small numbers of cases, in order to make analytical generalizations, but not generalizations to larger groups.

#### Teachers' Criteria for Selecting Case Studies

In order to select students to participate in the in-depth case studies, I asked the three homeroom teachers to nominate students. I met individually with the three teachers, Rebecca Jones, Peter Crow, and John Cummin. I asked them to nominate



students whom they thought would be interesting to interview, based on the knowledge that I wanted to understand how adolescents with Lds use people available to them for support. I reminded each of the teachers of the nature of the study by saying: "As you remember, I am interested in understanding how adolescents with Lds use the people available to them in order to get support. With this in mind, who, in your opinion, would be interesting to interview and why?" Rebecca was able to address my questions instantly. Peter and John both asked me to be more specific. I asked them about specific kinds of support and asked them who they thought used each type of support well. I then asked them who each thought did not use each type of support well. Using teacher nomination and a purposive sampling approach, I selected students based on maximum variation. Let us begin by meeting the three teachers who were asked to nominate students.

Rebecca is a twenty-nine year old woman with four years of teaching experience. She has worked with students who have Lds for three of those years. Rebecca is a Secondary III homeroom teacher. She teaches her class Geography, Biology, MRE, and Physical Education. The classes are mixed for math, therefore she teaches some of her own class and some students from the other two Secondary III classes. Rebecca is athletic and took her class rock climbing this year. In addition, she has a love of the environment which she shares with her class often. Rebecca has an excellent rapport with her class. They talk as a group about things that interest the students and many of the students talk with her privately about issues of concern in their lives. Peter is in his late thirties, early forties, but looks no more than thirty years old. He has been teaching for five years and has worked with students with Lds for all of those five years. He, like Rebecca, is athletic and also took his class rock climbing. During the data collection Peter was acting co-vice principal, as the VP was on maternity leave. Peter teaches his class MRE, and English and teaches a mix of Secondary III students math. Peter also has

rapport with his students, there appears to be mutual respect among he and his students. John is in his early forties and has been teaching for upwards of ten years. Five of those years have been exclusively teaching students with Lds. John has a strength in woodworking and teaches all three Secondary III classes ITT. In addition he teaches his own class MRE, and English and a mix of students math. John had a group of students who had difficulty working together as a group and many of them did not respect each other. Yet, John was able to connect with them individually. Homeroom appeared to be a time when as a group many of the students could chat with John and they functioned more cohesively .

I met with Rebecca first, in her classroom, at the end of a school day. She began by telling me about a female student in her class, Nancy, whom she felt used her support system really well and why as the following examples demonstrate.

***Nancy uses support well, explains Rebecca***

*Ok, Nancy uses it well, excellent. It takes Nancy a long time to get to know and also get to like someone. She has a lot of trouble trusting people so if she doesn't trust you or doesn't like you, then she's not gonna use you, which would make sense actually, but when she does like you and does trust you, then she'll ask for your help, whenever she needs it, she uses it, she's in the after school program and she uses that very well, I know a lot of kids in the after school program don't make use of that time very well, like it's not efficient and she's very efficient. She also uses the school psychologist well, she goes to her when she knows that she needs it, when she feels she's having trouble she also uses the school resource room teacher.*

***Nancy: Academic Support***

*Yeah, and so she uses Lina very well, last year she went to her, this year she's not, doesn't have the specific time for her, because I have kids, (last year she had a designated time to meet with Lina, this year she does not), I have three periods a week with her (Lina), that I can send someone to her at lunch and you know (she*

*sends students who have a greater need), she (Nancy) works on the newspaper in that she's still getting, you know, some help in writing stuff.*

***Nancy: Emotional & Academic support***

*She sees Lina and other teachers for emotional and academic stuff. I know the teachers that she has had in the past, that she has a good relationship with, she'll still go and see them, even just to chat with them and stuff, so she, you know she, I think needs a lot of emotional support so she does that like when she has a good connection with someone she uses that, in that way (emotional) and for academic help, she really uses the after school program really well and she uses the strategies people give her, she tries them out and uses them and also she knows the friends that she could use, like she's asked Antonio you know, sometimes, for help for something or she'll ask Donald sometimes, she likes to try to work alone but she'll ask if she needs help.*

***Nancy: Support outside of school***

*She has a boyfriend outside of school... she was in a group home and now she's back living at home with her mother and I know she still sees I think she used the group home very well also, it was very structured and she felt it was too structured... but she tries to see the positive and see what it's giving her...so you know she really liked her main social workers there and she has a social worker now from there, ...every once and a while and I think she appreciates that.*

***Nancy: Seeks support from the school psychologist, before calling the social worker***

*I think normally if she's really having a hard time she'll go to see Angela (School Psychologist) and it's just, you know sometimes she gets overly frustrated with her mother, so something that she needs to vent it out, so rather than to take it out at home, she'd rather come to someone here, which is yeah very mature. And because I know her mother very you know over kind of protective and stuff.*

***Nancy has maintained a relationship with her foster family***

*She has a foster mother that she stayed with when she was in foster care for almost two years, I guess when she was 13 or 14, and she still goes to see her every second weekend and that's her choice, it's something that she wanted to keep up, so umm, and she has a little foster brother there and she's baby-sitting tonight.*

***Nancy has friends in and out of school***

*I know she does have friends outside of school and she's very good friends with Tanya and Karen (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, March, 1998).*

Rebecca then began to tell me about a second student, this one male, Albert, who also uses his support system well, and she offered the following explanations.

***Albert: Gets support from his tutor, teachers and parents***

*He works so hard and he needs so much help just to get where he's at takes 500% of his effort and so it also makes him very anxious and makes him frustrated and he has a very short fuse of a lot of things and takes things out on people, but I think its because he works so hard.*

*...he has a tutor and he work really hard with her. He's always coming to me or to his math teacher or to his English teacher, if he needs help with things, he comes to me about French if he, you know, so he's always coming and asking for extra help, he'll stay at lunch, he'll stay after school, whenever and I know he goes home and works hard with his parents as well for help and when he doesn't understand something, I know math is really hard for him and he works really hard on it.*

***Albert: Gets support from classmates***

*He asks Donald, he'll ask Donald and he'll ask if they're doing independent work and stuff, sometimes to explain something to him he'll ask Derek.*

***Albert: Emotional support***

*He says he keeps things inside, but I see him blowing up. So if he is keeping it inside, I think to myself wouah like how much there must be in there but then he comes to me. He is always kind of talking loud and complaining about something blowing up a little, but then he will come to me and say he has been keeping it in and that because he is really about to blow but I think that's all his stress coming in and that he can't handle anyway anything a lot of time.....he'll come to me and say should I go to the French teacher I don't think it will help, should I talk to the student or can I just talk to you so I don't blow up or something he comes to me just to complain and I am just his sounding board and that way it releases his stress and he doesn't have to do anything about it or he'll ask me to speak with the students or he will ask me for a suggestion. He also asks me if, you know, if he would like to see Angela or if I think or he always kind of comes through me to go to the other channels. But he usually comes to me before speaking with the students and asks if it's a good idea or even before he goes to another teacher. He comes to me about problems in English and French and then I tell him to go and speak with the teacher or if he wants me to help with a student, he'll ask me plan a meeting.*

***Albert: Friends in and out of school***

*He has friends in school, I'll say mostly Blair. I think Blair is his best friend, but I see him hanging around with, you know, he's always with people. Outside the school, I know he had a girlfriend for a little while at the tutoring center, I don't think that's happening anymore. I drive him home sometimes and people always call out and say hi, so does Albert. He's sociable (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, March, 1998).*

I asked Rebecca, "Who would you say does not use their support system well and why?"

Rebecca thought for a minute and then began to provide a great deal of detail about another student named Stephen. A few excerpts have been included here.

***Stephen does not use support well***

*He doesn't use support well. ...Stephen has always had, not always had but I mean in the past couple of years you know the after school program has been up and*

*the center has been up for him and it's there for him and he's not making use of it, he's not using it well and this whole year he was in the after school program when he was there and I offered to talk to him or Lina was there and offered he was one of the students that I suggested to go with. Now he doesn't want to go to Lina. ...he doesn't want to see Angela, he is in the after school program but doesn't get much done and was not using it purposefully or efficiently and you know, was using it kind of as social time once in awhile to get last minute things done. He doesn't come to the teacher for help ever, academic stuff.*

*Comes to me when it's to complain about how, you know, maybe a teacher treated him unjustly or something. Not usually for academic help. I have always done and given and advised and he doesn't come but he always got the excuse afterwards. ...now he's not in the after school program, I think, because his girlfriend decided that she didn't need anymore individual support, so of course he no longer goes either. So, all of a sudden at the end, I have been the one using all the resources for him, I have been the one staying on top of things. I have been trying hard to stop and trying to make him responsible for that and for him to maybe realize the consequences if he doesn't. He is a very easy student to support.*

*He's probably gone through a lot because I can see how easy it is to get frustrated with him. How easy it is for teachers to call him lazy, maybe, or, you know, always say that it's his fault that he's not getting anything done. I mean it's really hard to... Like I see... I really don't think that his lack of doing work, and even lack of... Because if it was only in work that I saw that, that he didn't take initiative or didn't, you know, clue in to what's the best way to survive this situation or strategies to get through this. But because I see it in every other aspect, even socially, even in emotional, even, you know, when does he ask for support? When does he ask for help? Who does he go to? Like even with Jill, you know, like it's often delayed. And so I don't think that it's just because he's lazy or just because he doesn't care. You know?*

**Stephen: Accessing support when he felt he needed to**

*So now, all of a sudden I showed him his third term marks and I told him very strongly, that he probably wouldn't come back next year. Then he came to me and said Oh, do you think it would be a good idea if I went to see H  l  ne (the principal) and talk about next year? Yes, I'm sure. He then had a meeting with H  l  ne and he told her that he planned to graduate and that he planned to finish.*

*He went to Angela to have the same talk with her.....Then he went to Lina and asked her for some time. Lina rearranged her schedule with three other kids in order to allow him time. Then he went to Agnes (Director of the Vanguard After-School Program) and asked for an English tutor to join him in his English class because he refuses to do anything after school. ....he wants people to do it for him (school work). He has the resources and he knows who they are, but he doesn't follow through or when it is offered to him he doesn't take it. Angela also offered to see him, at school or the tutoring center. Then he doesn't go (follow through on the plan that he has created). You know but then a week later he showed up. It's always at his own convenience.*

***Who does Stephen talk to about emotional stuff?***

*I think only Jill (his girlfriend, of two or three years. They are in the same school and grade, different homerooms) and he's got a friend in grade 10, I think he's close with Joe. I think he talks with Eliott when he gets frustrated, especially if it's about things he doesn't want to talk to Jill about.*

***Stephen: Friends in and out of school***

*...everyone likes him and you know he definitely has a lot of kinds of friends, well he hangs out mainly with Jill, usually the two of them or in a larger group. ...he definitely has a good time with her and her parents...they go a lot of time you know on trips in the country camping or things like that with her parents.*

***Stephen's Strengths***

*I've been so frustrated with him for the past few weeks, so, hard for me to even think.... But, no, in phys. ed., ok, definitely, and ITT definitely. So, in areas where he shines and he feels confident and comfortable, then he is the most supportive to other students. ... in an area that he shines, unlike many other people, he doesn't show it off. He uses it to help others. Which I think is amazing. So, and in the class, you know, he's definitely supportive and it does come out, I'd say... probably every day I see it. Just in little ways that, um, in very passive ways, but just in little ways. Like he'll, I don't know, if a conversation is going on between some people or someone is teasing someone else, or, whatever, he won't... he's not an active... like he won't kind of interrupt or tell someone not to say*

*something to someone else. But often he'll kind of distract sometimes. Like sometimes Donald was being, I don't know, silly or Albert was getting mad at Donald or something, and then Stephen would just ask Donald a question, and then that would take Donald's attention away from Albert and then Albert would stop getting pissed off.*

***Peter advocating for Jill, while Rebecca advocates for Stephen***

*But then it's funny because just a couple of weeks ago, I was having a meeting with Stephen about something else, and Peter popped in. And Peter decided to come in and talk about Jill and Stephen. Anyway, but I mean Peter is Jill's homeroom teacher so of course he's going to see it more from her point of view, and I'm going to see it more from Stephen's point of view. Or not point of view, but just kind of thought. Which I think is good because I think that, you know, the students need their backers. So, you know, Peter is seeing it from the point that Jill is doing a lot of Stephen's work, and Jill is going to get stressed about it and Jill is going to end up messing up her own thing because she gets stressed and she'll just decide not to do it. So if she's doing Stephen's work, then, how's that going to be? And I see that, and I see that that's true, but the thing is, is that Stephen doesn't want her and isn't always asking her, but she's doing it anyway. She's taking charge. Stephen's personality...*

*.....so Peter came in to tell Stephen what's he going to do about it. How's he going to stop this, bla, bla bla. And the thing is that I've seen them together and they've done that. And Stephen doesn't seem to have a say in anything, so far that I've seen. And, uh, you know, he doesn't have a say. Jill comes up and says Well,... And then I'm here and it's embarrassing for him. Just this morning, you know, this is all in three minutes, but she's saying, "You've got to be more organized". And "didn't I tell you".. And "I helped you work on it and you did do some of it". And, you know, "I've organized your box. How many times am I going to have to do it?" You know, and she's saying all this and he's just, you know... And she was also the one who, you know, at the beginning, in September and October, she would come and ask me for extensions for Stephen and Stephen didn't know she was doing it. And, you know, Stephen even said when he did his public speech, he asked Jill... He read it to Jill because he wanted to just say Do you like it? And he told me that he didn't say it when Peter was there, but when Peter left, you know, he said to me, um, that, you know, because Peter caught Jill recopying his speech in one of her classes or something. And Stephen said he felt*



*really proud when he had done his speech and said... and read it to Jill because he wanted her to hear it, and wanted, you know, some feedback. And she took it and corrected all the spelling and she said, You know, if you say it this way, it would be better, and he said, you know, she does that. And then I get in trouble for it because she's doing it in Peter's classes, but I didn't ask her to and I didn't want her to. And she always has to make it better. So... He's the student that I feel, kind of agonize over the most, and feel for him in so many ways. And I'm also exasperated about him more than any other student because as much as I want to just say, Ya, I know it's really tough, I just want to strangle him. You know? (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

I interviewed Peter in the staff room during lunch. When I asked him to nominate students who he felt used support well, he responded quickly that he did not think anyone used their support system particularly well in his class. He added that I would know better than he, as I have been sitting in his class for four months looking for examples of support, where he as a teacher would miss things when he was teaching. Peter spoke more generally about his class, not in terms of specific students.

#### ***Peter's general comments***

*I think a lot of them don't know what questions to ask and who to go to. Generally, I would think most students are like that, the few that use them (people for support) (Pause) I'm trying to think of instances. Like there is an instance where Charles L. would use the support network but what he'll do is copy, so I don't think, I don't see that as the right kind of support (Teacher Interview: Peter, March, 1998).*

Peter and I continued to discuss his class in general. I commented on the fact that I have observed his students as very supportive of one another, such as in English class. Peter responded.

***Peter comments on his students as supportive of one another***

*Well, you know if it's in my class I would say that the people who are supportive in that way (English?), I would say everybody except Pam. I think Pam herself has such a hard time reading. Personally I think my homeroom interacts well that way. I would say that the only person that you know is probably Lindsay, but she is still able to get some support, but the kids also ride her a bit, but she can be annoying like you know she is, "that is the answer", you know (Teacher Interview: Peter, March, 1998).*

Peter then described who he thought supported others and who was difficult to support.

***Patrick supports the class***

*You know, I mean one person who tends to support the most and is a bit more of a meter is Patrick, cause he tends to phrase things from a view that's a bit higher than the class in the sense of you know. Today we watched a movie and at the end of the movie there was some Klu Klux Klan who showed up and beat up the black guy and he said something like « Man I hate it when people hate other people so much » and that kind of like, he's really good at giving those global statements, you know what I'm saying, like boy this is really what its about...and I think that is like kind of a support cause it gets all of the other kids going, you know thinking at a better level.*

***Alex is difficult to support***

*The worst is and the most difficult person to support is Alex, cause he never, he almost never says anything as to what he doesn't understand, he never really says he doesn't understand and he always says he gets it, and I know for sure it's the opposite (Teacher Interview: Peter, March, 1998)*

When he was asked about specific students he was able to suggest who might use a particular kind of support well.

***What about Luke Q.? Is he difficult to support?***

*Maybe, but Luke has more ability, no that's not true cause Luke will often ask for support but he'll ask it one-on-one. He won't often say, "Sir I don't get it" in class, occasionally but most of the time in he'll come after and he'll check the key point that he doesn't quite get, so he does ask for support.*

***Does Jill seek support when she needs it?***

*Yeah, Jill will, see I guess I'm dealing with it as a teacher and I'm saying like who asks for support, Jill asks for support, like when she doesn't get something she'll always ask, she'll say 'sir I don't get it, I don't get it at all', and she does it in like a kind of worried way, cause I don't get it... she's frantic about it, but on the other hand, she asks, when she doesn't get it, she knows she doesn't get it (Teacher Interview: Peter, March, 1998)*

I then asked Peter who he thought had lots of friends and could get support when they needed it from peers. He responded, "Patrick and Jill." When asked about how students cope with conflict, Peter responded.

***Underground justice system***

*I don't think they're very good about approaching teachers, by the time teachers find out about it quite often its gone too far, like Lindsay is always getting harassed by a couple of kids in the class, its been ongoing since like last year, I found out about it seven months later. You know, they have a subculture which is normal to have and their subculture handles the conflicts, so quite often I'm not even aware of it. I can see it a little bit, like there's some whispers. (But the students will handle it amongst themselves?) Yeah, just like there was a instance (not amongst the participants of this study) with a kid who burnt somebody, some kids took it on their own to burn another kid back, now, that's an extreme, that tends to be typical of the way they handle conflicts, they'll handle them underground on their own, they have their own system of justice, and they have their own penalties, the case of the burning was extreme it was obviously against what the school is about. And so we took measures to deal with it, but there is so much going on underground that we don't know about, you know they handle*

*things until the point when it does become obvious that's when the teacher steps in (Teacher Interview: Peter, March, 1998).*

It took several weeks to meet with the third teacher, John. John and I set several meeting times, however each time he was busy or he had a class, which he had not remembered about when making the appointment, or on one occasion an emergency had come up with a student. When John and I did meet, we met for only fifteen minutes. He selected Karen as a student who used support well and he selected several students who did not use support well. Two who agreed to participate in case studies are reported here, Michael and Matthew. In the following excerpt John discusses why Karen would be a good choice for a case study, as someone who uses support well.

***John nominating Karen as a student who used support well***

*What she has projected to me is that her sister is very helpful to her. Not only in homework but in other situations too. She's written poems and letters about her older sister and how wonderful it is to have an older sister, and what a great support she is and bla, bla, bla. And that she loves her a lot and that in turn is loved a lot by her older sister. And I know her parents are incredibly supportive of her, and will help her with math. She goes to them, and sometimes she'll come to me and say, "Even my mother couldn't figure this out and I went to my dad and he couldn't do it". So you know, and then she'll come back to me and ask me the question. So you know she's really a kid who uses her system well. And her dad is a guidance counselor I think with the Lakeshore School board, so you know, she's got education in the family, so it's an environment that she's used to at home and she's self-motivated and really wants the classes to go quickly and run efficiently, sometimes when I'm lagging or off on a tangent, Karen's at the back and she's giving me the evil eye or something, (John snaps his fingers) like come on move on with the book or whatever. She's a kid that in my class that's great.*

*Tara: Does she ask friends for academic support?*

*John : I'm sure she does, I know in math, she, Nancy, Tanya, and now Antonio all help each other, so that's a group that interacts that way*

*Tara: I've seen her being very supportive of others, providing academic support, but I have never seen anyone reciprocate. But maybe when they are working in the group I don't see or hear what they are doing exactly.*

*John : Yeah*

*Tara: What about emotionally, does she have people for emotional support that she can rely on?*

*John : Her sister again, I think. And she seems to have strong friendships. She has Lorraine, Do you remember Lorraine? (I respond yes) and she's going to adult Ed, she's been gone for two years, but they still hang out. Sometimes Lorraine will pick her up after school and they go places. So she seems to develop very strong attachments. (I asked about Lindsay). Very close friends with Lindsay, Karen is very solid in that area. And Lara too, they're good friends and Tanya. And she's pretty cool too. She's an academic kid who doesn't come across as a total geek, everyone respects her, so that's really nice.*

*Tara: And her Ld is comprehension primarily*

*John : yeah, comprehension, she's looking better and better. It's a language based disability and she has difficulty comprehending. She reads in class, and she's a beautiful reader, she reads as well as I do, but then she won't know what she's read after she's finished a page*

*Tara: But she uses good strategies, I explain how Karen reported she works on improving her comprehension, by going home and re-reading what was read in class with someone like her sister or mum and they talk about it together.*

*John : And her comprehension is improving too, because I sometimes now ask her questions about what she has just read and she's starting to pick up on what she's read, the first time through (Teacher Interview: John, April, 1998).*

In the following excerpt John discusses several students who do not use people in their support networks well. John then mentions Michael as an excellent candidate. I agree with this choice. The following excerpt documents why Michael would be a good choice.

***John nominating students who do not use their support networks well***

*Tara: Who doesn't use support well, in your class or in the grade?*

*John : There's a few, who come to mind right away...*

*Tara: I explain that I can not use these families as they would not allow their children to participate in the focus group, so it was unlikely that they would be interested in participating in a case study...*

*John : What about Michael? Michael has got all kinds of support, his mother is very supportive and he's at the Learning Associates, he's got all this support but he's trying more or less to evade it all. He's doing his best to try to get out of doing anything and letting people help him*

*Tara: Is he failing the year?*

*John : Um, he had a really bad term, last term, but I think he's passing overall. But last term I think he failed, math, geography, I'm not sure about English. Because he didn't hand things anything in. Math he wasn't doing his homework, he didn't hand in his work book when I wanted to mark it that kind of thing.*

*Tara: His mum must be very concerned*

*John : Ya, she is. She sees him being very rebellious at home too and my feeling is that because Luke moved in on his turf this year, he's trying to stake out some ground for himself and distinguish himself. Luke is doing much better than him. And Michael has these influences in the class, like ...who are very strong, negative personalities (Teacher Interview: John, April, 1998).*

I then asked John if he thought Matthew would be a good candidate for a case study.

John said yes. The following excerpt, documents Matthew as a possible candidate.

***Matthew as a student who does not use support well.***

*Tara: What about Matthew? Does he use support well?*

*John : No he doesn't. He's a different kettle of fish. He's really smart. Really, really smart and what his game this year has been, is to focus at the absolute last second and as long as he gets sixty and passes, he's happy with that. And I'm so frustrated with him, because he's capable of so much more. First term in math he got 84% and then 69% and then he failed last term. Like what is that? You know.*

*Tara: Does he have support at home?*

*John : Yeah, his mum and step-dad are very nice and very supportive. Matthew has had a bit of a history, his brother used to go to this school and he's been in and out of jail and now he's out of the country. His dad is an alcoholic and takes swings at Matthew and all kinds of horrific stuff. Matthew's brother picked on him all through childhood, growing up, so, as far as I know he has no active*

*support system, because he doesn't ask for one. He's another one, who is avoiding having a support system.*

*Tara: But he's so smart about it. Sometimes I've watched him in class and he'll be drawing, sometimes listening as he draws and other times he is tuned out and you have asked him a question. At times he'll respond by saying something like, "Oh that's a really good question, what do you think sir?" and he throws it back to you. That's very clever.*

*John : He's got that brilliance and eccentricity about him. The other day he freaked out in class and left the school screaming, "I'm the devil" all the while lifting up his shirt. He's not applying himself, but if he could, he could do anything. So maybe he would be a good one (for a case study).*

*Tara: I don't see him asking for support from anyone in school or with emotional support, I just see him doing his own thing (Teacher Interview: John, April, 1998).*

I agreed with all of the students the teachers nominated. Based on my four months in the classroom as a participant observer and leader of the focus groups, I believe that I would have made the same student selections as the teachers did. Originally six students were selected, three who were thought to use support well and three who use support less well. However, I realized that all three of the students who were thought to use support well, all live in intact families (Albert, Patrick, and Karen). Whereas, the students who do not use support as well had experienced or were currently experiencing parental divorce. Stephen's parents were experiencing marital difficulties during the data collection and separated during the summer (1998). Matthew's parents divorced when he was a toddler; he has lived with his mother and step-father since early elementary school. Michael's parents divorced when he was he was in elementary school. Although all of the students were living in stable home environments at the time of the data collection, with the exception of Stephen, it was thought best to add a fourth student to one of the groups. Nancy, who was nominated as a student who uses support well was asked to participate. Nancy's parents are divorced. Nancy lives with her mother, but is placed in foster care regularly, as her mother frequently becomes overwhelmed and cannot cope.

As I had spent several months in the classes with these students I felt that I too could contribute to the case study nominations. Prior to meeting with the teachers I created portraits of the students I thought would be interesting to interview. I selected many of the same students as the teachers did. I chose Karen, Jill, Albert, Nancy and Patrick as students who use their support systems well. In terms of students who do not use their support system well, I chose Stephen, Michael, Matthew, Kevin, and Charles T. Mini profiles are provided below in the following two tables. Table 4 presents the students who use support well and were chosen to participate in case studies. Table 5 illustrates the students who do not use support as well and were willing to be involved in case studies.

Table 4

Mini Profiles: Students Who Use Support Well

Student	Age	Place of Birth	Lives with	Parent Employment	Sibling	Uses support	Nominated by
Nancy	16	Montreal	Mum & Foster care	Mum on disability	none	Well	Rebecca & I
Albert	18	Montreal, 1st generation from Barbados	Parents and sister	Mum: domestic Dad: Business Manager	Sister, 15, HS	Well	Rebecca & I
Patrick	16	Eastern Townships	Brother weekday Parents/siblings on weekend	Mum: owns a business Dad: works in business	Brother, McGill student Sister: HS	Well	Peter & I
Karen	16	Montreal	Parents, sister & brother	Mum: teacher Dad: Guidance counselor	Sister: CEGEP Brother: Elementary	Well	John & I



Table 5

Mini profiles: Students Who Do Not Use Support Well

Student	Age	Place of birth	Lives with	Parent Employment	Sibling	Uses Support	Nominated by
Stephen	16	Montreal	Mum, dad, & a brother	Mum: home Dad: installs alarms	three brothers,	Not Well	Rebecca & I
Matthew	16	Montreal	Mum & Step-dad	Canada Post	2 sibs. both live with dad in Dominica Republic	Not Well	John & I
Michael	16	Montreal	Mum & Brother	Receptionist/ secretary	twin brother, same HS, different class	Not Well	John & I

Ld Discrepancy

Using teacher nomination and a purposive sampling approach, I selected students based on maximum variation. The similarities and differences among the participants will now be highlighted. All of the students attend Secondary III at Vanguard Intercultural High School. Each student has been at this school for at least one year; this ensures that the students are familiar with the school environment. In other words the students know their way around the school; they know the teachers, students, support staff, and they are familiar with the school routine. A third similarity is that in order to gain entrance into the school, each student must meet two criteria: (a) they must be assessed as having a Serious Learning Difficulty, as defined by the Ministère Education du Québec (MEQ); and (b) each student must be coded 02 (See Appendix A for MEQ definition). This means that:

Summative evaluation of the language of instruction or mathematics program shows that he or she is two or more years behind in either of these subjects in terms of what is expected of him or her, given his or her abilities and the frame of reference constituted by the majority of students of the same age in the school boards (severe academic delay); or when the assessment carried out by qualified personnel primarily through long-term observation shows that he or she has specific learning difficulties manifested by a developmental delay (especially in the area of communication skills) that is severe enough to cause him or her to fall behind in school without the help of appropriate support measures (Direction de la coordination des réseaux Ministère de L'éducation, September 1992, Code:51-5365A).

Students who attend Vanguard High School are referred to this school only when school boards determine that they do not have an appropriate program that can meet the student's special needs.

*All* of the students who participated in this inquiry met the above criteria. In addition to meeting these criteria, the student files of those who participated in the case studies were examined carefully in order to be sure that I could use the term Ld. The students were identified as having a Ld if they had normal-range or above intelligence, defined as an IQ of 90 or greater, in conjunction with measured achievement 1.5 standard deviations or more below the mean. In other words, an 18 point difference between IQ and achievement standard scores on one or more measure of achievement in reading, arithmetic, and or spelling.

The students' IQs and academic achievement were verified through school records. However, raw scores were not always available as psychological reports tended to provide descriptive data (i.e. Above Average, Average, Low Average) rather than raw scores. In terms of the WISC-III scores, if only descriptive data was available, I used the

lowest score within the range to calculate the students discrepancies when comparing standard scores (e.g., scores in the average range are between 90 and 109. I used the score of 90 when the raw score was not available).

Each of the students who participated in the case studies had been administered a standardized intelligence test (the WISC-III) and standardized achievements tests (i.e. WRAT-III, WRMT-R, or the TOWS-2). All of these standardized measures have a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Therefore the standard scores can be compared. Each student displayed a discrepancy of over 18 points between standard scores on an ability measure (WISC-III) and achievement measures (Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised (WRAT-III), Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R), Test of Written Spelling-2 (TOWS-2), or Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)), with their achievement scores falling significantly below their ability in reading, spelling, or math. This criteria for diagnoses of a Ld is consistent with the literature in the field (e.g., Heath & Wiener, 1996). IQ and achievement scores of Ld students who were identified as using support well are highlighted in Table 6. Scores of the students who were selected as not using support well are shown in Table 7.

Table 6

IQ and Achievement Discrepancies In Order To Identify An Ld Population: Students Who Use Support Well

	IQ	WRAT-R	WRAT-S	WRAT-A
Student #1	Average = 90	SS: 52 (<1%ile)		
Student #2	Average = 90			SS: 71 (3%ile)
Student #3	Average = 109 (score available)	SS:76 (5%ile)	SS:75 (5%ile)	

Note: IQ: When only descriptive data was available, the lowest score within the range was used.

WRAT-R: Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised; subtest reading

WRAT-S: Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised; subtest spelling

WRAT-A: Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised; subtest arithmetic

Table 7

IQ And Achievement Discrepancies In Order To Identify An Ld Population: Students Who Do *Not* Use Support Well

	IQ	TOWS-2	WIAT-R	WRMT-R: WID
Student #4	Avg. = 90	SS: 67, 1%ile		
Student #5	High Avg.=110 (score available)		SS: 80, 10%ile	SS: 82, 12%ile
Student #6	Avg. 90	SS: 68, 2%ile		SS: 72, 3%ile

Note: IQ: When only descriptive data was available, the lowest score within the range was used.

TOWS-2: Test of Written Spelling

WIAT-R: Weschler Individual Achievement Test; subtest reading

WRMT-R:WID: Woodcock Reading Mastery Test -Revised; subtest Word Identification

There are two ways in which the participants varied. First, of the adolescents who were selected to participate, three were selected based on their ability to use support well and three students were selected who do not appear to use support well. Of the students who use their support systems well, two are girls and one is a boy. A fourth boy was selected and interviewed, however, when discrepancy scores were calculated for each student there was only a 16 point difference (as opposed to an 18 point difference) between his ability score and his achievement scores. Therefore, he did not meet the Ld criteria and hence, could not be considered during the analysis. Of the students who appear not to have mastered how to use their support systems, all three are boys. There is not an even gender distribution among the selected case studies. Of the 36 secondary III students only eight are girls. Of those eight girls, three use their support systems well, as I and the teachers observed them. Of the remaining girls, there were more appropriate participants for selection, given the criteria I used.

### Confidentiality

As the researcher in this study I am very conscious of the rights of the adolescents who participate in this study. Names have been changed in the research report to protect the identity of the participants and their families, friends, teachers and others who contributed. At this point the teachers names have been changed, however the name of the school has remained. A copy of this chapter was forwarded to the school personnel so they could check for errors and inconsistencies. No information obtained during the course of the study will be discussed with anyone outside the research team (e.g., supervisors) and peer debriefed without the written permission of the participants, their families, and all others who participate.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

*Once I start it (a project or an assignment) then I can do it but if before that I need help to get started, I won't start. It's like a car without gas, you have to have gas to start it (Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998).*

In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which I investigated how adolescents with Lds access and use people for social support. I am interested in adopting a contextualized approach to examine several different types of support, such as emotional support, informational/instrumental support, companionship, and conflict. For example, when students are happy about something, do they tell anyone? Whom do they tell? Why do they seek support? How does that person support them? In this chapter, I present my data analysis, then I explain and interpret my findings. I also reflect on the implications of these findings for helping adolescents with learning disabilities.

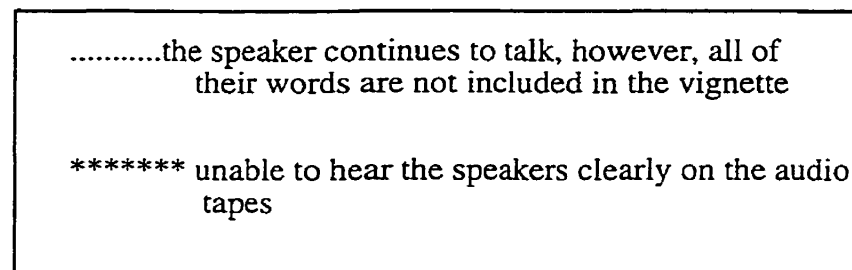
#### Data Sets

I analyzed four different types of data sets: (a) focus group interviews; (b) case study interviews; (c) field notes; and (d) the researcher's journal. The focus groups (groups of three to six students) were provided a series of scenarios and asked what they or their classmates would do in given situations. I audio-taped interviews with six focus groups (a total of 22 students). I interviewed case study participants individually, and these sessions were audio-taped. The participants were provided with the same scenarios as those presented to the focus groups. My field notes consist of observations of social interactions between students and teachers. I accepted a role as a participant observer in

the classroom. I used my researcher's journal as a tool to jot down initial findings and thoughts about the interviews, observations or incidents as they occurred. I used all of these data sets to triangulate that data in order to understand how adolescents with Lds access and use people for social support.

### Managing the Data for Analysis

In order to manage the quickly accumulating data I was collecting from the field, I first transferred the raw data into clearly readable protocols. First, all audio taped interviews were transcribed, the focus groups and the individual interviews (See Appendices C and D for samples of the transcribed data). The field notes and researcher's journal were then typed into a computer (See Appendix E for a sample of the field notes and Appendix F for a sample of the transcribed researcher's journal). I have used the following transcription notations for reading the vignettes and excerpts included in this dissertation. An example of the notations I used is presented in Figure 1.



.....the speaker continues to talk, however, all of  
their words are not included in the vignette

\*\*\*\*\* unable to hear the speakers clearly on the audio  
tapes

Figure 1. Notational system used in transcribed documents

### Coding each page of data to their sources

I provided a header and footer for each page that was transcribed. The running header contains the source of the data (i.e. Focus Group or Case Study Interview) and

each students' name. The footer contains an acronym for the data source (i.e. FG or CI), students initials, and the page number (See Appendices C and D for illustrations) . Once each page of the transcribed documents had been coded to their source, I photocopied each data set. The raw data and the original set of transcribed data were stored and the copies were used during the following analysis procedures. The photocopies were used in order to divide the data into 'chunks of meaning'.

### Unitizing the data

Using the photocopied data, my next step was to identify the units of meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this process unitizing the data. Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to search for meaning from the words and actions of the participants. First, smaller units of meaning are identified in the data that will later serve as the basis for identifying larger categories of meaning. Each unit of meaning that is identified needs to be understood on its own, without additional information. However, in the context of an interview if the unit is based on a question, the question has been included within the unit of meaning.

I identified units of meaning by critically reading through transcripts of the focus group interviews and case study interviews. These units of meaning were eventually cut out from the photo copies of data for easy manipulation. Each time I identified a new unit of meaning, I drew a line across the page to separate this unit of meaning from the next unit. After separating a unit of meaning, I indicated in the left margin where the unit is located in the data set and indicated in the right hand margin the essence of the unit. Figure 2 is a graphic illustration of this process.



---

Focus Group: Allen    T: Can you think of the last time that you were sad?  
 p.9                      A: Ya, two nights ago. I was bothering my dad about  
 getting a dog for a year,  
                              because after we lost our second dog, like I bothered him. And he  
                              would always say, "Oh, maybe, I'll think about it" or whatever.  
                              Like he would always stall me. Then he said, "your chances aren't  
                              good". And I felt really sad. He could have just told me that from  
                              the beginning and not led me on.  
                              T: That's hard. What did you do?  
                              A: Well I tried to talk to my dad, but he said, "Get over it"  
                              T: He wasn't very sensitive to your \*\*\*\*\*                      Sought  
                              Support from Dad  
                              B: Then he went out and played pool                                      but  
                              didn't get it.  
                              T: What did you do?  
                              B: He runs away when things happen that he can't handle. He just  
                              leaves.

---

Figure 2. Unitizing the data within the transcript

I used what is typically called an open coding procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In other words, each statement made by the students was analyzed in terms of the essential concepts they convey. After each unit of meaning had been identified, each was cut and taped to an index card. On the blank side of the index card, I wrote my initial ideas of themes that had emerged, a summary of the question being asked, the students name, a summary of the unit of meaning, and my initial thoughts on the students response. Figure 3, illustrates an example of this process of theme identification.

Allen:	Focus Group: Allen et al
Emotional Support	
Ques: Sad	
What: Ex. of argument with Dad re: getting a dog.	
Dad said he would think about getting a dog, then said no. Allen sad, "he could have just told me from the begining and not led me on.	
Who: Sought support from Dad, but Dad didn't give it	
How: went to Dad, Dad said "get over it" and then left	
Allen reported that, "he runs away when things happen that he can't handle. (Insightful of Allen)	FG: A,K,B,p.9

Figure 3. Unit of meaning as represented on an index card

### Constant Comparative Method

Using multiple sources of data (e.g., focus group interviews, case study interviews, field notes) allowed me to constantly and recursively compare the information and behaviors being noted. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintain that the constant comparative method of analyzing qualitative data combines inductive category coding with an ongoing comparison of all units and meanings obtained. Figure 4 illustrates my use of a constant comparative method of data analysis set within the framework of Maycut and Morehouse (1996, p. 135).

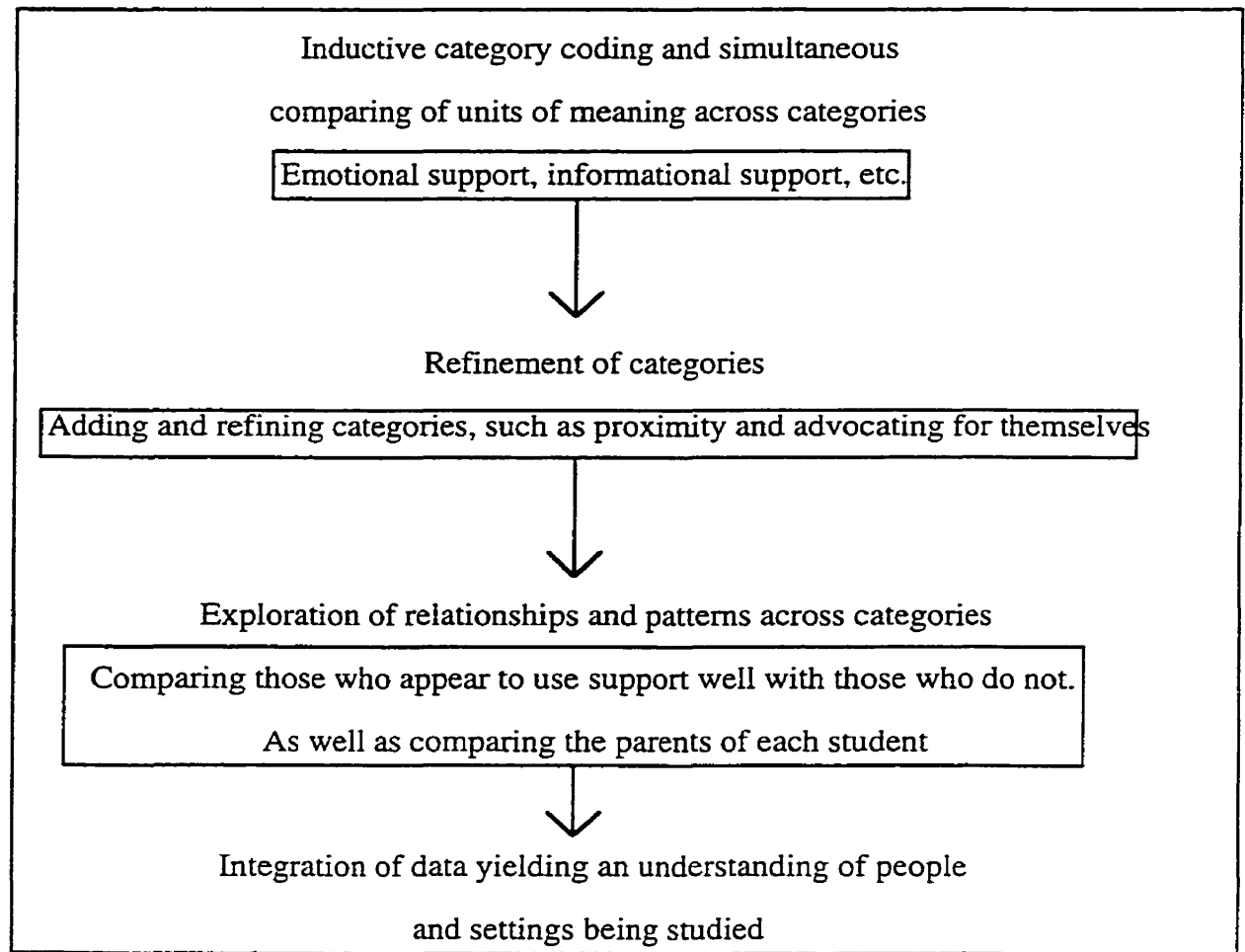


Figure 4. A summary of my methodology as it fits with a constant comparative method of data analysis.

After I had identified each new unit of meaning for analysis, I compared each one to all other units of meaning and then categorized or grouped with similar units of meaning based on type of support. The index cards were then clipped together by grouping for each student/parent and labeled with the student/parent name and type of support represented (theme). During the categorizing and coding process my goal was to develop a set of categories that could provide a reasonable reconstruction of the data that has been collected.

### Creating Matrices

After each piece of the data had been unitized and grouped by type of support, I then created matrices for two of the data sets, the focus groups and case study participants. These matrices included the four types of support that the questions were based on during the interviews and the students' personal definition of support. As discussed in Chapter one, the four types of support are: (a) Emotional support which includes affection such as expressions of caring and concern, as well as intimacy and disclosure, such as trust and closeness; (b) Instrumental/informational support which includes procedural advice and material aid, as well as assistance and cognitive guidance in tasks; (c) Companionship which includes participating in activities together, such as going to an arcade or "hanging out"; and (d) Conflict which includes having disagreements with others such as having an argument with a friend or parent. I used the information from the index cards to fill in the matrices. I chose for analysis matrices of the students who participated in the case study interviews. I also created matrices for the parents of those students who participated. Table 8 is a matrix summary of Allen's answers to the questions that were asked during one of the focus group interviews. His answers reveal four types of support.

Table 8

An Example of an Initial Matrix, Prior to Re-Examining the Data.

Students' Name	THEME	THEME	THEME	THEME	THEME
Allen	Emotional Support	Conflict	Companion-ship	Instrumental/Informational	Definition of support
Who	teacher, classmates, friends, parents, his animals	on own, or calls a friend	friends: Leanne & Katie, Mum	friends, tutor, on own, classmates, teacher, Brother asks him for help	somebody who-cares about you. -there if I need any kind of help, My tutor
How	mum advocated on his behalf	convince person, scream, vent to friends		-figure out on own, -In exams skip and move on, - tries to explain stuff to others, - scribed for brother	
Why	-classmates seeking attention, he provided suggestions -tries to get support from Dad, who runs when problems, suggests why				
What			-movies, go to Dunkin Donuts with mum		

Take for example the informational/instrumental theme. The matrix illustrates that Allen seeks support from his friends, his tutor, his classmates, his teacher, and that he can support himself. He also added that he supports his brother at times. The matrix also indicates how Allen uses support and provides support to others. Allen reported

"figuring stuff out on his own." He described how during exams he skips questions that he finds difficult and moves on. He also described how he explains information to his peers and acts as his brother's scribe when he requires help with projects. These matrices provide a thumbnail sketch of the rich data I found within each interview.

### Inductive Category Coding

Several new themes emerged through careful analysis of the *student* matrices and units of meaning as identified on the index cards. These new themes were: (a) proximity to available support; (b) ability to recognize preferred learning style and articulate it; (c) *awareness* of strategies needed to be successful; (d) the *ability* to implement these strategies; (e) *knowingly* allows others to advocate for them; (f) *unknowingly* people advocate for them; (g) ability to advocate for self; (h) vocalizing what they should/could do versus what they actually do; (i) future dreams and goals versus none; and (j) pre-post Vanguard experiences.

Thirteen new themes also emerged from the *parent* interviews: (a) approach and tone of voice is crucial; (b) parent child relationship; (c) use of a cognitive apprenticeship model; (d) parent\tutor advocate for their kids; (e) highlight and support student strengths; (f) highlight student weaknesses; (g) believe in/encourage success; (h) planning and organization; (i) parent perceptions that their child does not expect to be understood; (j) value education; (k) modeling; (l) parent perception that their child has feelings of persecution; (m) pre-Vanguard and now; and (n) miscellaneous.

I revised all of the matrices for further emerging themes. I discovered many differences between the themes that were common among the students who access and use support well and those who do not. In addition, the themes also differed among the parents of students who access and use support well and those who do not.

The matrices contain an array of recurring concepts, patterns, and themes embedded in my focus group interviews, individual interviews, field notes, and documents. After refining the themes, I then examined the matrices and looked for similarities and differences among the students as individuals and as two distinct groups, those who appear to use support well and those who do not. I examined each theme across students and their parents. Because the matrices contained only summaries, I referred back to the index cards and transcripts to obtain key examples of evidence.

#### Conversations With Adolescents Who Have Lds:

##### Their Perceptions Of Accessing And Using Social Support

My main focus in this inquiry was to gain an understanding of how adolescents with Lds access and use people in their social networks for social support. I present the findings in relation to four main research questions:

- (a) What are the similarities and differences between the social networks of students with Lds who appear to access and use social support well (USW) versus those who do not access and use social support well (DUSW)? Who are the individuals in each students social network? Are there more people in one group's social network than another?
- (b) Who do the students turn to for each type of support? What are the similarities and differences between those who USW and DUSW?
- (c) What is the nature of the social support provided by each individual? How did these individuals support the students?
- (d) How do the students use each individual for support? What are the similarities and differences between those who USW and DUSW?

The first question concerns the nature of social networks among the two groups. *Who* are the individuals that make up the students social networks? Are there more

people in one group than another? Consistent with the existing research (Hoyle & Serafica, 1988; Wenz-Gross & Siperstein, 1997), which compared students with and without Lds, both groups in this study, those who USW and those who DUSW, have roughly the same number of individuals within their social networks. On average the students have 7.8 people they rely on for social support. These include parents, friends, teachers and others and is illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Types of Individuals and Things Students Report Using for Specific Types of Support.

	USW		DUSW
<b>Emotional support</b>		<b>Emotional support</b>	
Patrick	mother, self, parents, friends, cousins	Michael	father
Karen	mother, father, friends, family, uncle	Stephen	family, girlfriend, friend, self
Nancy	friends, self, resource teacher, school psych., foster mother, teachers, father	Matthew	girlfriend, friends, teachers, mother, self
<b>Informational/Instrumental</b>		<b>Informational/Instrumental</b>	
Patrick	friends, teacher, self, mother, Franklin Speller	Michael	classmates, mother, tutor, teacher, self, team leader
Karen	family, father, sister, mother, teacher	Stephen	brother, girlfriend, girlfriend's mother and father, teacher, self, television
Nancy	neighbor, teachers, foster mother, foster mother's sister, school psych., self, friends, tutor, mum	Matthew	self, friends, teachers, step-father, mother
<b>Companionship</b>		<b>Companionship</b>	
Patrick	friends	Michael	friends
Karen	friends	Stephen	friends
Nancy	friends, father	Matthew	friends
<b>Conflict</b>		<b>Conflict</b>	
Patrick	no evidence	Michael	self, father
Karen	self, friends, mother, father	Stephen	self
Nancy	self	Matthew	self



There appear to be few differences with respect to whom the students reported that they turned to for each type of support. Examination of the similarities and differences indicate that all of the students have a variety of individuals whom they reported they rely on for social support. Concerning demonstrations of emotional support (affection such as hugs, expressions of caring and concern, as well as intimacy and disclosure), the students reported turning to family, friends and some school personnel. However, there was one case, Michael, who reported turning only to his father for emotional support. Michael reported that he did not feel heard by the members of his social network particularly his mother. However, he reports being heard and respected by his father. Therefore, Michael feels comfortable accessing and using the support provided by his father, particularly in the area of emotional support.

Informational/instrumental support have been collapsed together and include procedural advice and material aid as well as assistance and cognitive guidance in tasks. All of the students named a variety of individuals within their social networks who provide this type of support, such as friends, teachers, family, neighbors, tutors and others. Two significant differences were found. Interestingly the students who USW and one student who DUSW, Matthew, reported that friends were a source of informational/instrumental support. Michael and Stephen did not report friends as a source of informational /instrumental support. I think that there could be number of reasons for this difference. Perhaps, a student's self-esteem in the domain of school plays a significant role. Despite the fact that all of the students have Lds, Michael and Stephen both feel unsuccessful at school and tend to withdraw in the face of academic adversity rather than seek support as the others report doing. Both of these boys have friends and use them for support. However, they do not use their friends for

informational/instrumental support. It may be that the cost of seeking support from peers outweighs the benefits in the minds of these two students. Adolescence tends to be a period when individuals become very self conscious and tend to compare themselves to the perceived norms of their social groups. This self consciousness can lead to feelings of inferiority and withdrawal from particular social groups. Perhaps, Michael and Stephen are experiencing this self consciousness, perceive themselves as not at the same level as their peers and hence rely on others within their social network for informational/instrumental support.

A second difference found among the students with regards to informational/instrumental support was that all of the students who DUSW and one student who USW, Patrick, reported that they rely on themselves for this type of support. Although neither Karen or Nancy mentioned that they relied on themselves, I observed both of them working on material independently in class prior to seeking support. I suggest that this omission of including themselves was perhaps an oversight. Perhaps, in responding to the questions they were only thinking of others in their network and they forgot to mention themselves. In my field notes there are many examples of both Karen and Nancy using themselves for support in productive ways, much like Patrick. For example, I observed Karen working on a math equation, erasing it several times and starting over, before she called on her friend Tanya to help her (Field Notes: John Cummin's math class, March 2, 1998).

Students' reliance on themselves was a recurring pattern in my observational notes of their behaviors in class. Sometimes this self reliance was constructive. For example, on one occasion I noted that Patrick was having difficulty spelling a word; he pulled out his Franklin Speller (a hand held computer spell checker) and worked independently to find the correct spelling (Field Notes: PC. Eng. CL., February 3, 1998). However, when

students relied on themselves it was also sometimes counter productive. For example, in a math class, I observed how Michael would get frustrated. Rather than use any of the strategies he told me about during his interview (e.g., stop working, calm down, get a drink of water) I noted that Michael would tend to give up and often place his head on his desk for the remainder of a class. Like Michael, when Matthew relied on himself, it often became counter-productive. He would start by obtaining a friend's attention. More often than not he would obtain the attention and support of a friend who was also experiencing difficulty. Together they would start talking and disrupting those around them (e.g., Field Notes: John Cummin's Math Class, February 17, 1998).

When the students were asked about companionship, all of them reported that they had friends whom they accessed and used for support. This finding is consistent with those presented by Juvonen and Bear (1992) which suggest that although students with Lds can be less accepted and have poor social skills, they do have friends and close associations with some classmates. In this inquiry the students who USW and those who DUSW all reported close associations with friends and classmates. In terms of conflict (which includes having disagreements with others) all of the students with one exception reported relying on themselves. I was interested in understanding if the students had a sense of how to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way and whether they used strategies in their conflict resolutions such as negotiation and compromise. Karen, Nancy, Matthew, and Stephen all reported that they would directly talk with the person with whom they were in conflict with. Stephen added that he would directly apologize to an individual with whom he had had a conflictual relationship. Karen reported she relied on a variety of individuals. She reported seeking support from her friends, when she was in conflict with another friend, "Well if it's a friend then I wouldn't talk to that person. I would think about talking to one of my best friends and then go back and confront them" (Case

Interview: Karen, June 15, 1998). Karen reported seeking support from one or both of her parents when she was fighting with her sister, "I talk to my mom or dad. They would talk to Joyce and tell her how I feel. Then after they talk to her I would speak to her..." (Case Interview: Karen, June 15, 1998). Michael reported that during conflictual situations he would "keep to himself" (Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998). Later in the same interview, he discussed seeking support from his father. Patrick provided no information about how he coped in conflictual situations. He and his mother both reported that he did not often find himself in these types of situations. When asked how that could be, Patrick responded, "I don't know, I'm just a nice guy I guess" (Case Interview: Patrick, June 26, 1998).

Although, the focus of this inquiry is to gain an understanding of how adolescents *use* social support, the analysis of data also revealed how these students *provide* social support to others. In the next section, I examine students use of social support and discuss how they each provide these types of social support.

Despite the fact that the students had roughly the same number of people in their social networks on whom they could rely for social support, accessing this support can be difficult for some students. At times, even when support is accessed or provided the students may have difficulty using it. I believe that sometimes the students do not use the support because the support provided is often not ideal for particular students. It may be that they can not use support as it has not been their experience to be supported.

Figure 5 is a visual representation of the paths students took when they had a **given need** and required a type of support. The students were each provided with the same scenarios and questions, which were based on a particular type of support (i.e., emotional support, informational/instrumental, companionship, and conflict). Given a particular need the students either **asked for support or they did not**. More often than

not the students who were in the group who USW asked for support. Those students who were selected because it appeared that they DUSW, did not ask for support as often as the other group.

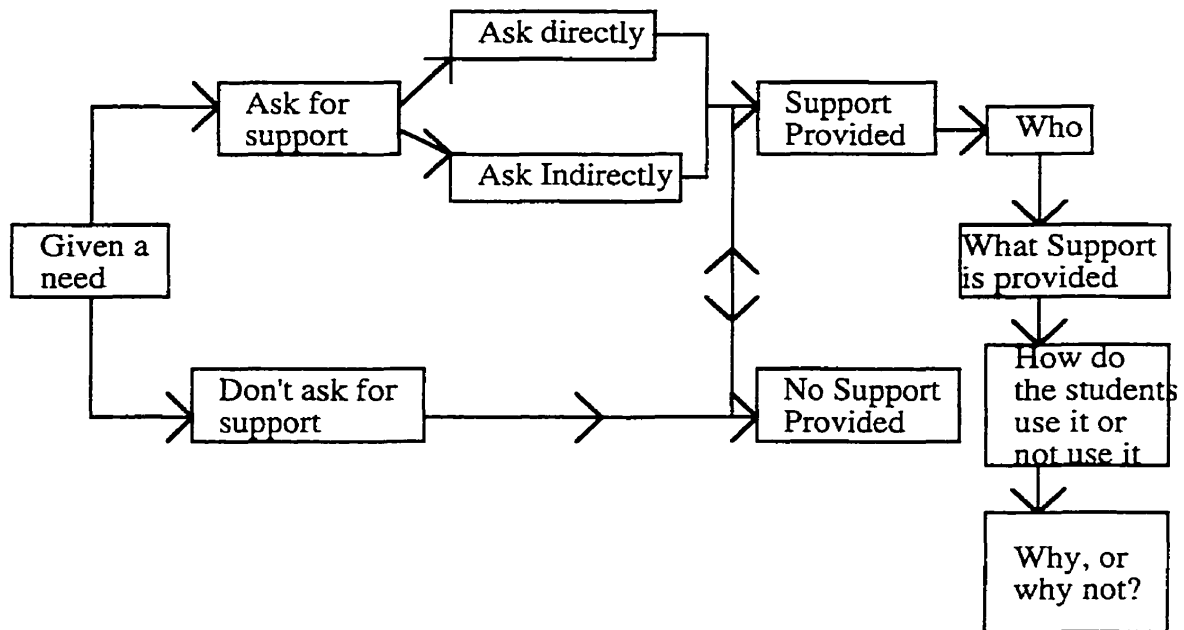


Figure 5. Pathways in which students in both groups accessed social support.

When the students asked for support they did so either **directly** or **indirectly**. There was more evidence of the students who USW accessing support directly (as opposed to asking indirectly or not asking for support). However, those students who DUSW also accessed support directly and indirectly, though not with the same frequency as those who used support well. There was evidence that both groups of students regardless of whether they asked for it or not, **were provided with support**. In other words, even students who did not ask for support, even subtly, were provided with some type of support.

A different path that was sometimes used by students and illustrated in Figure 5, was given a need, students **did not ask for support** and hence **no support was provided**. In addition, there were students in the group who DUSW who asked for

support (either directly or indirectly), but, **support was not provided**. Hence, the arrows in Figure 5 illustrates that support was sought but was not provided.

In those instances, when support was provided, one can examine **who** the student used for support, **what** kind of support was provided to each student, and **how** a student was able to use or not use the support provided. Finally, the more interesting question concerns, **why** support was used or not by the students.

Results of the analysis demonstrated that students who USW, asked for all types of support directly, more often than those who DUSW. However, the difference between the two groups did not appear to be the result of whether the students asked for support or not. As the findings suggest, support is often provided to both groups whether they ask for it or not. In other words, one group is not being deprived of support, because even when they did not ask for support, they often got it. Thus, new questions emerge: For example, (a) Do they receive the kind of support they believe they need? (b) Are they getting support but they do not realize it? (c) Is it that the students who DUSW do not know what kind of support is helpful? (d) Or is it that the students are not being provided with what they perceive to be the right kind of support?

#### Asking for Direct Support: Suggesting a Collaborative Approach

Students who USW do seek all types of support more often than not when they need it. They may ask for support directly or indirectly. The following examples illustrate how students who USW asked for direct support in the area of informational/instrumental support. For example, in the following vignette Patrick was having difficulty in math class. The class had just been handed back a math test and the teacher was reviewing it with them as a group.

*"Can we do one more example together?"*

*Patrick asks: "Can we do one more example together? I still don't get it." Peter (the math teacher) agrees. To begin, Patrick has to label a graph and then use the numbers on the graph and plug them into a formula. Patrick tries to put the numbers into the equation, but he can not remember the equation and he gets it wrong. Peter starts jumping up and down (Literally) in frustration. Patrick says, "I don't understand this shit, why do we need it!?" (Field notes: Peter Crow's math class, March 18th 1998).*

This is an excellent example of a student requiring support and asking for it directly. He uses a question and suggests a collaborative approach to request direct support, *"Can we do one more example together...?"*. Patrick signals his need directly through his use of the modal *"Can"*. His question *"Can we do..."* also signals his desire for an interactive, collaborative, problem-solving approach. Vygotsky stresses this type of collaborative approach in order to develop self-regulation. This example also demonstrates Peter's inability to work within Patrick's zone of proximal development. Patrick requests direct support and Peter tries to provide it to him. However, Peter is not able to provide Patrick with the guidance he needs in order for Patrick to construct the knowledge he needs to understand this math problem. The result is a frustrated teacher who jumps up and down (literally) because he thinks the student *should* understand the problem, and a frustrated student who swears, challenges the teacher and then gives up. In this example, it might have been helpful for Peter to back up to a point where Patrick did understand (his actual developmental level) and offer directions from that point.

In the next excerpt, Nancy explained that she could ask her mother for direct support in spelling, but she did not ask her mother for any other type of support. Nancy felt that her mother was unable to provide her with any other type of support. The reason

for this was that Nancy and her mother have a very traumatic relationship and their communications often result in argument. Therefore, Nancy felt that it was best to only ask for support in the area of spelling which is a concrete request that limits their interactions.

***Coping with mother's lack of patience***

*Tara: When you're having difficulty spelling something, what do you do?*

*Nancy: I try to get a dictionary or I just come home and ask my mother. I just ask her for spelling (no other type of support). But after like the fifth time I ask, she kind of gets fed up.*

*Tara: What does she do then?*

*Nancy: She says, O.K. Nancy, look in the dictionary  
(Case Study Interview: Nancy, June 1998).*

Nancy seems to perceive her mother's patience wears thin, "...*But after like the fifth time I ask, she kind of gets fed up.*"

A third example of a student asking for direct support comes from an interview I had with Rebecca, the classroom teacher, shortly after her class returned from a rock climbing adventure. This vignette involved two students who did not participate in the case studies. However, it is an excellent example of a student asking another student for direct support.

***"How did you get over that part"?***

*Rebecca: Antonio had just tried to climb up this one (wall, which had a) triangle (part which) sticks out of the wall and he couldn't make it. He had gotten to a certain point but then couldn't get past that triangle, so he came down. Derek (a classmate) had done it previously and he had gotten to the top. Derek was at another wall actually tying up his knot and Antonio had just come down. Antonio went over to Derek and asked, "How did you get over that part"? (pointing at the triangle which jutted out). What I loved about the whole thing was that they*



*weren't just trusting each other to belay (the belayer is the person at the base of the wall who is in charge of the rope as the person on the wall is climbing) and helping each other in that way but whenever someone was on the wall, even if they stopped, even for a few seconds, people were always, from wherever they were noticed who needed help. (They were) always telling each other, "oh it's okay, rest" and encouraging them (each other) to keep going or pointing out the strategy to use, "the one on the right, there's a big one there". I just found it phenomenal. So at this point Antonio turns to Derek (and continues his question) "Derek I couldn't get it. How did you do it" and Derek says, "Well, where did you get to?" Antonio said, "I got to you know those two....." and then Derek said, "well when you get there you gotta put your foot, see that big one over there if you can get your foot there...then you just gotta push a little and reach up with your right hand grab on to that penis hold" Derek continued his explanation with Antonio listening carefully; they didn't even flinch. From then on the hand hold was referred to the 'penis hold' but nobody was laughing, except me (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

In this excerpt Rebecca describes her observation of Antonio asking Derek for direct support. Antonio sought out a classmate whom he considered to be an expert in a particular area. Antonio and Derek had an exchange in which Antonio explained where he was having a problem. Derek was able to move in within Antonio's zone of proximal development, in order to provide him with the instrumental support he needed to in order to achieve a desired goal. In other words, Derek was able to identify Antonio's actual developmental level, the section of the wall he was able to climb, and where on the wall Antonio was having difficulty. Derek was able to provide support by using language and gesture to provide Antonio with the necessary steps for mutual understanding. Once again, here was an example of a student using a question and suggesting a collaborative approach to request direct support. Together they discussed the difficulty and the solution which would allow Antonio to try the wall again and hopefully reach a successful outcome.

Although students who USW ask for support directly more often than those students who DUSW, that is not to say the latter group does not use a direct approach at times. The following examples highlight students who DUSW asking for direct support. There was only one example of Stephen asking for and receiving direct support. In this excerpt, he rallied informational/instrumental support (in other words, procedural advice and material aid as well as assistance and cognitive guidance in tasks) from his classmates when his English teacher would not accept a poem he had written.

***Stephen rallying the support of his classmates***

*Stephen: I'm good at poetry and making up stories. I wrote a poem for class. I forget how it goes. Something about someone hard headed, who can't use their brain. It ends up that the person puts a jack hammer to her brain and opens it up.*

*Tara: Yikes*

*Stephen: It's not a nice poem, it's a bit evil. So the teacher wouldn't accept it, because it wasn't about love. But it was really. I wrote it because Jill (his girlfriend) and I had a fight and she was being stubborn. Because the teacher told me that she wouldn't accept it I showed it to the class and they all said to the teacher that she should accept it. So, she took it (Case Interview: Stephen, June, 1998).*

In this excerpt Stephen accessed support directly from his classmates when his teacher told him that she would not accept his poem. He obtained the support of his peers who in turn put pressure on the teacher and asked her to accept Stephen's work. Rather than explain his point of view to his teacher, perhaps Stephen thought a more effective route to be recognized was to exercise pressure from his peers. Was Stephen being manipulative or was he using his interpersonal strengths with his peers? Newman (1990) and Newman and Goldin (1990) found in their research that grade seven students sought support from parents and other adults depending on how they weighed the costs and benefits, such as fear of embarrassment, awareness of peer acceptance and conformity. Newman (1990)

and Newman and Goldin (1990) found that students in their study did not seek support when greater costs are perceived. In Stephen's situation, it seems that he may have decided that he would have better success seeking direct support from his peers rather than his teacher. It would appear that his analysis of his own situation worked for him. It may also be that Stephen did not have the ability or skill in order to communicate his feelings of anger or frustration to his teacher. He may not have been able to put his feelings into words, or was not able to take responsibility for those feelings and talk to the teacher, making her aware of why she should accept the poem in an assertive way, as opposed to choosing a passive indirect route by obtaining the support of his peers. Stephen was able to seek direct support from his peers and achieved his intended goal. There were alternative methods of dealing with the situation which might have been more empowering for Stephen which he did not consider in this situation.

In the following example Matthew described a situation in which he was very angry at a girl for telling lies about him and sought direct support from a friend. It is important to note how Matthew copes with feelings of betrayal and friendship.

*"...he didn't like her either."*

*Matthew: I just kicked things and punched walls and stuff and just kind of like got all my anger out and then just chilled.*

*Tara: Where were you?*

*Matthew: Outside.*

*Tara: What did you do next?*

*Matthew: I talked to one friend about it because I trusted this friend and my friend didn't tell her. Because he didn't like her either.*

*Tara: What did you expect from your friend?*

*Matthew: Well he did what he should have did. He just sat back and just listened.*

*Tara: Is that what you usually expect from people?*

*Matthew: To understand and to listen, because that's usually what I do when someone is mad (Case Interview: Matthew, June 30, 1998).*

Matthew described his initial attempts at coping which involved physical aggression, "*I just kicked things and punched walls...*" He then reported seeking direct support from a friend. He chose to discuss his feelings with a friend for whom he felt kinship and mutual concern. He sought support from a friend whom he felt there was mutuality as the friend, "*...didn't like her either.*" Or was it that he colluded with a friend who apparently, "*...didn't like her either.*" Matthew was also able to explain what he expected from his friend. He expected him to understand, presumably because this friend shared the same feelings about this girl and to listen.

There is also evidence that sometimes when the students who **DUSW asked for direct support they did not get it**. However, there was no such evidence among the students who USW. The next two vignettes illustrate students who asked for support directly but did not get it. In the first example, Stephen described what happened when he asked his brother for informational/instrumental support.

*Stephen asks his brother for support, but he doesn't get it*

*Stephen: I'd like go to Bob (his brother) but he's never there, he doesn't keep promises anyway. He says he'll help me but then he never does.*

*Jill: (Stephen's girlfriend was present during the interview and adds). Yeah, but Steve, he wants to see that you're trying and then he'll help you. He helps me. I think you're jealous of my relationship with your brother.*

*Stephen: He (Bob) said he'd give me a reward if I did well, but how can I do well, if he doesn't help me? He says he'll help me but then he never comes home (Case Interview: Stephen and Jill, June 1998).*

In this excerpt, Stephen expressed his feelings of disappointment that his brother who offered to be involved in helping him be more successful at school, did not follow

through with his offer. Stephen was able to ask his brother for direct support but he did not receive the support he was looking for. The lack of support may have been confounded by Stephen's observation that Jill, his girlfriend, was being provided the support he desires from his brother. Jill said that she got support from Bob and added that all Stephen had to do was to show his brother that he was trying. The problem here was two-fold. One was that Stephen, like Michael, had difficulty getting a task started. He required someone to set him up and help him begin so that he could continue on his own (often with support, but at times he can work independently). Therefore, it would have been difficult to *'show'* his brother that he was trying when one of the most difficult things for Stephen was getting started. The second problem, which may have contributed to his brother's lack of following through with his offer to support Stephen was that he has a severe language based LD and had a great deal of difficulty in school himself. Bob required additional tutoring throughout high school and repeated several grades. It is possible that Bob wanted Stephen to be successful, but he was uncertain of how to support Stephen in an area of informational/informational support when the type of support needed pertained to school. Perhaps, Bob was able to support Jill, because when Jill sought support regarding her school work, often she was looking for someone to read over her work and tell her that it was good. This is quite different from the type of support Stephen was seeking from his brother. Stephen has difficulty beginning tasks independently; he requires someone to sit down with him and help him to see that the task is not as difficult as he believes. In the area of math for example, once Stephen sat down with his books open and he felt comfortable with an assignment, I observed that he could continue to work independently. If the task required reading or writing, it was useful for someone to work with him on the task at hand. Bob may not have been able to provide this type of support. However, it is very possible that Stephen was not able to

verbalize his needs. This situation is perhaps a double bind. Perhaps if Stephen was able to identify the situation and be able to express how it made him feel, then he might have been able to think about possible options for solving the problem. In this example, maybe he could have shared with his brother his feelings of hurt and disappointment. Or perhaps he could have sought the support of a peer, teacher, or school psychologist to brainstorm possible options. He then could have reflected on the possible consequences of each of his options. Stephen could then choose a solution and execute it.

In this next example, Matthew asked his teacher for informational/instrumental support but he did not appear to receive it.

***Timing is everything***

*Tara: When you are asked to do a project, but you don't really understand it, what do you do?*

*Matthew: I ask the teacher in class. Then she tells me to ask after class, cause usually I take a chance to see if she will tell me in class and if not then I have to go after class and ask her. They're like, 'ask me after the period' (Case Interview, Matthew June 30, 1998).*

My field notes confirmed this pattern of Matthew asking for clarification and being told to speak to the teacher after class. The problem appeared to be that Matthew asked for clarification after the teacher had begun to teach his/her lesson. Matthew's timing was inappropriate (Field Notes: English class, March 18, 1998). For some of the students at Vanguard High School, it is possible that they process oral language more slowly than others. Therefore, by the time the student has processed the information that the teacher has disseminated, the teacher has already moved on to another topic. It then appears that the student was not paying attention and is disrupting the class by asking for further information or asking a question at an inappropriate time. The difficulty that teachers

had with Matthew was determining when he was having difficulty with receptive language and when he was trying to divert the teacher's attention in a class. I observed many occasions when Matthew was asking questions in an attempt to change the course of the class by changing the topic to something completely unrelated or trying to take the class back to where they were at the beginning of the period. For example, at the beginning of an English class John was reminding the students to bring in their parental consent for an upcoming ski trip. Approximately fifteen minutes into the English class, Matthew was asked to read out loud the homework assignment he was to have done the night before and which he had not done. Rather than say he had not done the assignment, he asked John about the ski trip. He was successful at changing the topic for several minutes at which point the class began reading from Romeo and Juliet. Was this an example of a receptive language difficulty or a very strategic student who was diverting the teacher's attention away from him and on to something else? I suspect the latter. Vygotsky would perhaps suggest that by diverting the teachers attention Matthew was shifting regulation to some else. It must be very difficult for teachers to tease out in the midst of a lesson which of the above scenarios is accurate, a difficulty with oral language or a strategy to distract a teacher?. Smith (1989) talks about the different masks students wear to cover up particular areas of weakness. Teachers, everyday, need to evaluate students behavior, and try to determine what is causing the behavior and what feelings are behind the mask.

#### Asking for Support Indirectly

Students who USW also ask for support indirectly using a variety of strategies such as body language, gesture, tone of voice, and indirect questions. Karen, for

example, described her best friend as very intuitive and knowing just the right type of support to provide her, without Karen having to ask for it.

***Intuitive friends: "...she knows when to leave me alone..."***

*Karen: Lindsay understands me. Cause like when I'm mad she knows to leave me alone and I'll come to her when I'm ready. Like, someone like Nancy and Tanya, they're also good friends, but they don't know me as well.*

*Tara: How does Lindsay support you?*

*Karen: She like, comforts me and she'll know what to do basically.....Nancy, is a good problem solver (Case Interview: Karen, June 15, 1998).*

In this excerpt Karen explains how her friend Lindsay is intuitive and respectful of her need for time to be alone when Karen is angry. Karen expressed that she doesn't have to 'tell' Lindsay directly what her needs are as Lindsay "*knows*". Karen describes Lindsay as empathic, understanding others' feelings and concerns.

When Rebecca's class went rock climbing, the students had to learn how to tie the figure eight knot and how to belay before they could begin climbing. The belayer is the person at the base of the mountain/wall who is in charge of the rope as the person on the wall is climbing. The person who is belaying is responsible for the safety of the person climbing. Some of the students had more difficulty than others learning how to tie the knot and how to belay. Nancy was having a great deal of difficulty learning to tie the figure eight knot. Many of the other students in the group seemed to be catching on before she was. Nancy never verbalized her frustrations in words; however, her body stiffened and she gave the impression of being frustrated. In addition, she huffed every now and again. The following excerpt is her teachers' observation of Marianne observing Nancy's frustration and moving in subtly to provide her with some support.



*Marianne moving in to support Nancy*

*Nancy really overcame a lot and she was getting frustrated a bit at the beginning and stopped herself from you know getting upset but um.....uhum...what I think is that she is so afraid to feel self-conscious so she has to avoid it, so anytime that anything looks like maybe she's not going to be able to do something or she's not going to feel comfortable, she avoids it..... um I think she's learning slowly to try and overcome that ...yeah because she started to get frustrated learning how to tie the knot at the beginning and Marianne went over and put her hand on her shoulder and said quietly, "just try it again" and Nancy didn't get upset, it was neat...(Interview: Rebecca, March 1998).*

In this example Marianne was able to recognize that Nancy was beginning to get frustrated and was upset. Marianne quietly moved in to provide Nancy with some emotional support. What is of particular interest is that the students seem very aware of what type of support their peers need. For example, in the above situation it would have been quite easy for Marianne to move in and provide Nancy with instrumental support. By this I mean that she could have taken a different approach and tried to explain or show Nancy how to tie the knot. But she did not. Marianne was able to recognize that all Nancy required at that moment was some encouragement, in other words emotional support. It is very difficult to know when to move in and provide someone with support and even trickier to know which kind of support to provide. For an individual to do this well, Goleman (1997) would say that a person requires good emotional intelligence. In this case that would mean the following components: self-awareness, empathy, insight, and communication. Marianne demonstrated these skills as she supported Nancy.

Throughout my data collection I observed students providing each other with indirect support in the area of reading. As students read out loud, if they experienced difficulty sounding out a word, a fellow classmate would always jump in and help. For example, one day in English class Allen was reading out loud and he was struggling with

a word. Scott leaned forward and told him that the word was "brawl", Allen said the word and kept on reading (Field Notes: John Cummin's English Class, February 4, 1998). Patrick explained to me how things work in his English class when he has difficulty reading a word. *"If I'm in class, like other people in the class will say the word for you or I have my spell checker"* (Case Interview: Patrick, June 26, 1998). The students in all three of the classes appeared to provide the same type of support to one another, intuitively, when a peer was struggling with a word. I am not sure how the students have learned to provide this support. Perhaps they have learned to provide this type of support to others as they have seen their teachers use this type of strategy. Or perhaps as they have each experienced difficulty in the area of academics, they can empathize with a peer who is experiencing difficulty and provide the type of support they would want for themselves. The Self Science curriculum at Nueva School (1978) would call this type of support empathy and insight. Empathy is the ability to understand and be sensitive to another's feelings, thoughts and experiences. Insight means having the ability to identify patterns in one's own emotional life and recognize similar patterns in others.

Another example involves Patrick asking his mother for indirect support. Rather than asking his mother to go to the library with him, he asked, "when are we going to get it (books)?" Patrick was not able to ask his mother for direct support in this situation, but he was able to subtly communicate to her that he needed a collaborative venture with her.

### ***Soliciting support for project work***

*Mrs. Gagnon: Just the past assignment, the one on marijuana, we (she and her son) were talking about it, ....he did tell us (his parents) that he had to do it. And he said,*

*Patrick: 'I need a book, I have to go to the library to get it'. 'Well, when are we going to get it?'*

*Mrs. Gagnon: I feel that we have to kind of guide him.*

*Mrs. Gagnon responds to Patrick: Well, Monday you don't have anything to do, so why don't you go Monday after school.*

*Patrick responds: Well, I have to do this and this.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: Well, before you do this you can go to the library; you have a library card. All you have to do when you go, you go to the reception and you ask the reception where books on this would be.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: This is kind of what he needs. He has to be told step by step what to do rather than to go in and ask for help. But I always find that if you say, well you go and ask that person for help? And tell him the exact stages to go through. But that creates a fear in him. He's really afraid to do those kind of things. So his brother, John, stepped in and said,*

*John: Well, I have time, I'll take you to the Concordia library and I know that there's books on marijuana.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: So the two of them physically went and they got, I think, three books from the library and Patrick went through them and got the information that he needed, got the photocopies.*

*Tara: How did he get the information? Did John help him to get the information?*

*Mrs. Gagnon: I think he helped him a little bit. But he did a lot of it himself. And then he typed it on the computer and his brother's girlfriend corrected it for him. And so he was happy with that.*

*Tara: So did he ask John to help him go to the library or did John*

*Mrs. Gagnon: John offered.*

*Tara: And then would Patrick ask John's girlfriend to edit or would the girlfriend...*

*Mrs. Gagnon: She would offer, yes. He wouldn't ask for the help (Parent Interview: Mrs. Gagnon, June, 1998).*

In this situation Patrick asked for support indirectly by stating that he had to go to the library to get a book. He solicited support by posing a collaborative relationship, "When are we going to get it?" By asking when are we going to get it, Patrick was indirectly asking for his mother's support. It would appear that Mrs. Gagnon did not hear his request for her company and began to highlight for Patrick the steps involved in going to the library on his own. However, it would seem that he was not ready to accept her

advice and follow through. This conversation took place at dinner. His brother picked up on the fact that Patrick was not comfortable going to the library on his own and offered to go with him. Patrick was able to take John up on his offer and he successfully found the books and information that he needed. In this example Patrick's brother, John, demonstrated his intuitiveness about Patrick's needs and provided Patrick with the appropriate support that fulfilled his needs. This can be considered an example of what Vygotsky calls other regulation, when a dialogic pair interacts and works collaboratively.

An important difference with respect to students who DUSW is that the students in this group may be able to seek support indirectly. However, they would not ask for support from a parent, and the support they receive may not actually help them. In the following example, Michael procrastinated starting a project until the last minute. His mother would often provide him with directives such as, "*Okay, make sure you finish it on time*". Michael would provide her with the answer that he thinks she wanted to hear: "*...don't worry, I'll do it...*"

### ***Pacifying mom***

*Michael: ....usually I wait until the last minute.....my mom always says, "okay, make sure you finish it (Biology project) on time", I'm like okay, don't worry, don't worry, I'll do it, it'll be done on time. Then when the last week comes and I start to do it, it's like ah, it won't be finished (Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998).*

Perhaps, Michael is afraid of letting his mother down, so he tells her what he thinks she wants to hear. Perhaps he had the intention of getting his project done on time, but he was not sure how to make it happen. Michael's mother provided me with the following perspective as illustrated in an excerpt from an interview with her.

*Is it a disability or is he just lazy?*

*Tara: What does Michael do if he has to do something school related and he doesn't know how to do it, like homework or he got an assignment and he does not know how to approach it, what will he do?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: Well, he never asks here. I always ask if he has something, it is always 'I did it in class', 'I did it with the tutors' and that has been all this year and then I found out that it was not done in class and not always done with the tutors.*

*Tara: Then what happens?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: I get angry and then if I ask him why, he will say 'I don't know', 'I forgot', it is always the same thing. 'I forgot' and then I get angry with him and his argument is he does not like to ask me because I don't have patience with him. He says, 'when I ask you to help with my homework you yell at me' and I say 'I don't yell at you' and I told him 'I have tried to help you but I get frustrated because when I try to help you, you want me to do all the work, you want me to do the answers'. What happened one night, he brought home his biology and he says 'can you help' and I said 'I will help you but I said ask early, don't come at 9:00' and he just sits there, and I say, 'O.K. what is the first question' and he reads it and I say, 'it has to be within these certain pages' and he just stares at it and I say 'Michael, you have to look' and he does not seem to know how he just sits there and wants me to tell him, 'that's the answer there', and then I get frustrated because I find he is not trying. So that is when I don't understand. Is it a disability or is he just lazy? He just doesn't want to be bothered to try to find the answer. It is easier to say, 'I don't understand it' (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

It appeared to me that Mrs. Desjardins wanted to support her son, but did not seem to know how to do this in a way that would make sense to Michael. Michael would like the support from his mother but also did not know how to share with her what he needed to be supported. There appeared to be a lack of attunement in their relationship. The result of this lack of attunement was Michael's attempt to reassure her, "don't worry, I'll do it, it will be done on time." Over the course of the school year Mrs. Desjardins discovered that Michael had not handed in various homework assignments and projects. The result was that she became angry and approached Michael in a way which he perceived as

judgmental and accusatory. Michael coped in one of two ways. More often than not he withdrew and provided his mother (and teachers, tutors) with vague responses such as, *"I don't know"* or *"I forgot."* However, in this example Michael risked being honest with his mother and told her that she yells at him and loses patience with him. Rather than validate and acknowledge Michael's feelings, unfortunately Mrs. Desjardins thought that she had to defend herself by explaining why she got frustrated: *"you want me to do the answers."* In order to break this vicious cycle in which Michael and his mother find themselves, it will be important for Mrs. Desjardins to learn how to hear her son and validate and respect his feelings. Then together they can work through problems in a respectful, open, non-judgmental way.

Matthew worked quite differently than Michael. He reported that he never brought home schoolwork, and during an interview with his mother, she sounded quite comfortable with the routine. Matthew explained that he did not bring home school work, and explained to me how he got it done.

***"I never bring homework home"***

*Tara: Your mum was saying that you don't really bring homework home.*

*Matthew: I never bring homework home.*

*Tara: Where do you do it?*

*Matthew: I do it at school in the morning or at recess.*

*Tara: I think you mentioned earlier that you sometimes work on the train, is that right?*

*Matthew: Yeah, I ask a friend on the train in the morning. If it's like during the week I ask a friend on the train and they explain it the question to me.*

*Tara: So if it's due in a few days then you won't copy, you'll just ask them?*

*Matthew: Yeah*

*Tara: What if it's due that morning?*

*Matthew: Then I copy it and I take a chance .*

*Tara: When they explain it to you, do they explain it in words or...*

*Matthew: I'll just be like what does it mean when da da da da on question 2 and they'll be like turn to page 56 and it's all there (Case Interview: Matthew, June, 1998)*

In this excerpt, Matthew reported that he did not bring home his school work, doing his homework during class, at recess, or on the train. My query was that I never observed a peer providing support to Matthew concerning school work that did not involve copying or telling him the answer. Similarly, as Michael told his mother what he thought she wanted to hear, I felt that there were times during my interview with Matthew when he told me what he thought I wanted to hear. It may be the case that Matthew has not had very positive experiences at school when he is honest, so perhaps in his view he thought it was better not to be honest. For instance, Matthew and his mother described an incident which took place in September 1997. Matthew and his friends pulled a fire alarm at school. Matthew was the only one of the group who came forward and told the truth about his involvement in this school problem. He was suspended and was asked to do some community work. The others involved never came forward and hence were not punished. Matthew was not angry at his peers for not coming forward; he was angry that he was not rewarded for being honest. This being his perception, then where was the incentive for him to be honest when someone asked him questions related to school? Maybe he was telling me what he thought I wanted to hear and maybe he was providing me with his perception of how he did homework. During an interview with Matthew's mother, she confirmed that he rarely did his school work at home. However, she had a different perception with regards to his school work.

***"It (homework) gets done. A lot of the time it doesn't get handed in"***

*Tara: What about homework? Does he bring homework home?*

*Mrs. Rogers: Not often.*

*Tara: Where does he do it?*

*Mrs. Rogers: He does it at school.*

*Tara: Do you think it gets done or not really?*

*Mrs. Rogers: It gets done. A lot of the time it doesn't get handed in.*

*Tara: Where is the breakdown, do you think?*

*Mrs. Rogers: Organization. He loses it or puts it somewhere and doesn't remember. That's a big problem. I would say the biggest problem. ...he gets the pages and they turn them in once a week, it's holding onto it (the pages) for a week and then handing them in when he's supposed to or when they say okay you have a project, you've got a month to do it and it's got to be handed in on this date, forget it! He'll wait until the last minute or he'll do it in the last week. For him everything has to be done at school (Case Interview: Mrs. Roger's, June 30, 1998).*

Matthew's mother appeared to be quite accepting of the fact that Matthew did his school work outside of the home. She also recognized that he worked on projects at the last minute. I did not sense the same anxiety or blame in her words or tone in comparison to Michael's mother. Mrs. Rogers attributed the problem to poor organization, a skill that could not be changed or modified. Perhaps, by rationalizing the problem she believed that there was no need to solve the problem or take some responsibility for it.

Stephen reported that when he needed help with a project he would ask his brother or girlfriend, or the teacher. He reported, "*I usually keep asking until I understand, but then I forget.*" Stephen explained that in terms of projects, Jill, his girlfriend, usually did them for him. It was my observation that Stephen often did not need to ask for support, because Jill usually moved in to help.

***"I know if I do it myself I'll fail"***

*Stephen: Sometimes Jill does them (projects) for me on the type writer so the teacher won't recognize her writing...I want to do it myself but I'm not ready. I know if I do it myself I'll fail...Once Jill got up at three in the morning to a biology project for me. I told her not too, but she never listens (Case Interview: Stephen, July, 1998).*



It appeared that despite Jill's best efforts to support Stephen, by doing his work for him, she was further damaging his self-esteem. She was corroborating and colluding with his view of himself that he could not do it himself: *"I'll fail."* He believed that someone had to do his work for him. In this next excerpt, Stephen explained what he really wanted from the members of his social network. He expressed sadness that he did not get the support from whom he wants it.

***"I want them to be happy for me. Even if it's not a good mark"***

*Tara: What do you want out of someone-anyone?*

*Stephen: I want them to be happy for me. Even if it's not a good mark. I never got someone to be really happy for me, even if it's not good. Jill's mum does now (is happy for him). She makes me feel good, she gets so excited for me, she cries for me, she's proud of me. I want Bob to be the one I show my marks to, but...*

*Tara: What about your parents?*

*Stephen: My dad tells me I can do better. He says he's there to help me, but I don't like the way he helps me. I don't understand his way and we fight (Case Interview: Stephen, July, 1998).*

In this excerpt, Stephen's sadness at not getting the support he wants from his family came through. He seemed to be saying that he wanted his family and his girlfriend to be proud of him and love him, not because of his good or bad marks but just because of who he is. He wanted to be himself, and he wanted that to be enough. He was able to express these emotions to me in a private interview. However, he has not been able to find a way to share these emotions with his family.

My findings continuously point to the differences in the relationships between the students and their parents. Patrick and Karen who use support well appear to have open, trusting, and respectful relationships with their parents. Nancy, who also uses support well, had a series of people within her social network to whom she can turn for support, who also provided her with respect, trust, and openness. These three students clearly

expected to be supported. The students in the group who DUSW appear to have had different types of relationships with their families. The question becomes why? One possible reason could be that it is difficult for the students in this group to verbalize their needs, making it difficult for those individuals to provide the social support the students may require. Ultimately the students who DUSW felt unheard, they do not feel respected, or valued by their parents.

Students who USW sought indirect support more often than students who DUSW. The following examples illustrate students who **DUSW asking for support indirectly and receiving support**. In the following excerpt Matthew asks his mother for emotional support indirectly.

***Coping with being "dumped"***

*Tara: Think of the last time you were really sad, what was happening?*

*Matthew: Last time I was really sad I got dumped.*

*Tara: What did you do?*

*Matthew: I didn't stay home because I knew I was going to get too depressed so I just went out, like every night and slept over every night (at friends houses) and tried to like have lots of fun.*

*Tara: Did you tell anyone you were feeling sad?*

*Matthew: Yeah, everyone. All my friends, my parents. But they were asking me too. They were like, what's wrong? Sad? What? So I told them, I got dumped.*

*My mom talked to me about it. She was like don't worry, things will work out for you. Then she made me laugh. But I mostly just talked to like friends, guy friends (Case Interview: Matthew, June 30, 1998).*

In this excerpt Matthew explained from whom he sought support when he and his girlfriend split up. Although he reported telling everyone about his situation, he also reported that people within his social network were asking him: "What's wrong? Sad? What?" This indicated that without Matthew having to ask for support directly,

individuals within his network were picking up on his body language, sadness, or change in routine (i.e., going out every night and sleeping over at friends houses every night). This is another example of a student having members in their social networks who have the ability to empathize. Matthew reported that his friends and family were able to read the visual cues that he was providing them and thereby provide him with the support that he was seeking indirectly.

Michael was also provided support, at times, when he asked for it indirectly. For example, in math class on March 12th, 1998, Michael was sitting at his desk and appeared to be staring into space. I wrote the following notes that day.

***Staring into space***

*Michael is sitting at his desk, he doesn't appear to know what to do. He's just sitting there, staring into space. He has not asked anyone for support. He's just staring straight ahead. A few minutes later, Peter approaches. Peter bends over Michael's shoulder and provides him with some support (Field Notes, Peter's math class, March 12th, 1998)*

In this situation Michael did not need to ask for support directly. His day dreamy behavior alerted his teacher that he was having difficulty and Michael's teacher was able to move in and provide support.

The following excerpts are examples of students asking **indirectly for support but none is provided**. There was evidence of this only among the students who DUSW. In the next example, Michael's head was on his desk, and he was not working. Regardless of why his head was on his desk, whether it was because he was unsure of what to do or whether it was because he was bored, one would think that he was sending off a clear message that he required support.

### ***A defeatist stance***

*Tara: What do you do when you're in class and you're having difficulty with math?*

*Michael: ah, depends on how I feel, ah most of the time I give up and put my head down and try to fall asleep. Ah, usually that doesn't work cause the teacher won't allow us to sleep, ah some other classes I can get away with it, but not math. In French it works cause the teacher is not strict..what some students do is they ignore her and they just go ahead and do it (sleep). Me, I just keep my head down and she usually doesn't say anything cause she gives up on the other kids... (Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998)*

This example illustrates Michael's perception of how he coped when he was having difficulty in class. It would appear that despite Michael's indirect attempts at gaining support in French class (by putting his head on his desk), he was not provided with any. When he was asked, *Is there a better way to cope?* He provided the following response:

### ***Possible solutions to cope better in class***

*Yes, first I guess you could stop working, try to calm down, maybe ask the teacher if you can get a drink of water or something. Then when you come back you just sit down and if you're still a bit frustrated you just wait for another two minutes, then you just start again. If you still can't get it you just ask the teacher to help you or explain it to you or give you some sort of example to make you understand how to do it or what to do (Case Interview: Michael, June, 1998).*

Michael could describe what he *could* do to cope better; however, he was not able to follow through on these suggestions and strategies.

I also observed Matthew asking indirectly for support at times during class but not receiving it. There appeared to be a theme of ignoring students who quietly withdraw and were not disruptive. This is in contrast to the direct attention given to students who were disruptive and at times even dangerous. In an interview with Matthew, I asked him

about his most difficult subjects. He told me that his two most difficult subjects were geography and biology. I then asked: "*What do you do when you're in class and you get stuck on one of those subjects?*" He responded, "*I space out and I try to go to sleep.*" My field notes confirmed that this was an avoidance strategy he used. In the classes in which I observed him, he was generally left to work independently and was not provided with support. When asked if he tried anything else, he said: "*Try to figure it out from a friend, probably.*" This response also made sense to me and paralleled my own observations of how Matthew coped in class when he had difficulty. My field notes indicated that Matthew sometimes "spaces out" and frequently he became involved in off-task behavior such as talking with a friend. When frustrated, he would often chat with a friend and then get admonished by the teacher, as opposed to receiving support (Field Notes, Peter's English class, February 11, 1998). Matthew's way of asking for support indirectly was to try to sleep or engage in off-task behavior, such as talking with peers, drawing, or day dreaming. His off-task behaviors provoked an angry response from his teachers. Smith (1989) discusses the different masks that students with Lds wear, such as a mask of super competence, mask of helplessness, mask of invisibility, mask of the class clown, mask of not caring, mask of boredom, among many others. She suggests that the students hide behind these masks in order to cover up their insecurities and difficulties. Some of these masks can be more aggravating to some teachers than to others. Matthew wore many different masks in class when he was experiencing difficulty. However, the mask of boredom seemed to dominate. Whereas Michael more often wore the mask of invisibility. He remained very quiet, often with his head on his desk.

Support Provided To Those Who USW: Whether Requested Or Not

My findings also indicate that often students did not have to ask for support, it was simply provided. It would appear that the students who USW had very sensitive and empathetic individuals within their social networks. Once again it appeared that the students who USW were provided with support more frequently, and the type of support provided was more useful than that provided to the students who DUSW. The following excerpts reveal the perspectives of some of the parents and how they think they provide support to their children as they intuitively thought was necessary. These excerpts also demonstrate the students' ability to use the support being provided. In the first excerpt, Patrick's mother describes how she encouraged her son to get his snow boarding teaching certificate.

### ***Removing obstacles***

*Mrs. Gagnon: Yeah, he's a snowboard instructor. He got his instructor's in January. ...I pushed him to get his snow boarding certification. I do all the leg work because he wouldn't have done it on his own.*

*Tara: So you do the leg work in terms of 'this is when the course is being given, so I signed you up', that kind of thing?*

*Mrs. Gagnon: I had to go with him because he was a junior. I had to take the course, too and I had already had my certification. But my husband and myself, we both did the course with him... Sometimes that's what it takes. When it came to the snow boarding certification, I knew he had the ability to do it so I signed him up. I do the leg work so that there will be no obstacles. If there's an obstacle then he'll give up.*

*Tara: Do you think he knows what the steps are? Like, did you say, I called Tremblant today and the course is on this day so I told them that we are going to come and take it? And then does he go with you when you have to sign up so he kind of sees the steps, the process, that you have to go through so it's not a magical thing? We're here.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: I did. I guess probably that whole physical part I did, that one I did on my own (Parent Interview: Mrs. Gagnon, June 1998).*

In this excerpt Mrs. Gagnon described Patrick achieving a teaching certificate in snow boarding. She acknowledged pushing him into athletics as she saw that he had potential in this area. Patrick's parents recognized his talent/strength in this area and encouraged him to excel. They both took the course with him since he was too young to be permitted to take the course without parental involvement. This is clearly an example of parental support.

Patrick's mother acknowledged that she had to do the "leg work" for him to be successful because if there were obstacles Patrick would give up. She seems to have recognized the learned helpless cycle that students like Patrick can get into and what she needed to do in order to support him (i.e., remove the obstacles of calling to get information about the course and signing up). It was at this point that I began to realize that perhaps the real issue was not that one group uses support well and the other does not. Perhaps, the group who appears to USW have people within their social networks who are better able to move into their zone of proximal development and supporting them as they need it.

Although in this section, I am explaining that students receive support without having to ask for it, I feel it was important to contrast Patrick's experience of being supported with Michael's. In the following excerpt, Michael's mother acknowledges that, like Patrick, her son also gives up easily. The difference appears to be that Patrick's mother is able to identify what she sees as potential obstacles and removes them so that Patrick may be successful. In other words, Mrs. Gagnon is able to work within Patrick's zone of proximal development in order to help him to succeed. Whereas Michael's mother becomes frustrated with her son's defeatist attitude. Rather than being pro-active and problem solving, she herself adopts a defeatist attitude and gives up. The question arises as to who is feeding whose defeatist attitude?

***"Why bother, I'm just gonna fail anyway"***

*Mrs. Desjardins: ...he panics and then he just goes, he does not try, he gives up. He tends to give up pretty easily. His whole attitude this year is more giving up in everything.*

*Tara: What do you think could make a difference?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: I don't know. I am trying to figure it out. I get frustrated. This year he has had a very, um, defeatist attitude. 'Why bother, I'm just gonna fail anyway.'*

*Tara: What happens then?*

*Ms. Desjardins: He doesn't do what he's supposed to do. And we argue (Parent Interview: Ms. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

The difference in approach between these two mothers was not that one parent could remove the obstacles and the other could not. The difference was two-fold. One was that Mrs. Gagnon acknowledged Patrick's strengths and weaknesses, allowing Patrick to be himself and acknowledging that his strengths and weaknesses co-exist. It is her acknowledgment and acceptance of Patrick as an individual that appears to make the difference. Secondly, Mrs. Gagnon appears to have a strength and ability to empathize with her son. For Mrs. Desjardins, her frustration ends in an argument. Is it difficult for Mrs. Desjardins to accept and empathize with her son? Or is it difficult for Michael to verbalize his thoughts and feelings, which in turn makes it difficult for parents and others within his social network to provide him with social support? One can only imagine how difficult it must be for parents like Mrs. Desjardins to support their children regardless of why.

In this next excerpt Mrs. Gagnon talks about the difficulty Patrick had in obtaining information to start Driver's Education class. She explains how important and how excited Patrick was to get his driver's license but he had difficulty achieving his goal.



*"I don't know, I just couldn't do it"*

*Mrs. Gagnon: ...He's taken a little bit more responsibility with his driver's license. He was with me when I made the phone call. And then it was..... it's just on St. Catherine's across from Alexis Neon near the school. So I said, 'you're going to sign up next Monday night'. It was in the fall, 'go Monday night'. So, I called him Sunday night to remind him (his parents live in the Eastern Townships). I called Monday night at nine o'clock: 'So you went?' (Patrick said) 'No, I didn't call'. 'Why not?' (He responded) 'I don't know'. And I said, 'Well, Patrick, I'm doing this for you; you want your license; you're 16, this is what you've always wanted. You could hardly wait until you turned 16'. I said, 'Why didn't you call?' (Patrick said) 'I don't know, I just couldn't do it'. So I said, 'okay, fine'. So I didn't push him. And then next week when I went up (to Montreal) we went physically (together). I went in with him and got all the information and then, 'okay, you start this night', and you have to show him. And then that was fine. After that he was okay.*

*Tara: He could show up on his own that first night when he knew where to go?*

*Mrs. Gagnon: Yes. The first night, once that I went there, because he wasn't sure. Originally we had driven by, I had shown him the building and I said, 'okay, that's the building, there's the number, that's where you go in'. But I hadn't parked and gone up the stairs. So he couldn't go. But the next week we went, we parked and we walked upstairs, and hello, and this is it. So the week after when he wanted to go (the first day of class), he was okay because he knew exactly where to walk to and where to walk up the stairs and where to sit. But I had to do it for him the first week (Parent Interview: Mrs. Gagnon, July 1998).*

In this example Mrs. Gagnon thought that she was helping Patrick within his zone of proximal development by driving past the driver's education building and pointed to it, so he would know where he had to go to get information. However, when she called him to find out if he had gone, she discovered that he had not followed through. When she questioned him, he responded: *"I don't know, I just couldn't do it."* His short defeatist response was not a surprise. It is the same type of response that Stephen or Michael would provide to their parents when they did not fulfill expectations. However, rather

than get frustrated or angry at Patrick, Mrs. Gagnon explains: *"I didn't push him."* She recognized that obtaining a driver's license was important to Patrick. She moved back into Patrick's zone of proximal development and supported him in his goal. She was able to provide him with just enough support by going with him the first time to obtain the information. Then she withdrew and provided Patrick with the space to excel on his own. This type of ebb and flow of parents or more capable peers moving in and out of a students' ZPD is crucial to a student's development of self-regulatory behavior. Patrick's mother was able to recognize and validate his fears and provide him with support in a way that was respectful of an adolescent's feelings of fear, shame, and anger. Mrs. Gagnon validated his tacit feelings and delivered this message by not judging him and by not getting angry. This is another example of how a member of a student's social network can be empathetic and insightful.

In this next excerpt, Patrick was asked by his mother to go to the school clothing sale and buy his clothes for next year. His mother was not able to join him as she had a meeting. When Patrick told his mother directly that he could not go and make the purchases. Mrs. Gagnon brainstormed a possible solution which he accepted.

#### ***Perceived literacy inadequacies***

*Mrs. Gagnon: ...and then another situation was when we had to order the uniforms. And I was busy that night; it would just be a major difficulty to go. And he (Patrick) just had to order two pair of pants and five shirts; it was really simple stuff. I checked everything off and I said, 'Patrick, you could go and walk down the street'. 'You try on the shirts; I trust that you get the right size. I'm going to give you a cheque. I'll write out who the company is. I've signed the cheque; you just have to fill in the dollar amount'. And he didn't say anything to me. I handed him the piece of paper, ticked off, 'here it is, here it is'. And he said, 'I can't do it'. I said 'why?' (he responded) 'Well, I'll have to fill in the cheque and you know I'm really bad at that kind of thing'. I said, 'well, just give it to the*

*people and they'll fill in the dollar amount'. So that took care of it, he was able to do it.*

*Tara: And he did it on his own?*

*Mrs. Gagnon: He did it. He did it on his own.*

*Tara: That's a really hard thing. Because it's not actually going and doing the clothes that he was worried about but it's the actual writing part of it. Filling in the number.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: I know, yes.*

*Tara: It's very intimidating.*

*Mrs. Gagnon: But as long as I gave him a solution. You see he had no solution. He didn't know. He was at a block, he didn't know. He could try the clothes and everything but when it came to filling in the cheque, he couldn't figure that out, to ask. I said, 'Patrick, they know that this is a school\*\*\*\*\* (for kids with learning disabilities). So once he had a solution then he was okay with it. He said, 'Don't worry, Mom, I can do it. Don't worry about it'. I had an appointment until 7:30 and then I would have to drive up, and I said, 'okay, I've got between eight and eight-thirty'. And I said, 'Patrick, you know, you'd really be helping me out a lot'. And he understood the importance of him walking down the street. But it was filling in this cheque, was like, 'I can't do it'. So that's that situation (Parent Interview: Mrs. Gagnon, July 1998).*

In this example Patrick's mother initially requested that Patrick do something that he felt he could not do. After a brief silence he was able to tell his mother: *"I can't do it."* He told his mother that he could not accomplish this task and explained why: *"Well, I'll have to fill in the cheque and you know I'm really bad at that kind of thing."* As spelling is an area of weakness for him, he was experiencing some anxiety with respect to successfully filling in the cheque. Patrick's mother came up with a solution for him (to ask the person at the cash to fill the cheque in for him). It may be that Patrick's anxiety and fear of filling in the cheque prevented him from coming up with his own solution. He required his mother to provide him with informational/instrumental support, which he was then able to use independently. He moved from a feeling of lack of confidence to reassuring his mother by saying: *"Don't worry mum, I can do it"*, and he did.

Although Albert did not meet the definition of having a Ld as he was only 1 standard deviation below the mean as opposed to 1.5 SD, I have included the following excerpts taken from interviews with his mother, as they contribute to an understanding of students who USW when support is provided. Despite a history of medical problems, Albert's parents were determined that he would complete his secondary education. Despite doctors and other professionals trying to help the family accept that Albert may never go to school let alone complete high school, Albert's parents would not accept this prognosis. Albert's mother reported telling the teachers, and Albert, that he had to finish school. In her view, there was no alternative, he would go to school and she would hold herself and the school responsible.

***"He have to go (to school), so you have to help him"***

*Mrs. Carter: ...I was telling her (an elementary teacher) he have to go to high school. That's the first thing I told them, "he have to go, so you have to help him". ...there is no choice, no training school from elementary school, I don't want that. He can go after high school to a training program if he wants to. "There's lots of nice training college so that he can go and learn a trade", I said, "but he have to finish high school." And he had a good teacher and she helped him... I wasn't going to give up on him. He has really come a long way, I'm proud of him. We never listened to nobody (doctors or professionals). I go with my gut instinct. I didn't want him to turn out like me, so that's why. I have a learning disability too...(Case Interview: Mrs. Carter, June, 1998).*

In this excerpt, Mrs. Carter plays an advocacy role for her son and insists his school assume responsibility for his learning. She gives the school a message that her son was going to get to high school and it was their job to get him there. She also delivered a message to Albert that she believed in him, and that he could make it through high school with support. For example, she demonstrates for Albert how to get support by talking with his teachers. In this situation Mrs. Carter, was demonstrating that she was trusting

her intuition and not only relying on professionals. In an interview with Angela, a member of the schools' professional team, she confirmed that Mrs. Carter had delivered the very same message to herself and the high school teachers, that Albert was going to complete high school when he began his academic career at Vanguard.

***"They gave him a sense of the possible..."***

*Angela: When his parents were told that he would probably never go to elementary school, or when they've been given any bad news about Albert, they would disregard it, mobilize their resources, and quietly model success for him. What they modeled for him, and he will tell you this, 'don't think about quitting, you might not be able to do this right now and you might need some more help but don't think about stopping. That is not an option.' They gave him a sense of the possible by doing that, I think (Interview with a member of the professional support staff, Angela: July 10, 1998).*

It is sad that the professionals that the Carter's encountered prior to Vanguard stressed the negative outcomes rather than considering what Vygotsky called learning in the potential. As a clinician I understand that professionals do not want to give families false hope nor do they want families to place pressure on a student to achieve unattainable goals. However, who are we to say what is and is not attainable? Through our modern assessments, we can not account for the potential of parental support and encouragement, nor a student's desire for success. To return to Vygotsky's actual definition of the zone of proximal development, he wrote: "...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Learning in the potential is what we may be able to achieve with support. Angela confirms Mrs. Carter's desire for Albert to succeed in

high school and in life. Mrs. Carter has delivered the same message to Albert, as the following excerpt illustrates.

***"Don't do it for me, do it for yourself, because you have to live with yourself"***

*Ms. Carter: I always tell him, it's not for me. "Don't do it for me, do it for yourself, because you have to live with yourself"....I said, "I'm already living my life"....so I say "you should actually try to do everything in life for you". I say, "make yourself happy because if you are trying to please me you are going to be unhappy"... (Case Interview: Mrs. Carter, June, 1998).*

Mrs. Carter believes in her son's potential to be himself. The message she continuously sends him seems to be the following: *"Do it for yourself"*, trust yourself and that's the way to be happy in life. In sending this message to Albert she is also saying, 'I trust you, and I support you'.

Although Nancy's mother models for her daughter how she accesses support when she needs it (i.e., calling the social worker when she feels that she can not handle Nancy), there was not a great deal of evidence to suggest that Nancy is personally supported by her mother at this stage in her life. However, there are other people in Nancy's social network who are able to recognize when she needs support and are able to move into her zone of proximal development. The following examples illustrate her teacher's ability to support Nancy emotionally and academically.

***Rebecca's ability to support Nancy intuitively***

*Rebecca: Sometimes I can just tell that she's (Nancy) upset or tired or grumpy or whatever.*

*Tara: How?*

*Rebecca: um, by the way she's sitting, or not making eye contact. I know her well enough now to recognize the signs.*

*Tara: So what happens?*

*Rebecca: Well it depends. Sometimes I just leave her alone. Like in class I won't ask her questions, I let her participate if she wants to. But often she'll come to me and tell me that she had a rough night, which usually means I should give her some space. But sometimes I will approach her, like during homeroom and check in with her. Sometimes she wants to talk, but mostly she just lets me know that she's having a difficult time and I know to leave her alone for a while (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, May, 1998).*

In this excerpt Rebecca is able to recognize when Nancy requires support through careful observation of her body language such as *"the way she's sitting or not making eye contact..."* Rebecca then uses her skills in emotional literacy and decides how best to provide support such as providing her with some space, not calling on her in class, or by approaching Nancy directly.

Angela described an incident in which Nancy coped extremely well in a situation that would have made most teenagers furious and cause them to be reactive.

*"She will get distressed and she will find a way (to cope)"*

*Angela: She is quite a wonder, I don't know where she got some of the skills and strategies and strengths that she has got. She's a very strong young lady.*

*Tara: Yeah, here's a girl who really did not have good modeling in terms of family support. And yet, whenever she is in a group home or foster care, she seems to really look for people that can be useful to her and she has maintained a relationship with many of these people.*

*Angela: Last summer she spent her summer in a group home. They are all distressed kids. One of them was kicking her things. This is the kind of thing that most teenagers would just go bananas about, but Nancy found a way to deal with it. She will get distressed and she will find a way (to cope). I am very impressed with her*

*Tara: How did you hear about this incident?*

*Angela: I used to drive her home after school sometimes, the group home was very close to my house. She would often tell me how things were going.*

*(Interview with a member of the professional support staff: Angela, July 10, 1998).*

Angela confirms Nancy's ability to cope in difficult situations and seek out support as she needs it. This excerpt also suggests that Nancy has developed skills in the areas of personal decision-making (her ability to act as opposed to react), managing her feelings (monitor herself through "self-talk" and finding ways to handle emotions such as anger), assertiveness (expressing her feelings without anger or passivity), and conflict resolution (how to fight fair).

In these previous examples, the students were provided with different degrees and types of support, depending on their individual needs. The students who USW were each able to use the support and follow through with either constant support or independently. These examples illustrated their parents' and teachers' abilities to read/perceive, empathize, model, and support them within their ZPD and then withdraw, or change their support as the adolescents indicated that they needed them to. These examples demonstrate the students', parents' and teachers' abilities to provide support as appropriate to meet their needs by modeling, scaffolding and brainstorming within the students' zone of proximal development. As well as believing in them, they highlighted their strengths, and encouraged their children. The parents were able to do this with their children because they demonstrated a degree of attunement and flexibility with their children. That is, they knew how to read the words and worlds of the other. Each parent and child has demonstrated some degree of emotional literacy. Many of the parents were able to empathize with their children, provide insight, and model self-awareness. The parents were also able to explain to their children how to take responsibility, be assertive, and resolve conflicts. These are all components which are taught within the curriculum of many emotional literacy programs, such as the Self Science class at Nueva school, Troup



Middle School social competence program in New Haven, or the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in New York City.

The difference between students who USW and those students who DUSW are subtle. In the above situations, sometimes the individuals within each students' social network intuitively moved into their ZPD and the student did not need to say anything. In the cheque example, Patrick could say directly to his mother: *"I can't do it."* She was able to empathize with her son's fears. She was respectful of his worries and helped him to see the situation as not so 'scary' after all and come up with a solution with which he was comfortable. My analysis of the data regarding students who USW reveals that students feelings (fears, joys, and feelings of anger) were acknowledged, respected, and supported appropriately. The students were never told directly or indirectly, through a tone of voice or body language, that they were being silly or stupid, that they were letting anyone down or that they should just stop "it" and conform to the norms. The situations which I observed and have reported here, illustrate respectful, trusting interactions in which the students felt free to say how they felt and understood that support would be provided. In addition, these students were able to use the support provided.

#### Support Provided to Those Who DUSW: But is it the Right Type of Support?

The following examples are types of situations reported by the parents and teachers of those students who DUSW. These vignettes and excerpts illustrate that the parents and teachers feel frustrated and unsure of how their children/students need to be supported. Often they are trying to provide support to them. However, from the students' perspective it would appear that at times the 'right' kind of support is not being provided. At other times, the students can't seem to use the support being provided, whether it is within their zone of proximal development or not. One reason may be that the students

have not learned how to access and use support, so even when it is provided they are unsure and doubt that they can count on it.

### Michael

The subtle difference between the two groups appears to be that even though support may be provided, whether asked for or not, the students who DUSW are often not able to follow through and use the support provided. Is this perhaps in part because the type of support being provided may not be appropriate, from the students' perspective? Why is a student not able to explain to an individual what might be more useful? In the following excerpts, I explore the support being provided to Michael and his inability to use what is offered.

Recall the excerpt earlier in this chapter, "Is it his Ld or is he lazy?. Michael's mother, Mrs. Desjardins, provided us with an example of the type of conflict that occurs in their home with respect to homework. Mrs. Desjardins explains that when she asks Michael if he has homework, he responds that he has done it already. She reports that when she discovers that he has not been doing his work (generally when she receives his report card), she reacts, becomes angry, and asks why not. In this type of conflictual situation, Michael has a tendency to withdraw and respond with short innocuous phrases such as, "*I don't know*" or "*I forgot*." In the example presented Michael is able to open up to his mother and provide her with an explanation as to why he does not do homework at home. He explains that he feels that she has no patience with him and she yells at him. Mrs. Desjardins does not appear to be able to validate his perception of the situation. She immediately responds with a counter statement: "*I don't yell at you*." With this type of response Michael usually withdraws and pays lip service to anything that comes next. This example helps us to begin to see more clearly the differences in the types of parent-

child interaction between those who USW and those who DUSW. The parents of the students who USW tend to look beyond the mask and the words of their children for what their child is feeling. They then move in within their child's zone of proximal development to support them. The example presented above demonstrates both the student and the parent reacting rather than listening to one another. Thus, support is not able to be provided. Although Mrs. Desjardins was not able to provide her son with the support he may have needed, it must be difficult to see beyond Michael's mask as he often has difficulty verbalizing his thoughts.

In this next excerpt, Mrs. Desjardins talks about the rivalry between her two sons. She described Michael as always comparing himself to his brother even when they were young. She felt that when they went to separate schools Michael's self-confidence increased. Now that they are back in the same school again Michael is adopting a defeatist attitude, compares himself to his brother and gives up easily.

### ***Unsupported and unheard***

*Tara: What is he (Michael) good at?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: He could be good at many things if he would try. When he was a little boy it was the same. I remember once, I had a birthday party for them (he and his brother) and we had sack races. He did the first one, of course he did not win. So then we had the next one he did not want to participate because, 'why bother, I am not going to win'. So he always does this. It seemed to disappear for a while but this year it is back again. Really strong.*

*Tara: What changed?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: I don't know. Age related. I am always concerned about Luke obtaining his goal. I thought maybe, because when they started high school it was the first time they were apart because they were together from kindergarten to grade 6 in the same class because the school never had the room to separate them. When they separated for high school I thought maybe that helped him develop his confidence because all through elementary 'Luke is better than me', 'Luke is taller than me', 'Luke is stronger than me', it was always that way and*

*then this year they are back together (in the same school), but they are not in the same class. In fact Luke is new in school (Michael has been at Vanguard since grade 7, Luke began this year in grade 9). I don't know if this has something to do with it because he is back at this 'why bother', I don't know if that has caused it. Luke says that it's silly, 'I don't bother him, we are in separate classes'.*

*Luke has done well, other kids have told Michael about it, 'your brother is doing well', you know, I don't know if this caused it, or if he just figures, 'O.K. I am going to go the other way', I don't know.*

*Tara: It could be part of it for sure.*

*Mrs. Desjardins: He did not want Luke going there (to Vanguard) and this came about last year, he did not want it and I explain to him, I said, 'why not', (Michael responded) 'It's my school' and I said 'Michael, what will we do with Luke, should he suffer just because you don't want him there. It's not fair. He qualifies, I had him tested, I can put him there, why would I say I am not going put him there just to save you, that is not right' and then next minute he say 'O.K.' and he said it did not bother him, but I am wondering (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

At the beginning of this excerpt, Mrs. Desjardins describes Michael as someone "who gives up easily" and someone "who does not try." She suggested that he has always had these traits but that they had dissipated since he started high school. However, he is now back to giving up on and not bothering about life. When I asked Mrs. Desjardins why she thought Michael had this attitude, she seemed uncertain. She suggested that perhaps it was "age related". She noted that Michael and Luke were now in the same high school and that this may have something to do with his "why bother attitude." She explained how "Luke says that it's silly, I don't bother him and we're in separate classes." Does the referent "it's silly" refer to Michael's feelings? Mrs. Desjardins adds that maybe his attitude has changed because Michael and Luke's peers are comparing them. Mrs. Desjardins then explained that Michael did not want Luke to attend Vanguard. When his mother asked him why not, he responded, "It's my school". Recall from the above excerpt, Mrs. Desjardins offers the following explanation:

*Michael, what will we do with Luke, should he suffer just because you don't want him there. It's not fair. He qualifies, I had him tested, I can put him there, why would I say I am not going put him there just to save you, that is not right (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998)*

This excerpt brings up two key issues. One relates to sibling rivalry. Michael had created a space for himself at Vanguard that he could call his own. His brother attending the same school could be seen as an invasion of Michael's personal space. The second issue is that Michael tried to help his mother understand his perspective but was unsuccessful. Michael felt unheard by his mother and withdrew from the problem situation. Michael's concerns and worries, although he did not clearly verbalize them do not seem to have been validated. Mrs. Desjardins used the word save, "...*why would I say I am not going to put him there just to save you*". It may be that Michael heard this statement as his mother favoring Luke, and may have deduced that he was less important.

Emotional learning continues throughout our lives. All of these small exchanges between a parent and child have an emotional subtext. The repetition of these messages over the years form the core of a child's emotional outlook and capabilities (Goleman, 1997). Stern (1987) further suggests that repeated moments of attunement or misattunement between a parent and child shape the emotional expectations adults bring to their close relationships. If Michael has experienced repeated moments of misattunement, as the above example seem to indicate, it is understandable why it would be difficult for him to access and use social support.

During the analysis of my data it became evident to me that it is just as difficult for student's like Michael to access and use support, as it is for his parents. The next two excerpts illustrate Mrs. Desjardins difficulty in the area. In the first example, Mrs. Desjardins explains that Michael had a grade six teacher whom she considered to be

abusive to the students, of which Michael was one. Rather than support and protect Michael, she defends the teachers and rationalizes about why the teacher may have been abusive.

***Rationalizing a teacher's abusive behavior***

*In elementary school, I suppose it is difficult for them, they're overworked, they've got classes of 35 kids they're trying to handle. Personally, I saw more teachers who should not be teaching, not to elementary children. Especially his grade 6 teacher, I am sure he can tell you stories about her. She screamed from morning to night and you don't do that to Michael, don't scream. But Vanguard is his life, he does not seem to see beyond Vanguard (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

Mrs. Desjardins had concerns regarding this grade six teacher. Rather than show her anger and acknowledge how scary it must have been for Michael, she excuses the teacher by rationalizing her behavior: "...they're over worked" and "...they've got classes of 35 kids they're trying to handle." What message do these statements send to Michael? I would suggest that the message is that people in positions of authority need to be protected and believed. The message that I heard is that one should trust others before trusting oneself. This is in direct contrast to the message that Mrs. Carter sends her son. Earlier in the chapter, I described how the Carter family demonstrated for Albert that it is more important to trust oneself than rely on doctors and other professionals. Mrs. Carter modeled this for her son by playing an advocacy role for him and insisting that the school assume some responsibility for his learning. In the above example, it might be that Mrs. Desjardins does not want to offend the teachers and in protecting the teacher she does not appear to support her son. In this situation it would appear that Michael's feelings were

not met with empathy, nor did anyone advocate for him on his behalf, as we observed in the social interactions of the students who USW.

In this next excerpt, what struck me was how difficult it is for Mrs. Desjardins to seek support or question something. In this excerpt she is expressing concern with regards to the Taylor Adolescent program, an after school program where Michael receives one-to-one tutoring twice a week.

*A family pattern emerges*

*Mrs. Desjardins: ... sometimes I think he (Michael) depends too much on them (his tutor and team leader at TAP), that is my worry, that it's a crutch for him, that he's not trying on his own, that he depends too much on his tutor. When they (The TAP team) first told me about the program they told me it was not to do his homework, it was to help him with areas where he was having trouble. But to me it looks like all he ever does is his homework. That's what it looks like to me and that's what I get from him when I say, 'do you have homework' and I try to tell him that he is not suppose to do homework, you are suppose to be improving in areas that are difficult for you, but of course for him it is a problem (homework), so the tutor has to help him for everything, but sometimes I find he is using the tutor to do things and I am concerned because he is not trying on his own.*

*Tara: Did you bring that up at the meeting?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: ...when I get in there I sit there and I try to be quiet, and I let them talk, and I feel my face get red and my blood pressure go up and I get \*\*\*\* (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

Mrs. Desjardins would like Michael to be able to access and use support. Yet she has just demonstrated to Michael how difficult it is for her to seek support when she needs it. If Michael has not experienced a great deal of support in his life, if he does not have a good model at home with which to learn how to access and use support, how can professionals and teachers expect Michael to use the support that is provided for him? However, occasionally someone from within Michael's social network has been able to move into

his zone of proximal development and provide him with a healthy supportive experience which he is able to follow through on. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, relationships throughout life have the potential to continually reshape, and an imbalance that once existed can be corrected. As Michael has the experience of having his feelings met with empathy, insight, and a generally high level of emotional literacy, he may be able to reshape his working model of relationships. In this next excerpt the director of the Taylor Adolescent After-School Program (TAP), Dr. Snow, describes an incident that occurred with Michael. By providing him with privacy, time, and prompting, Michael was able to share with her why working with his tutor on a Biology project was not working and suggest what might work better.

***Privacy, time, and prompting***

*Dr. Snow: He had a project to do last week and he came without his biology. With him you have to sit down and say, well, let's figure this out. What he was able to say to me was he did not like to do the project the way his tutor wanted to, he had another way he wanted to do it. Her way did not fit with him, so we found a way we could tell her. He got caught and he stayed and worked until about 6:30 and it was quite a production because they were both excited... We had to go six steps back with him to where things were breaking down, if you do that, he is not a bad problem solver. But you have to wait for it and let him take you there. If you start to say, 'look doesn't it make sense if you have biology we should start to work on it, you will do a piece and I....' He will say yes, but it does not mean yes. You have to say to him, 'what do you think?', 'what makes sense Michael?'. Then he can (problem solve), under those conditions.*

*They (the tutor and intern) have said, 'it is driving me crazy, he came and he did no work at all last time and he does not even know what he has to work on'. So when I met him I said, 'what do you think would work?', he said, 'well, you see she (his tutor) wanted me to do it this way, you know it didn't work at all last time'. He gave me the whole script that they (the team leader and tutor) had just given me. So he knew all that (what he had to do). He was astonishing.*



*Tara: It is very hard for Michael to share things with people if he thinks what he is going to say will hurt their feelings.*

*Dr. Snow: Impossible, he won't. He did not want me to tell his tutor, he came out with this quite articulate description of what would work and what would not work. I said that well, 'we have to tell her', so I had him sit there while I let her hear what Michael had just told me, she didn't seem to mind.*

*Tara: So you had to speak for him.*

*Dr. Snow: Yes. I don't think he would do it again. He can not afford to do anything that might wound somebody.*

*We are people who are constantly judging and evaluating and you have really to stop with Michael. At no point do you say, 'how come you did not do that when you knew?'... that's a show stop, you have to say to him, 'well what do you think happened?' (Interview with Dr. Snow, Director of TAP, April, 1998).*

This is a wonderful example of Michael being provided conditions in which he felt comfortable to share his perspective. One needs to ask open questions which allow him the freedom to express himself. Vygotsky posits that learning is a mediated process. In this example Dr. Snow is the mediating agent who advocates on behalf of Michael. As we observed in social interactions Michael has shared with his mother, Mrs. Desjardins appears to be unable to express herself when she feels that she might upset or offend someone in authority at school or in the after school program. Thus, it is not surprising that Michael would share some of the same difficulties as his mother. In the social interaction with Dr. Snow, I presume that Michael felt supported and validated. The only other example in which Michael reported that he felt supported, heard, and validated was when he would interact with his father. The following example illustrates Michael's perception of his father's ability to listen to Michael and validate his feelings. He would then ask Michael to describe the other person's point of view if it was a conflictual situation. Michael couldn't explain to me what exactly his father said or did, but he felt very positive about his experiences with him.

***Being heard by Dad***

*Michael: if I'm mad I usually talk to my dad cause he knows how to calm me down*

*Tara: How does he do that?*

*Michael: I don't know...it's just like he talks to me so then all of a sudden I just calm down for some reason...like yesterday...I got into a fight with my mom over the phone...Tim's mom and father are going to Ottawa to spend the night because the next morning which was this morning ah it's his uncle's funeral ...they wanted me to sleep over because his mother didn't feel comfortable leaving Tim alone in the house so she wanted someone to stay with him so she asked me if I wanted to sleep over. I'm like well sure but let me call my mom and ask first so I did and she said no and we started fighting...*

*Tara: What happened next?*

*Michael: ah, she doesn't agree with sleep-overs...I'm not sure why but she just doesn't agree with it...so \*\*\*\*\* but then I got so mad that I guess you could say that I felt my ah blood pressure actually going up and I do have high blood pressure so then \*\*\*\*\* when I got off the phone I felt my arm and my legs were like numb like tingly feeling I could hardly feel it so I had to get up and walk I was also very light-headed that's how mad I got. Then after I called my dad I started telling him and like ah I asked him if I could just move in with him for a bit there 'til he got really fed up then he starts talking to me to calming me down so...*

*Tara: How did he clam you down?*

*Michael: First he'd ask me to hear my side of the story and then he tried to make me explain what I thought mom's side of the story was...what I thought would be my mom's side of the story so....so then after a while I don't know what exactly he said to make me calm down it's just talking to him for a while just calmed me down...(Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998).*

Acting as a mediator in the learning process, Dr. Snow, in the previous example, and Michael's father, as illustrated in the above example, were able to empathize with Michael and acknowledge his feelings. They were able to acknowledge what he was saying and support him in ways that he needed. It is important for Michael to have such positive experiences of being supported so that he can reshape his working model of

relationships. As these positive interactions repeat themselves, it is possible that Michael might begin to expect to be supported and eventually begin to access and use support well.

In the next excerpt Mrs. Desjardins explains her perception of how Michael uses support when he is upset or sad. It is her perception that Michael requests support indirectly when he is upset and she provides him with support. This excerpt leads us into a discussion of how Mrs. Desjardins thinks Michael identifies with his father.

***When Michael is sad***

*Mrs. Desjardins: He (Michael) keeps it inside, I can tell, he comes near me quiet, I know something is bothering him, he is quiet but he hangs around me more, I think he is waiting for me to pull it out of him and usually I do, but he will stay very very quiet.*

*Tara: So if he is really upset about something, you need to initiate, like 'is something bothering you', 'did something happen in school' or whatever and then eventually he will tell you?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: Yes.*

*Mrs. Desjardins: Yes, he would. He does not easily give out information this year.*

*Tara: Do you think he talks to anyone else about that?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: Tim. I think.*

*Tara: How do you support him when he tells you something or when he is upset about something?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: I listen to him. We can talk if he tells me what the problem is and I try to give him some advice and I ask 'what do you think will be the best way to handle it' and then see what he says, that's about it. I am trying to think of an incident at hand, but I can't. But he is very moody and then many times I asked him why and it is always his excuse because he is trying to give up smoking. Because he has been smoking for a while. That could be it I don't know.*

*Tara: Does he usually take your advice?*

*Mrs. Desjardins: No, I don't think so. (Parent Interview: Mrs. Desjardins, June 24, 1998).*

Michael provided me with a different perspective in an interview. He said that he did not seek support when he was sad or upset and that he could not remember the last time he was upset. Perhaps Michael is unaware that he spends more time with his mother when he is upset. Or perhaps, Mrs. Desjardins' intuitiveness makes her aware of her son's sadness and she moves in within his zone of proximal development and provides him with support, which from her perspective he is able to accept.

It is interesting to note that in this excerpt, Mrs. Desjardins asks her son for his opinion. She asked him, *"what do you think will be the best way to handle it."* This was the only example I observed when Mrs. Desjardins provided Michael with the type of support, which he says he values from his father and was able to take from Dr. Snow. Is it possible that Michael does not see the type of support in the same light when it comes from his mother? Mrs. Desjardins is very angry at her x-husband and does not speak highly of him. However, she expressed to me and to Michael how much *"Michael is like his father"*. To denigrate her ex-husband and yet compare him to Michael, may affect Michael in ways that are difficult to pin point. Michael picks up on this role identification. In the following excerpt, from a one-to-one interview, Michael tells me, *"I usually give up very easily...my father is the same way..."*

*"I usually give up very easily...my father is the same way..."*

*Michael: um, well the reason why I don't like doing homework here (at home) is cause ah like ah a few times when I have tried to do my homework and I need help I ask my mom and then we don't end up getting along after, cause like during trying to help I get frustrated and she gets frustrated and we just start to fight.*

*That's why I don't like doing homework here....I just usually give up very easily*

*Tara: Is that new, giving up easily?*

*Michael: No, I always was like that ever since elementary school so...*

*Tara: Why is that do you think?*

*Michael: I don't know why...it's just something like ah...my father is the same way, he always gave up on everything so maybe that's why I do too.*

*Tara: How do you know that your father gives up on things too?*

*Michael: My mom tells me. She says we're alike.*

*Tara: Are you?*

*Michael: well, ah, yeah. (Case Study Interview: Michael, June 1998).*

Michael seems to identify with his father. When he was asked, *How do you know when someone really understands you? Who knows you best?* He answered:

*Who knows you best?*

*Michael: Who knows me best? My dad, cause we get along very well. We always talk about things that bother us. Like I go to him if I have a problem, he'll come to me if he has a problem. So we know each other the best.*

*Tara: How does he support you?*

*Michael: ummmm, he probably tries to understand my point of view on it and then he'd try to understand what the other person's point of view would be too, like if there was this person involved too. And then he'd try, then he'd probably say something like ahhhh, 'right now you're just thinking of your side of view try to picture what the other person's side of view would be like so...'*

*Tara: Does your mum understand you?*

*Michael: mmm, I really don't know. Ahhh, not really. We never, most of the time, we don't see eye to eye, so... (Case Study Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998).*

This is another example of Michael reporting his feelings of being acknowledged and respected by his father. Michael reports that first, his father, *"tries to understand his point of view"*. From Michael's perspective his father does not simply react to what Michael tells him but he takes the time to understand and empathize. It would appear that Michael and his father are well attuned to each other. Next, Michael describes how his father counsels him, *"to try to understand what the other person's point of view would be..."*. The strategies used by Michael's father are similar to the prompting by Dr. Snow.

During my observational periods at the school, I would often spend time with the students at lunch and recess. I noted in my field notes the following conversation which I had with Michael at lunch outside in front of the school. Michael describes two different situations. One in which he describes how he and his father both have bad tempers. In the second excerpt, he describes having a fight with his mother and asks his father if he could move in with him. A third excerpt was taken from my journal that I kept while I was working in the Taylor Adolescent After School Program. Here Michael tells me of his father's plans to build an extension on his house so there will be room for Michael to move in.

### ***Identifying with Dad***

*...he (Michael) then went on to talk about how it was hard for him to control his temper and how he is worried about "exploding" one day. He talked about his Dad having a bad temper and how he couldn't control it, but now he can. When I asked questions about what types of things would happen when his dad lost his temper and I gave possible examples, Michael's body straightened and tensed up a bit and he said, "he can control it now", I backed off. (Field Notes: Conversation with Michael outside at recess, February 3, 1998)*

This vignette is an example of Michael's identification with his father as he believes that they both have bad tempers. The next vignette is taken from my field notes and describes a conversation I had with Michael after school.

### ***Parental rivalry***

*Today Michael shared with me how angry he was at his mum just recently. He explained that she is unreasonable and that he's almost 18, soon he can do whatever he pleases. He talked about wanting to go and live with his father. He called his dad to talk about the idea. He said his dad said he could, but it wasn't*

*a very good time right now, as he and his girlfriend were fighting a lot (Researcher's Journal: May 1998).*

This journal entry reminded me of a previous talk that Michael and I had in September 1997. He and his mother had a fight. Michael talked about his plan to move out and live with his father.

### ***The desire to move in with Dad***

*Michael was excited today about the possibility of living with his father. He talked about how much he wanted to move in with his dad, who is living with his girlfriend and two young children, in Ste. Thèrese. He talked about the logistics of getting back and forth to school and how upset his mum would be. He said that he had told his dad of his wish and his dad told him that he would build an addition onto his house so he could live with him. Michael described the renovations and how he would have his own private entrance...The only problem was that his dad didn't have the money to build the addition right now (Journal: Conversation with Michael at TAP, September, 1997).*

Michael seemed so excited about the idea of living with his father that I worried that he was setting himself up for more disappointment. It became a familiar pattern to listen to Michael's grand plans which involved his father but never seemed to materialize. It is now June 1999 and Michael continues to live with his mother and brother. I believe that Michael identifies so strongly with his father that he feels that he can not afford to question his father's plans and intentions of having him move out of his mother's home.

### **Stephen**

In the following excerpt Stephen's teacher, Rebecca, describes his difficulty in accessing support. She suggests that one needs to approach him and offer support.

***Approaching and offering support***

*Rebecca: ...it takes him a long time to figure out that there's a problem, but I don't think that he sees or can even fathom up a way that it could be solvable. I think that he just kind of always accepts everything for what it is right now at this point and doesn't, kind of, ever see, you know...*

*Tara: That he has options and that there are possible solutions.*

*Rebecca: Yeah,...unless you go to him and talk to him about it and bring it out of him and make him... You know, then he's fine. And when you talk to him, it's like, "Is this?" Yes, it is a problem. Or, you know, "what could you do about it?"*

*Tara: So you need to probe him with questions*

*Rebecca: Ya, it just seems that ...you kind of bring it out verbally. Now he'll come to me about other problems too. Other teachers and stuff. But he wouldn't for a long, long time. And now he'll come to me and say, you know "Mrs. X is giving me a hard time..." But he also doesn't know how to go through the correct channels a lot of times. Like he's done stuff before, which have come back to me, and he should have come to me first, and didn't. Or he's come to me first when I didn't really have anything to do with it and he should have gone to this person. You know? (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, 1998).*

Rebecca claims that Stephen is not even aware that there are options or possible solutions when there is a problem. Rebecca describes how she needed to question and probe him in order to understand a situation so that she can try to support him. In the next excerpt Stephen's girlfriend, Jill, uses the same questioning and probing technique described above, in order to provide Stephen with support.

***Jill advocating on Stephen's behalf***

*Rebecca: Stephen often goes about things in a way that looks manipulative, I don't think he is being manipulative, he doesn't get it, or he doesn't know. He doesn't take initiative, just as much as he doesn't take initiative to do his work. It's like first term, second term he never came to me for anything, not to ask for an extension, anything. Jill would either come to me or tell him to come to me (Rebecca would over hear). Just this morning is a perfect example, he didn't have*



*an assignment, he couldn't find it, he looked everywhere, he was all upset. Ten minutes later after looking through his stuff he says, 'Can I go and look in Jill's bag'. I said fine. So he went down and looked into Jill's bag...he came back upstairs and about five minutes later, Jill came up and tried looking for it (the assignment) and I am here (at her desk) and I am just picking up my stuff and Jill says, 'Oh Stephen! Did you ask Rebecca', I'm right here. 'Stephen did you ask Rebecca if you could have an extension?' As she came in the room I had just said to Stephen that I'd accept it tomorrow but you will lose ten marks, because I have told the whole class that no exceptions, I wouldn't accept it. But I had seen his assignment, he showed me last week and it was half done and I know that he was so proud that he had actually done some work on it. He's done this before. Done part of an assignment and then not handed it in so he get zero rather than maybe 10 or 30 or something. ...he's misplaced it, he can't find it, etc. Jill says to him, "Well if you can't find it what are you going to do?" He says, "I don't know". So Jill says to him again, 'Well if you can't find it, what are you going to do?' And he says, "I don't know, I guess I'll get a zero", and then she says, "well Steve, you know, why don't you ask Rebecca if you can have another copy and you'll just have to redo it". So he says, "Oh", and then he turns to me and says, "Rebecca, Can I have another copy in case I can't find mine". You know? So that was just very... (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, March, 1998).*

Did Stephen not understand that Rebecca had offered him an extension? Was he too upset to consider his options? This excerpt illustrates Stephen's problem of not knowing what to do when he realizes that he has lost his assignment. Jill questions him about what he will do and he responds, *"I don't know, I guess I'll get a zero."* Stephen adopts a defeatist attitude much like Michael does. When Jill offers him a solution, to ask the teacher for another copy of the assignment, he accepts her support and asks his teacher for a new copy of the assignment. It is interesting to note that Stephen never found the lost assignment, nor did he re-do it.

Although these examples demonstrate Stephen using the support provided to him, more often than not he is provided with the wrong type of support. I observed his peers moving in too quickly in class to help him. At home and at school it would appear that

his girlfriend does much of his work for him. Unfortunately Jill and his peers do not understand that by doing Stephen's work for him they are contributing the learned helplessness cycle which Stephen is in and they contribute to his dependency. The following vignette was taken from my field notes. I observed Jill was doing Stephen's homework for him, during her English class.

*Contributing to the learned helplessness cycle*

*Jill asked Lindsay if she could borrow some notes "to do something". Lindsay said yes and Jill took Lindsay's binder from the book shelf. Jill starts to copy something from Lindsay's notes. Peter realizes that Jill is doing Stephen's homework. Peter said that he had no choice but to tell Stephen's teacher, Jill says, "No Peter, please" in a cute whiny voice. The attention shifts to another student... Meanwhile Jill is still busy copying Lindsay's work for Stephen. Peter tells Jill that she isn't helping him, Pam pipes up, "that's what I told her!". Someone else added, "I can't believe he can't do it himself!" I wrote, a truly unsupportive comment, which surprised me since Stephen is one of the most well liked and respected students in Sec. III and since this class is normally so supportive of one another). Jill has kept writing Stephen's homework. Peter says to her, "you can do it, but I have to tell the teacher because it is dishonest. You can keep writing but you're wasting your time in my class and Stephen's". She keeps writing, she whines Peter's name, "Peeeterrrr" in a pleading type of voice, kind of like come on give us a break. The class continues. They are reading from Romeo and Juliet today... Later in the class, Peter, not even looking at Jill says, "I'm not happy with what you're doing Jill". Jill says, "Yeah, I know" and continues her copying. The students continue reading... Patrick reads and asks what 'disdain' means. Without even looking up from what she was doing, Jill provides the class with an excellent definition. (This is typical of Jill, to look like she is not following, not paying attention and yet she is) (Field Notes: Peter's English class, February 17, 1998).*

In the vignette above, Jill borrows Lindsay's Geography binder with her assignment in it and copies it for Stephen. Jill's teacher, Peter, indicates to her that he is not impressed and that he has no choice but to inform Stephen's teacher, Rebecca. Jill continues to

finish Stephen's assignment. It appeared to me that Jill was focused on Stephen's homework and was not paying attention to the class. I was wrong. Although she did not appear to be a part of the class she was. She demonstrated this by answering one of her classmates questions. It would seem that Jill truly believed that she was helping/supporting Stephen when she did his work for him. She appears to feel a sense of responsibility toward supporting Stephen. Or is it that on some subconscious level Jill is fostering dependence in Stephen in order to feel secure in the relationship? Maybe it is a combination of all of these components. My hunches were confirmed as I read through my journal and found these three entries.

***Jill undertaking to teach Stephen how to read***

*I was told by members of the Vanguard After-School Program that Jill was very concerned about Stephen's reading difficulties and she has undertaken to teach him how to read. Some members of the team felt this was great and others felt like this was too large an undertaking and responsibility for a teenager (Researcher's Journal, February, 26, 1998).*

***Is Jill really "helping", as she thinks she is?***

*I saw Jill up in Stephen's class at the end of the day and I heard her say to Rebecca, "Oh, I'll help him with that" and Rebecca will respond, "No, Stephen is quite capable of doing it on his own". Neither Stephen nor Jill acknowledged her comment, I had the sense that her comment was falling on deaf ears (Researcher's Journal, March 2, 1998).*

***"Help" is actually hindrance***

*Rebecca and I spoke in her office as we were grouping kids for the focus groups. We discussed how Stephen is in a learned helpless cycle. Rebecca feels that sadly Jill is helping to keep him in it. Jill really wants to help Stephen, but by helping him she is keeping him weak and in the role of the victim (Researcher's Journal, March 12, 1998).*

In the first of the three excerpts I was told by members of the after school program team that Jill has taken on the job of teaching Stephen to read. In the second vignette, she comments to Stephen's teacher, Rebecca, "*Oh, I'll help him with that.*" She did not hear or believe it when Rebecca responded that Stephen didn't require help with the assignment. It appears that Jill feels a certain responsibility towards Stephen and chooses to "help" him as she deems necessary. In the third excerpt, Rebecca confirms my own belief that Jill is doing the opposite of her good intentions. These three excerpts confirm that Jill feels responsible and has a sincere desire to support Stephen with his academics. In trying to support Stephen by doing his work for him and taking on the responsibility of teaching him how to read, it would seem that she is in fact perpetuating his low self-esteem with regards to how he views himself as a learner. As I mentioned above, there is also the possibility that subconsciously Jill is fostering dependence in Stephen in order to feel secure in the relationship.

In the next excerpt, Angela comments that Stephen finds ways around getting his work done and that she has never seen him really interested 'caught up' in something academic.

***Feelings of helplessness with respect to school work***

*Angela: I don't see that he feels that he could really have a big impact on his own academic outcome, except socially. He manages to get the teachers on his side, managing to get somebody to help him with his homework, manages to get Rebecca to give him many many extensions and the teachers want to do it to help him. I never see him manage to work up a sweat and enjoy that, so why would he... (Interview with a member of the professional support staff, July 10, 1998).*

Angela, in this excerpt, is commenting on how Stephen uses his excellent interpersonal intelligence or social skills in order to access support. However, the type of support he

seeks hinders him rather than helps him. She suggests that he does not see himself as able to have a positive impact on his academic outcome.

Stephen accepts support from Jill, even though he recognizes that it may not be ideal for him. In the following excerpt, his teacher, Rebecca, describes her perception of whether Jill is really helping Stephen, despite Jill's best efforts and a conversation which she had with Stephen.

***Reinforcing learned helplessness***

*Rebecca: I think Jill wants to help him with his work and at times, you know, he genuinely wants help, when he's sitting there realizing that he's got a problem, he wants someone to help, whether it be a tutor or whether it be Jill. I know his brother's girlfriend is helping him sometimes and Jill's mother was helping him sometimes with homework and with tutoring. And I know Jill was also saying she was helping him with his work. But I think what happens is Stephen says I have this work to do or... and she (Jill) tries to help him with it but then she gets... wants it overly... you know, better than he can do or produce. She doesn't just accept what is his work. ...she ends up over correcting or over fixing or over... you know. And even with his reading, I don't think she helps him with his reading, I think she will read to him so that he can maybe do the work. But then when she sees his work, she'll correct the spelling and then say, Write it this way instead.*

*I had a conversation with him about that. About, maybe about three weeks ago. And um, it was quite a long talk. We talked for about half an hour, and I talked about learned helplessness and talked about, you know, how that pattern kind of comes about.... And he said that he realizes it, but that he feels bad because he knows people feel good when they help. So he doesn't want to tell them. He doesn't want to not accept their help because he feels like he would be insulting them or putting them down.*

*So, we had a long talk about that and it was really interesting. And I wasn't saying, you know, this has to change or that, you know, any of that kind of stuff. I was just kind of bringing it out. I wanted to see if he realized it, and he said that he did, but maybe not to the extent. And also he didn't realize so much that it was maybe part and parcel of why he doesn't do things. It's because people are maybe*

*over-helping him and then he, you know.... And he said that he's trying now that he knows, you know, when he doing tests, he'll try to read the questions and stuff on his own before he'll ask for help (Teacher Interview: Rebecca, April, 1998)*

In this excerpt, Rebecca talks about her observations regarding Stephen wanting help at times. The problem, as she sees it, is that when Jill helps she tends to over correct Stephen's work, thus it becomes her work and not his. Rebecca describes a conversation she had with Stephen about learned helplessness. Stephen acknowledged the pattern and explained how he doesn't want to tell people that he doesn't want their help because he would feel bad. This is the same pattern I observed with Michael and his mother. Neither of them wanted to say anything negative for fear of upsetting/hurting another person (e.g., Michael was not able to tell his tutor that her way of working on a project wasn't working for him. Mrs. Desjardins was not able to approach Michael's sixth grade teacher or the TAP team to voice her concerns). It would appear that Stephen does not want to turn support away even if he does not see it as useful for fear of insulting the person. Stephen also reported that he is fearful that if he turns support away sometimes, maybe it will not be there when he requires it. All of these situations are subtle power relations and indicate that Stephen does not trust that support will be available when he needs it.

Unfortunately Mrs. Tremblant, Stephen's mother, was not available for an interview. My data collection was during a very difficult time in her life when she and her husband were in the process of separating. When I first tried to make an appointment to speak with her, she was in the midst of a job search and she felt that she did not have time. The next time I spoke with Mrs. Tremblant she was off to the bank to negotiate a loan so that she could buy a condo and hence she could not talk. At a later date Mrs. Tremblant, was moving and an interview was not arranged. I have known Mrs.

Tremblant for four years and I have had no difficulty in the past communicating with her. I feel confident that had the timing been different Mrs. Tremblant would have enjoyed meeting me to discuss Stephen's ability to access and use support.

### Matthew

Early in my data analysis, Matthew was a mystery to me in terms of why he did not use support well. In my interview with both Matthew and his mother they reported having a very open and respectful relationship. They reported talking together when things were troubling one another. They appeared to have the same type of family relationship as Patrick and Karen, that which involved attunement, mutual respect, and a high degree of emotional literacy. These were all characteristics which I had felt were important in ensuring that students were able to access and use support. What became evident to me throughout my analysis was that the attunement that I observed was relatively new in the Roger's household. It appeared that they were in the midst of repairing and reshaping their family relationships. Matthew reported to me that when he was younger he had a very difficult and abusive relationship with his older brother, Greg. I am not certain how much of the abuse Mrs. Roger's is aware of, as she reported in an interview some of Greg's illegal activity, however, she did not mention sibling rivalry. Matthew described how he feared for his life at times. Angela, a member of the professional staff at Vanguard, confirmed Matthew's very difficult life experiences. I began to realize that perhaps, as the other students in this group, Matthew had not felt supported when he was younger, as his family was focused on his older brother.

The difference for Matthew now, as compared to the other students in this group, is that he and his mother are well on their way to repairing some of the early damage which was done. By this I mean that the older brother is no longer in the home and Mrs. Rogers

and her husband (Matthew's step-father) have been able to reflect on the experience of having a difficult child in the home.

***The focus was on Greg, perhaps Matthew did not feel supported***

*Tara: What about things with his older brother. It seems to me he kept things inside and then he let them out.*

*Mrs. Rogers: Who, Matthew? He did get very frustrated when his brother was here, Frustrated with his brother, frustrated with me because when his brother was here, well you know about Greg?.*

*Tara: Well only a little bit through Matthew, like whatever he told me.*

*Mrs. Rogers: He was getting into a lot of problems, a lot. He was on drugs, stealing, doing a lot of stupid things and when he was here I was focused on Greg. (Greg has been in and out of the home due to these areas of difficulty. He is currently out of the country and has been for several years).*

*Tara: Because you were worried about him.*

*Mrs. Rogers: But it was like I was 100% focused on Greg. I know it is not logical but Matthew is not trouble. He can take care of himself. I think maybe that's why Matthew is so logical and easy going, through everything with his brother and seeing everything that's happened and how it affects the family and his brother and sister (I know very little about the sister, she is no longer within the home). It wasn't nice but he learned a lot from it. And he would come and tell me, 'Mom, you know, don't let him back into the house. He's ruining our family life' and when I would he would get upset with me. So again, he was always very comfortable (expressing himself). ... he would come and say, 'Look, you want to go through this again?' 'Why are you doing this?' (Parent Interview: Mrs. Rogers, June, 1998).*

Mrs. Rogers did not discuss the events which led to Greg's leaving the home. She mentioned drugs and stealing; however, she did not mention anything which may have involved Greg and Matthew. Matthew reported that he has not disclosed all of the experiences he endured with his brother, as he does not want to upset his mother. Mrs. Rogers recognized that when her oldest son returned to the home she focused all of her attention on him. She added that she felt that Matthew could take care of himself. Based



on the experiences which Matthew disclosed during his interview, it would appear that he had required the support of his mother at one time in his life. However, he was not able to access the support he needed. Mrs. Rogers added that perhaps Matthew was easy going and logical because of the experiences that he had had with his brother, *"It wasn't nice but he learned a lot from it."* When Greg returned to the home, Matthew did go directly to his mother for support. However, he did so in such a way that it appeared that he was providing his mother with support by asking her, *"Look, you want to go through this again?" "Why are you doing this?"* Was Matthew supporting his mum, or was he seeking support (protection) from her? Maybe both. It seems that Matthew continues to have difficulty seeking support for himself. However, it would appear that his mother has spent a lot of time thinking about her own role in her son Greg's difficult life and she takes responsibility for her role. She is now able to talk about parenting differently and it seems that she is now parenting Matthew differently as the next excerpt will illustrate.

*Changing the way you perceive your role as a parent*

*Mrs. Rogers: ...so much for Dr. Spock. I really think kids should be aware of what's going on and you should be open with them and they should be allowed to express themselves. They have to learn by their mistakes. You can't expect them to be perfect and I think that's a really big mistake a lot of parents make.*

*Tara: and as a society we are told to follow rules and do things in such and such a way so we stop thinking almost. It's like we do things automatically rather than*  
*Mrs. Rogers: Exactly, My other son (Greg), I did everything for him because I always figured I had to be right there so he never learned how to be independent. Matthew is so independent. I mean, Greg. is someone who won't go look for a job unless someone is with him. He always needs someone and that is why he always gets in trouble. He always needs friends and friends aren't always good. He is easily influenced. Matthew is not, he has a mind of his own.*

*Tara: You know what, in fairness, every kid is so different that maybe that is really what Greg. needs (constant support), whereas Matthew as an individual is more independent. Or maybe it is probably a combination.*

*Mrs. Rogers: No I think when you do that you are lacking respect for him. It's like saying you're too stupid to make a decision. I think I failed there.*

*Tara: Maybe you just followed the societal norm and you didn't trust yourself. I heard somebody say the other day that as humans we have instinct but have learned to repress it. Maybe we all need to work on trusting your instinct.*

*Mrs. Rogers: You are totally right (Parent Interview: Mrs. Rogers, June, 1998).*

In this excerpt, Mrs. Rogers explains that she has learned that as a parent, *"you can't expect them (your children) to be perfect."* She added that by trying to be everything to her son Greg, she in fact taught him the opposite of what she had intended. She explained that she was always, *"right there, so he never learned how to be independent."* She recognizes now that *"kids should be aware of what's going on and you should be open with them and they should be allowed to express themselves. They have to learn by their mistakes. You can't expect them to be perfect ..."* She disclosed that she herself made that mistake with Greg. I agree with Mrs. Rogers, there is a balance which must be found between protecting a child and allowing a child to learn from their mistakes. In trying to fulfill a child's every need we in fact do not teach our children how to trust themselves, how seek or use support, we do not teach them that it is human to make mistakes, and we do not teach them how to cope when they do make a mistake. I believe that attunement and emotional literacy are the key components. It would seem that Mrs. Rogers has reconceptualized her role as a parent. Perhaps, her new parenting methods will help Matthew learn how to better access and use social support.

In the following excerpt, Mrs. Rogers explains how insightful Matthew can be at times. She describes a situation in which she was experiencing some difficulties in her life and how Matthew was able to support her.

***"In five years from now is this going to be really important to you?"***

*Mrs. Rogers: I was having some problems and getting really discouraged a couple of months ago, and he says to me, Mom, calm down. You have to think if this is really important. In five years from now is this going to be really important to you and if it's not then don't get so upset about it.*

*Tara: Wow.*

*Mrs. Rogers: And I thought that was pretty neat.*

*Tara: How did he get that inner sense of importance?*

*Mrs. Rogers: I don't know. Even when he was young he would come out with these logical explanations, like "Mom, doesn't this make more sense" and I would say yes it does. And making me feel stupid, it does. What can I say.*

*Tara: He is very bright.*

*Mrs. Rogers: Yeah, ...I think maybe that's why he is the way he is too because he doesn't keep anything inside. I mean, the only thing he keeps to himself now is what is between him and his girlfriend because, you know, private things, and that's normal too. I've never said 'now don't \*\*\*', it's important to talk about it. He might make me look stupid sometimes but hey, that's important.*

*(Parent Interview: Mrs. Rogers, June, 1998).*

Mrs. Rogers shared with me that she was comfortable and encouraged her son to speak his mind. She was pleased when he was able to provide some insight that she had not seen herself. Mrs. Rogers reported that some times she felt "*stupid*", but that she felt that it's important for her son to feel free to express himself. She acknowledged that she did not have to have all the answers. She recognizes that as Winnicott (1986) suggests, she was a "good enough mother" by allowing her son to speak freely and have his own opinions. It would appear that Mrs. Rogers shifted her parenting style and is now better able to support her son by being a "good enough mother", not a mother who feels that she needs to have all of the answers. She is able to model for him that she has made mistakes and she has been able to grow from them. This shift in conceptual framework of parenting may also create a shift in Matthew. By this I mean as Mrs. Rogers reshapes her working model of relationships, particularly parenting, so might Matthew. He may be

able to take some of the healthy experiences he has had more recently in his life (e.g., seeking support from his mum when he and his girlfriend broke up) and start trusting that people within his social network are available to him when he needs them for support.

The next excerpt illustrates that Mrs. Rogers has often been a good model for her children in terms of how to access and use support. It is important to keep in mind that although Mrs. Rogers may have been a good model, it may be that because Matthew did not feel supported himself, he could not risk accessing support for himself.

***A mother models how to access support***

*Tara: So how did you find Vanguard?*

*Mrs. Rogers: ...Greg was having problems. He was getting very discouraged, wasn't getting anywhere, I was trying to find answers and kept going to the schools and trying to explain to them, 'because of the disability,...'. They didn't even know what learning disabilities are. 'Dyslexia? What's that?' I would get so upset. At one point I was sitting at home and Greg was so upset about school, he was doing so lousy, I was crying and I went through the yellow pages and I came across the Learning Associates. Any place I could call to get information and I would. I can't remember who I was speaking to but they said they could tell me where to go or what to do but they mentioned a couple of schools and they sort of put the emphasis on Vanguard. If you could get him in there and telling me how to do it. You know the process you have to go through. And they also said that they themselves went through it and they were dyslexic, they had a learning disability and that if only their parents had known at the time. ... then I started looking into Vanguard and that's how he came. I was beside myself, almost a breakdown. What do you do? Your kid is getting no where, unhappy, and you are thinking, What kind of a life does he have? And you can't do anything. Just powerless. See them going down the drain and nobody wants to listen and nobody known anything about it, nobody is there to help. So, that's how we got to Vanguard.*

*Tara: That's great. That's a nice story (Parent Interview: Mrs. Rogers, June, 1998).*

In this excerpt, Mrs. Rogers demonstrated for her children how to access and use support, even in the face of adversity. She had tried to approach the school to discuss why her son was having such difficulty. She felt that the school was not able to provide the help that her child needed, as they themselves were not familiar with learning disabilities. In desperation, Mrs. Rogers went through the yellow pages and found the Learning Associates of Montreal, a non-profit organization that works with people who have Lds. It would seem that the person on the other end of the telephone at the Learning Associates heard the anxiety in Mrs. Rogers voice and disclosed that they themselves had a Ld, thereby validating all of the emotions that Mrs. Rogers was experiencing. The person that she spoke to at the Learning Associates suggested a few school possibilities, one of which was Vanguard. Mrs. Rogers was then able to use the information that had been given to her, thereby demonstrating to her children how to use support once it is provided.

### Providing Support To Others

A relevant question concerns student's abilities to provide support to others. If they are able to support others, this would suggest that they are able to process social information and have developed a degree of social competence. However, if they are able to provide support to others, why is it so difficult for some to seek support or use it themselves when it is provided?

Michael was not able to access support nor was he able to use it when support was provided to him. Therefore, it is expected that he would not be able to provide support to others. There was no indication in the interview with him or in my field notes that he could provide support to others. However, each of the other case study participants regardless of which group they were in could provide support to others. I examine the

instances which presented themselves and ask: Are these students able to provide support in areas where they cannot ask for it themselves.

### Stephen

Stephen was able to provide emotional support to his peers. The following vignette highlights his intuition and ability to quietly move in and support a peer within their zone of proximal development.

#### ***Providing respectful support within a peer's zone of proximal development***

*The students were throwing around a dodge ball as Antonio and Rebecca put up the volleyball net. Rebecca says, "If I get hit, I'll kill who ever it is" Stephen couldn't resist. He took the ball and hit her on purpose very gently. Everyone laughed. Nancy was holding Rebecca's camera at the edge of the gym. Cameron tossed the ball, which hit the camera that Nancy was holding. The camera fell to the floor and broke into pieces.*

*Derek and Anderson get into a fight. I think Anderson got hit in the face with the ball. Rebecca leaves to talk to them.*

*Stephen crouches in the corner and tries to fix the camera. "It's broken". Stephen tells Nancy that he will tell Rebecca after class. Nancy is sitting on the bench, not playing with the others. I'm not sure if she's upset about the camera. I ask, she says "No" Then she added, "I was just holding it". I try to reassure her, but she does not engage me in conversation.*

*Everyone is practicing well. Rebecca returns with Derek and Anderson. Rebecca realizes that her camera is dead. She turns off the radio and Tyler said something cheeky. Rebecca tells the class that she is about to explode, "not a word, not a joke, everyone be silent". They were. The students are broken into teams.*

*Rebecca tells Nancy to get up and play. She doesn't move, everyone gets into position. Stephen goes up to Nancy, who is still sitting beside me on the bench and speaks with her softly, "What's the matter?", no answer. "Do you feel bad?", no answer. Stephen put his hand on her shoulder and says, "don't worry, it was just an accident. Come play." She gets up, they go and take their positions (Field Notes: Rebecca's Phys.Ed. Class, March 17, 1998).*

In this vignette Nancy, is upset perhaps because she feels responsible that she was holding Rebecca's camera when it fell and broke. Stephen was able to provide her with the emotional support she needed. Nancy did not have to say a word. Stephen was able to move in quietly and provide her with support by empathizing with her and validating her feelings. This is yet another example of what Vygotsky calls, other regulation. Stephen was then able to get Nancy involved in the game.

This vignette is particularly interesting because in an interview with Stephen he said that he did not seek support when he is upset. Yet, this vignette illustrates how adept he is at providing emotional support when someone else is upset. In general, in the area of emotional support, Stephen will seek support when he is happy and wants to share information with others. He stated that he sometimes seeks support when he is mad (after he punches a wall). However, he said that he does not seek support when he is upset or when he feels badly about something. Perhaps in the way that he was supporting Nancy he was mirroring how he himself would like to be supported by others.

Stephen also demonstrated an ability to provide informational/instrumental support to his peers in many different ways and in two particular classes, physical education and information and technology (ITT). The following vignette demonstrates Stephen's skill in moving in within a classmates zone of proximal development in order to provide support. He is skilled at breaking down a task into parts allowing for a clear explanation.

***"Good, but a bit more like this"***

*The students were learning some martial art moves in class today...After the students had practiced on their own, punching in the air, Rebecca divided the students into two groups and asked Stephen to lead one group while she led the other. Stephen and Rebecca put their hands in the air and the students used them*

*as targets. Stephen spent the time to ensure that each student was punching correctly. He was quickly able to zone in on where the students punch was problematic and provide them with suggestions on how to improve it. He generally showed the student what they were doing wrong and then showed them the correct way to punch, highlighting the spot that was difficult for them. Then he would ask the student to try again. As the student punched he would fine tune it. By that I mean after the student had punched Stephen would say, "good, but a little more like this" and he would model. Stephen was really helpful, supportive and an excellent model. Stephen really spent time with each group member ensuring that they improved. Rebecca then joined his groups as she had finished with hers and took over.*

*The students then were taught and practiced kicks. The students were practicing independently. However, Stephen noticed that Donald was having difficulty so they started working together. Stephen showed him that it was important not to lean forward or backwards when he kicks and Stephen demonstrated why. He kicked and leaned forward and he explained that your kicked doesn't have as much power and you can fall because you're off balance. Then Stephen showed Donald what happens if you lean back while you kick. Again no power and you can be easily pushed off balance by who ever you are fighting with. Then Stephen showed him the correct way to kick and he and Donald practiced side by side, with Stephen providing tips after each kick. Meanwhile Donald had a big smile on his face and listened carefully and tried to make the adjustments Stephen was recommending (Field Notes: Rebecca's Phys. Ed. Class, March 2, 1998).*

In this excerpt Stephen was able to highlight for each student where their particular area of difficulty in their punching technique. As the students began to practice, Stephen validated their progress and was then able to help them fine tune their punch. He made comments such as, "*good, but a little more like this.*" There were many examples of Stephen's ability to move into his peers zone of proximal development in order to provide appropriate support. It was expected that he would be able to provide this type of procedural support as he is able to access it for himself when he requires it. It was not surprising that Stephen was not able to provide support to his peers in the area of core



academic subjects. This finding is expected in that Stephen was not able to ask for support in academics areas nor was he successful at using support when it is provided to him in an academic realm.

In terms of companionship, all of the students in this inquiry have people in their social network with whom they spend time. Stephen has companions to spend time with and provides companionship to others (e.g., Pierre and Jill).

The final type of support which was considered is conflict. There is no evidence in my field notes of Stephen supporting his peers in a conflictual situation, as none arose when Stephen was present. In the interviews with Stephen, he described dealing with conflict independently and not seeking support.

### Matthew

There is no evidence that Matthew provides emotional support to others. However, Matthew does himself access and use people in his social network for emotional support. There is, however, evidence in my field notes of Matthew providing informational/instrumental support to Michael during Information and Technology class (ITT), as the following vignette illustrates.

#### *Using a personal strength to support a peer*

*I chatted with Michael and I noticed that he had a center piece on his clock. (The previous class he was having difficulty drawing something and he and I had gone to the library together to try to find a picture to trace, but without success). I admired it, he told me that Matthew had drawn it. Matthew is a really talented artist!!*

*I approached Matthew and told him how impressed I was with what he had drawn for Michael. He smiled. Then I looked at what he was doing and he told me about it, this was his second clock. He told me that his first clock was at home, but his first try at cutting it out was here, he would show me. I followed*

*him into the ITT office and Matthew showed me the design, very nice, it looked a bit like the Batman symbol, it was a band symbol (as was what he drew for Michael) (all different bands). As we walked back to where he was working he told me about the bird house he had made. He looked at me and said proudly, "I didn't use any nails". "Really" I replied, "did you glue it?" "No" Matthew replied and he put his fingers together to show me how he had done it, interlocking. He explained how he cut notches so the wood would fit together. Then he added that as a final touch he used glue. This discussion reminded me of the intricate wood work my friend does when he builds a guitar, so I shared that information with Matthew. He seemed really impressed and asked me what kind of guitars he builds... (I have never seen Matthew so animated before, he was into our conversation. In class I feel as if he is always trying to cover up for not knowing or doing something, it was nice to begin to meet the 'real' Matthew) (Field Notes: John's ITT class, February, 18, 1998).*

An area of strength for Matthew is his artistic talent. Therefore, it is not surprising that he would support Michael in this area, by designing a center piece for Michael's clock as this vignette illustrates. There is also some evidence in my field notes of Matthew providing informational/instrumental support to a peer during English class.

#### *A collaborative approach to poetry writing*

*Matthew doing his own thing at his desk. (I'm sitting behind him, it looks as if he's doodling or something) I later discover that he was working on his own poem, nice job.*

*Kevin is sleeping on his desk... Kevin pulls his chair over to Matthew's desk. Matthew reads his poem to Kevin (he worked on during the discussion/creation of the class poem). Then Brendan reads it. They both like it.*

*John asks Kevin to move back to his own seat. Kevin says "no, I'm just not good at poetry, Matthew and Brendan are good, they'll help me". Then Matthew asks John to read his poem. He reads it and comments on how heavy it is. John says to Kevin, "I'm going to let you stay as foolish as that might be, but...." tells him that he wants him to try.*

*(Several minutes later) ...Kevin asks John a question, "What's the date?" I have never heard Kevin ask a content question. John approaches Kevin and*

*Matthew. Kevin has not written anything. He explains that he doesn't like any of the ideas that Matthew is giving him. They all brainstorm together. Matthew just runs with an idea, he got excited about it, Kevin didn't like it. It appears that Kevin is in that learned helpless mode, re: poetry. Scott wants John to read his poem. He's says in a minute he's trying to help Kevin get started. "Kevin we're all trying to help you..." John forgets to go and read Scott's poem (Field Notes: John's English Class, April 15, 1998).*

Matthew was trying to support Kevin by brainstorming with him but it appears that Kevin was not ready to be supported. Matthew became very excited about one idea and he tried to get Kevin enthusiastic but to no avail. It is not surprising, based on what Matthew reported during his interview, that Matthew is able to provide this type of informational/instrumental support to others. He indicated that he does seek support from his teachers and peers when he requires it.

With regards to companionship, Matthew does have people in his social network with whom he spends time. He has companions to spend time with and provides companionship to others (e.g., Roger and his girlfriend, swimming, La Ronde). Conflict is the final type of support that was examined and I was not present at the time of a conflict in order to observe how Matthew may or may not have provided support to others. In the interviews held with Matthew he describes supporting himself not seeking support when he is in conflict with someone.

#### Students who USW. providing support

There were some interesting findings regarding students who use support well. I will describe how Patrick provides each type of support to others, followed by Karen and then Nancy.

#### Patrick

Patrick was able to provide emotional support to others. In chapter two I described a situation in which I was feeling uncomfortable about reading out loud in English class. Patrick was able to reassure me that I need not read perfectly and explained that most of the students in the class had difficulty in the area. He was able to put me at ease by validating my concern and identifying with me. He was empathetic and insightful. It is not surprising that Patrick was able to provide me with emotional support, given that he is able to access and use emotional support when he needs it.

A second type of support being investigated was that of informational/instrumental. There is evidence that Patrick provides his peers with this type of support as the following excerpt demonstrates.

***Peers working collaboratively***

*Luke was worried about an upcoming Geography test. He asked Patrick if he could help him out. Patrick said sure. They made plans to meet at lunch. They sat together at a desk and started to go through Patrick's geography binder. Luke would read the page out loud and then Patrick would put the text just read in his own words and they would talk about it. Patrick had a natural ability to link what was just read to a movie or some experience to which they could both relate to (Field Notes: April, 2, 1998).*

In this vignette Patrick provided informational/instrumental support to his friend Luke. They quickly found a comfortable rhythm working together. As reading is an area of weakness for Patrick it appeared natural that Luke would assume the role of the reader. Patrick began to explain the different concepts and terms to Luke and used his own background information to help Luke understand. There are many examples within the data collected of Patrick's ability to seek and use this type of informational/instrumental support himself.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter all of the students who participated in the case studies were able to provide companionship to others. Patrick does have people in his social network with whom he spends time. He has companions to spend time with and provides companionship to others (e.g., "hangs out", plays hacky sack, and goes to parties with friends). No evidence was collected regarding how Patrick copes in conflictual situations.

Karen:

There is evidence of Karen providing emotional support to others, as the following excerpt illustrates.

***Attunement with between a granddaughter and grandfather***

*Karen: Like, my grandmother would go to Florida every year. So like my grandfather is like in a wheel chair and he can't eat, he has like a tube in his mouth so he can't eat, he has all the food injected, like liquids. He has like hearing aids and everything, so he's like handicapped. So when my grandmother usually goes away in the winter, I usually go over and I feed him like. I always like, push him around in his wheel chair. I was always there for him. I thought he'd be like lonely so I would go over. I was there for him. I liked working with my grandfather (Case Interview: Karen, June, 1998).*

In this excerpt Karen demonstrated her insight and intuition that her grandfather was lonely. She was able to move into his zone of proximal development and provide him with emotional support. Karen, herself, is able to seek and use emotional support when she needs it, therefore, her ability to provide this same type of support to others is not surprising.

Within my field notes there are a myriad of examples of Karen providing informational/instrumental support to her classmates. She was often observed providing

support in areas such as decoding. As decoding is an area of weakness for many of her peers and yet it is a strength for her, it may be that Karen chose to support peers with their decoding as it is beneficial to her self-esteem. In the following vignette the students have been assigned different characters in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. They are each taking turns reading out loud.

***Supporting a peer in ones' area of strength***

*...Kathy reads first. Karen helps her with the words she finds difficult (e.g., Fetch). Karen also helps Allen, who seems to have difficulty pronouncing his r's and w's... Lara asks Karen a word in her upcoming speech. Karen leans over and sounds out the tricky word with her (Field Notes: John's English Class, February 18, 1998).*

Karen, in the above vignette, was able to provide her peers with support by helping them in the area of decoding. Evidence from the data suggest that Karen is able to access and use informational/instrumental support as she requires it. Therefore, it was not surprising that she could provide others with the same type of support.

Karen does have people in her social network with whom she spends time. She has companions to spend time with and provides companionship to others (e.g., talks with friends, they stay at each others houses, talk on the phone, and go for coffee). There was evidence of Karen supporting Nancy and Lindsay when they were in conflict. Nancy had described a conflict which she had with Lindsay. Nancy acknowledged that she had upset Lindsay, but Lindsay would not talk to her to discuss it. Nancy found Karen, informed her what had happened and told Karen that Lindsay was in the bathroom crying. Karen reported the following.

*Mediating a fight between two friends*

*Karen: Like, I just went in and asked her why she was crying. She like told me.*

*Tara: what happened next?*

*Karen: um, I think I just explained to her that Nancy didn't mean to be mean.*

*Lindsay told me that she had been, even if she hadn't meant to. Like, she (Nancy) was mean but she didn't mean to be. We just talked and Lindsay stopped crying. She didn't want to talk to Nancy. I think she hung up on her that night. Then they like talked and it was okay after that. (Case Interview: Karen, June, 1998).*

It was expected that Karen would be able to be supportive in a conflictual situation, as she is able to seek support when she is involved in conflict. Karen was able to interact and work collaboratively with her friends.

Nancy

There is a great deal of evidence indicating that Nancy seeks and uses emotional support and informational/instrumental support as she needs it. However, there is little evidence of her providing this type of support to others. As Nancy is so adept at seeking and using support, I had expected her to be able to provide support in these areas to others. However, this was not the case. It could be that she has not yet developed the necessary skills in order to provide support. To provide support one requires a degree of proficiency in social information processing and emotional literacy. As she does not report attunement with her mother, it is possible that this misattunement has effected her ability to provide emotional and informational/instrumental support to others. Or perhaps Nancy is less knowledgeable about scaffolding and moving into someone's zone of proximal development as it has not been demonstrated to her.

Like all of the other students who participated in the case studies, Nancy has people in her social network with whom she spends time. She has companions and

provides companionship to others. She described going to movies, walking around, looking at clothes, and talking with her friends. She described her father as a new companion, now that she can see him without third party presence.

Nancy indicated that when she is in conflict with someone generally she relies on herself. For instance when she was in conflict with Lindsay, as indicated above, she acknowledged that she was nasty and swore at her. She tried to talk to Lindsay but Lindsay was not ready to talk. Nancy realized that Lindsay was very upset, therefore, she provided Lindsay with support by asking Karen to become involved.

During an interview with Nancy, she indicated that she is able to provide support to others when she deems it necessary. The following excerpt illustrates that Nancy will go to great lengths to protect someone she considers to be a friend. I would suggest that Nancy learned this behavior from her mother, as her own mother went to great lengths to protect her from an abusive father.

***Supporting a friend despite the personal cost***

*Nancy: And then there was another fight I don't think I ever resolved it. I did resolve it in a way but I had to do it in a hard way. There was this kid he was in grade 8 I think.*

*Tara: Is the kid still at Vanguard?*

*Nancy: No he left. No there was two kids, Dwayne, he left (grade 8) and then there was Charles you know... what happen was they were invited by a grade 10 and 11 to go to some country place during the week-end and have a party, smoke up and do drugs.*

*Tara: These two guys were invited?*

*Nancy: These two guys were invited. I didn't really care so much because they could do what they want, it was like I don't know them basically that well. Like I knew them but it was nothing. Then they (Dwayne and Charles) went to this grade 7, first year in high school Tony and I knew him because in elementary I dated him but nothing ever happen. We were really good friends and Tony had a brother named Antonio, you know....*



*Tara: (I clarify)*

*Nancy: Yes. I found out by my friend Jane (that Tony was invited). So I was thinking, should I get involved or not I can't do this because I know him very well. I can not let this happen. I can't let him go because if he goes who knows what will happen to him and if I know something happens...*

*Tara: You would feel awful.*

*Nancy: Yes. And I'm gonna have to live with it. So I marched to his classroom, it was lunch time and I said, 'Tony so are going to a party?' and he looked at me because he knew and he goes, 'It's my life and I am gonna do what I want' and I go 'Really, well I'm not leaving' and I said 'You're not going', and I said 'If you go and I find out, I am gonna tell your brother'. I marched out and then I was thinking, wait a minute, what good is it gonna do if this kid goes and I tell his brother, it's gonna do absolutely no good. So then I go, OK, the bell rang we had a class to go to. My teacher, she is a good teacher too. I have gone to the classroom and I told Tony's brother, I go 'Antonio...' and then I start talking to Dwayne and Charles and Dwayne goes, 'Listen I never invited this kid' I am going, 'Charles invited him, Charles wanted him to come'. Dwayne was the coolest. Charles, he is someone that tries to make trouble so I go to him and I said 'You are not taking Tony with you, I hope you are not' and he is like he is not gonna do anything, you know we will go off and we are gonna do our drugs. And I am like excuse me, 'How do you know that. What if he wants to try you're gonna tell him no', I said, 'What are the other kids gonna tell him'. We took most of the class to talk about it and the teacher was there, I didn't care I was just like let everybody know, I don't care and I didn't care what the grade 10 and 11 said. ...I think everybody should know whatever, they should know what is happening whether Charles was embarrassed or not maybe he will think twice about inviting people or even doing stuff like that. I know this year he is a real...that's another story. After that period was done and we were still talking about it and the bell rings and the classroom got separated at that point so after that the second class came and we did our work whatever so I am thinking, where is his classroom I have to talk to this kid because I don't think he really got the message he just like stormed out.*

*Tara: Tony or Charles?*

*Nancy: Charles, ... after the last class I went and I was talking to Charles. And I raised my voice at him and he stormed downstairs to his locker. So I go downstairs and I say 'Charles listen, I am sorry if I yelled at you but I would like to sit down and talk about this, it is very important to me. And he was downstairs*

*and it was more like where that macho guy came over I got show you. 'I am not scared of you'. Even though I was and he wanted to show me where to stand and that does not work with me. And so he starts screaming at me but he came like this like close to my face (she shows me) and his chest out and pushing me and that is when I lost my temper. It was... I don't remember, I did not hit him but I took him where he could not push me and I 'swam' him and I told him listen, 'You're trying to make yourself look like a big macho guy but it is not working'. And I said 'If you cannot handle something and you are putting your face up my face, it is not gonna work'. And after he said, 'You think I am scared of you?' I go 'It has nothing to do about that, I don't care if you are scared of me or not' I go 'This is my friend's life you are fucking with and I am not gonna let you do it'. Then he said something, I start screaming and I had been like this the whole time and this kid comes in and he is like 'OK OK Nancy come on stop'. Everybody is freaking out because they never saw me like this and I said 'Listen get out of the way, I am dealing with this kid' and he was a grade 10 or 11 he is one of the boy that invited him and he knew I was dealing with that by the sound of it. So he tried to get in on it and this kid is bigger than I am so I just gave him a little shot and I said, 'Get out of here' and then after that I started seeing black in his face and then after I knew if I stayed with him that I was gone lose it, so I let go whatever, and he went. I turned around and I tried to calm down, my friends were calming me down.*

*Tara: Because you were so angry?*

*Nancy: .... then the next day everybody was like they could not believe what happened, some people asked me what happen and I told them what happen and after the next day, I got off the bus and Charles comes up to me and he said something and I go, 'How can you even talk to me, I don't want talk to you'. I said, 'Don't get near me'. I don't know he had this nerve to come up to me and I said don't come up to me because you are asking for another fight and I don't want be near you.*

*Tara: Pretty smart of you, telling him what you needed*

*Nancy: And then I told him, 'You think you are a big shot, you don't even do drugs, you're willing to go and do drugs just to make yourself look cool' and I said 'I don't hang around people like you, I don't want talk to you, nothing get out of my face'. He starts going around the school because he thought he was all big for standing up to me but he was not. Everybody saw, everybody knew and so he goes up to people saying, you know I can beat her up but I don't beat up girls and they turned around and they are like, shut up man she can kick your ass, leave it*

*alone. And finally Tony come up to me and he goes, 'Nancy I didn't know you were so upset and you know I won't go...' and I said 'Thank you Tony'. I had to do all that just to prove a point but I mean he didn't go (Case Interview: Nancy, July, 1998).*

In this excerpt, it appears that Nancy protected Tony without regard for herself. She was concerned that Tony was going to go to a weekend party where there would be drugs. Although out of concern and protection for Tony, she approached him in a very confrontational manner. This was not surprising as Nancy's mother often approached Nancy in the same confrontational way. It is possible that Nancy learned this approach from her mother and now uses it herself (although it is also possible that Nancy's mother learned to be confrontational from her daughter). Despite the fact that the approach has little effect with Nancy it would seem to be a learned behavior. Tony left the conversation angry and Nancy felt that she has not been effective in convincing him not to go to the party. Thus, Nancy went to her next class and confronted the two boys who had invited Tony in the first place. Nancy seemed to have no fear of the costs of her becoming involved and stating her opinion. At the end of the class she was concerned that she had not delivered her message clearly enough to Charles (one of the boys who invited Tony to the party), so she went to talk to him in the locker room. Nancy reported that they became involved in a shouting match which included some pushing and shoving and intimidation on both sides. The next day Tony approached Nancy and told her that he would not go to the party. Nancy was relieved.

Nancy reported during an interview that she has no recollection of being abused nor any recollection of her mother supporting and protecting her against her abuser. In fact, Nancy believes that there was no such abuse and that her mother invented the story out of anger toward her ex-husband. However, it would appear that Nancy has learned to support and protect others. It could be that Nancy had early childhood experiences of

being supported and protected which she does not recall. On the other hand, maybe Nancy in her own personal struggle with her mother and social services has learned how to advocate and protect herself in conflictual situations. She described how when she was younger she was passive and would simply listen to her mother and the social worker. She explained how her mother would exaggerate a situation and eventually Nancy would become angry and began protecting herself by providing her side of the story. Perhaps, as Nancy's life has been so conflictual she has learned how to protect herself and therefore is able to provide the same support to others.

I return now to the question posed at the beginning of this section: Are the students in this inquiry able to provide support to others in areas where they can not ask for it themselves? The answer is complex. The analysis suggests that Stephen is able to provide emotional support to his peers when they are upset. However, he himself does not access support when he is upset. It may be important to examine the way in which he provides support to others (e.g., breaking down a task into smaller more manageable steps, demonstrating how to do something). Perhaps, Stephen is mirroring for us (teachers, parents, professionals, and friends) how he needs to be supported. It made sense that he does not provide others with support in content subjects nor does he seek support himself when he requires it. Matthew on the other hand reported seeking emotional support when he required it, however, he himself was not able to provide emotional support to others. It could be that Matthew does not have the skills in areas such as empathy and insight which would enable him to be aware of the needs of others. Among the students who USW, Patrick and Karen were able to provide support to others in areas where they were able to seek support themselves. Nancy on the other hand, much like Matthew, was able to seek emotional and informational/instrumental support, however, there was no evidence of Nancy providing these types of support to others.

## CHAPTER 5

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

*Michael describes that he often needs support when he starts a school project. Michael:- ...once I start it (a project), then I could do it but if I need help to get started I won't start...It's like a car without gas, you have to have gas to start it (Case Interview: Michael, June 24, 1998).*

## Understanding the Phenomenon of Support

In this inquiry, I use a Vygotskian theoretical framework for understanding how adolescents with Lds access and use people for social support and how they provide others with social support. Vygotsky's work is informed by socio-cultural theories of learning that consider development and social context as inextricable. Two central tenets of Vygotsky's theory relevant to my inquiry are: (a) that language and thinking are socio-culturally mediated interactions of knowledge and negotiations of meanings; and (b) that learning occurs through social interaction. Three concepts, the zone of proximal development, self-regulation and internalization are particularly important to my inquiry.

Recall as I discussed Vygotsky's theory in chapter two, the zone of proximal development refers to the range of tasks students cannot yet accomplish without guidance from an adult or more competent peer. The zone of proximal development can be described as the difference between a students' actual development (independent problem-solving abilities) and his or her development level with support. Self-regulation can be conceptualized as children's ability to plan, guide and monitor their own behavior from within and to be flexible about changing their behavior based on changing circumstances (Díaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams, 1990). In other words, when an individual is capable of independent strategic functioning, they have accomplished self-

regulation. Self-regulation is established when a child has internally organized a way to respond and relate to the environment. By internalization, Vygotsky refers not simply to a mental image or representation of external relations, but to a new level of organization which was once only possible with the help of external signs and mediators. With respect to the two themes that drive my inquiry, students' abilities to access and use social support and students' abilities to provide social support to others, appear to be separate concepts that also overlap with each other. In other words, their ability to provide support to others appears to have a direct but complex relationship with their ability to access and use social support in particular contexts of situation.

In the previous chapters, I have reported how adolescents with Lds perceive their own use of social support from a social constructivist theoretical perspective and emphasizing a qualitative methodology. I have presented an emic perspective of these adolescents' use of social support — that is their perspective of the phenomenon.

#### Implications for Theory, Research and Learning

In exploring adolescents with Lds and their perceptions of social support I used a qualitative methodology. This inquiry contributes to research on adolescents with Lds in several ways. First, few studies have examined social networks and social support using secondary students with disabilities. There are no studies to date which present the perspectives of the students themselves. An emic perspective allowed me to see new issues that connect to adolescents' social construction of identity. The majority of studies which have investigated social networks and social support have used a more traditional quantitative methodology.

Of particular value is the fact that this inquiry is one of the first studies to explore social support from the perspective of adolescents with learning disabilities, a population that is usually considered unable to speak for themselves. Each student confirms in

different ways that adopting a contextualized perspective can help educators understand adolescents strategic expressions of identity in their interactions with self and others. Such a perspective also confirms that the adolescent is not an historical, faceless linear subject but rather a complex human being. These students, each in their own ways, provide different windows of insight into their complex social worlds. Including the perspectives of the students, parents and teachers contributes to more robust understanding of how adolescents use people in their social networks for social support and their contexts of situation.

I believe that as a tool of inquiry, interviews are one of the most important methodological ways of understanding people's lives through their own eyes and voices. Vygotsky (1987) said that every word that people use in telling stories is a "microcosm of their consciousness." Examining an individual's consciousness allows researchers and educators to gain access into very complex social and educational issues. As social and educational issues are abstractions based on concrete experiences of people, interviews are crucial to understanding the people and their daily realities. The purpose of in-depth interviewing according to Kavale (1996) is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meanings they give those experiences.

The use of a qualitative methodology allowed me to start with one general and focused question: how adolescents with learning disabilities use people in there social networks for social support. It also allowed new questions and patterns to emerge. One such question that emerged from my data was the following: Can students provide social support to each other? These questions led me to interesting findings which relate to a student's ability to access and use social support. For example, another interesting finding which emerged was that all of the students in this inquiry were able to describe their very difficult school experiences before they attended Vanguard High School. Again the flexibility of a qualitative paradigm allowed me to investigate both the

students' and their parents' perceptions of their difficult early school experiences. Neither of the above questions could have been pursued within the context of my original question had I chosen a quantitative paradigm. This inquiry has also led me to ask new questions which could be pursued in future research. How do adolescents from different cultural and language backgrounds develop self-regulation. What social cues do they pick up on? How do they cope? What do students who come from cultures in which self-disclosure is not acceptable do about problems accessing social support? This inquiry has revealed how difficult it is for some adolescents with Lds to access and use social support. I can only imagine how complex accessing social support would be for a second language learner if they cannot express themselves in their second language. This would be an interesting and fascinating question to pursue. Another question worthy of investigation relates to the ability of students from different cultural backgrounds to access and use social support and their perceptions of what is or is not appropriate. In the remainder of this chapter I explore the implications of the study for theory, research and learning.

### General Findings

In the discussion that follows I reflect on the two groups of students I investigated, those who use support well and those who do not. One particular explanation for why adolescents in this inquiry use or do not use support well may be based on what they have learned through previous experiences and social interactions. Let's look at the four students who use support well.

#### Patrick, Karen, Albert and Nancy: Using Support Well

Patrick, Karen, Albert and Nancy all use support well. This may be due to family members and other individuals within their social networks who have the ability to move



into their zones of proximal development and provide support to them as they require it. Whether these students ask for support directly or indirectly, my analysis indicates that these four adolescents were usually provided with the necessary support in a timely manner. The individuals in their environments who were providing support were able to scaffold, break a task down into more manageable parts and demonstrate for them how to approach and manage a task. For example, in chapter four recall how Mrs. Gagnon described a situation in which she thought she had broken a task down into more manageable parts for Patrick by driving past the building where Patrick had to go to register for driver's education. When Mrs. Gagnon asked Patrick if he had gone to register the next day, he said that he had not. Patrick was not able to explain why he had not gone. Mrs. Gagnon did not get angry or become judgmental. It would appear that she had an intuitive sense of what she had to do in order to support her son. For example, she added strategies by going with him to the driver's education school, parking the car, going up the stairs with him and supporting him in the registration process. She was then able to withdraw her support and Patrick was able to move on to obtain his driver's license independently. While some many consider this as being over protective, her response seemed to work for Patrick. Another interpretation might be that this type of scaffolding in a supportive and respectful manner helps begin the process of internalization and self regulation. In other words, through this passive type of social interaction in which Mrs. Gagnon was able to move into Patrick's zone of proximal development, she was providing the necessary steps in developing mutual understanding between her son and herself and facilitated his cognitive development through apprenticeship. A constructivist perspective would suggest that Patrick was able to begin to develop the skills and understanding relevant to developing higher mental functions in this particular context. This type of social interaction in which a parent scaffolds and demonstrates breaking down a task was similarly described by Karen and Albert and

members of their social networks. These types of social interactions encourage a student to begin to internally organize a way to respond and relate to the environment and thus promotes internalization and self-regulation.

Nancy's case is intriguing. She also uses support well. However, her family dynamics are quite different from the other adolescents in this group. She was not provided with the same type of scaffolding and positive demonstrations from her family members. On the other hand, it appears that Nancy's mother does demonstrate seeking support when she requires it for herself. For example, when Nancy's mother becomes overwhelmed with life or her role as a mother, she reaches out to social services and accesses support through them. In this way she is demonstrating for Nancy how to access and use social support. On the other hand, Nancy's mother's demonstration of how to access and use social support also conveys another meaning; her abdication of her role as mother. It is possible that Nancy has learned to access and use social support through observation and participation in these types of social interactions with her mother or through more positive social interactions with other members within her social network. All of this may have added to Nancy's resilience in accessing support. It may also be that Nancy is the type of individual who has a strong inner resilience. It would appear that Nancy picks up on the positive rather than the negative aspects of this mother-daughter relationship. It is important to recognize that all of these subtle meanings such as I describe here in Nancy's case and that emerge in these adolescents' social worlds and networks could not be uncovered using a quantitative methodology. Let us now look at the difficulties of Michael, Stephen and Matthew who do not use support well.

Michael, Stephen, and Matthew: Difficulties in the area of accessing and using social support

Michael was not able to access nor use social support when it was provided to him. Nor was he able to provide social support to others. This was not surprising as there was evidence in the data to indicate that it was equally difficult for Michael's mother to access and use social support as well as provide social support to others. I would suggest that Michael has not learned through positive social interactions in the home situation about how to obtain support. When other individuals within his social network provide him with scaffolding and demonstrations, as I suggest is necessary for the students who use support well, Michael continues to have difficulty using the support provided. These difficulties were especially evident when Michael was asked directly about his needs (e.g., "Well why didn't you..." Michael would often respond, "I don't know" or "I forgot"). However, one interesting finding that emerges from the evidence Michael provides is that when he was approached in a way in which he felt he was being heard and validated, he was able to describe what he thought the problem was and what could possibly be helpful to him. The data analysis indicate that the Michael was able to risk talking about difficult situations with a member of his social network when he felt that his words were being listened to, validated and respected. In other words, the way in which Michael is approached and offered support is a crucial factor in his ability to access and receive support. In these particular situations Michael could discuss a problem and could often brainstorm possible solutions to it. However, more often when someone asked him directly why something was not working, or why something had not been done he would respond with a passive defeatist response such as, "I don't know" or "I forgot." Thus, in order for a students like Michael to risk-take he needed to feel safe, in a trusting relationship. The data seems to indicate that if Michael felt as if he was being judged or confronted he would withdraw from the interaction or the situation.

The data analysis indicated that Stephen, like Michael, has not learned through positive social interactions at home and in his immediate network how to access and use social support. In areas that Stephen experiences difficulty, such as reading and writing, I observed many situations in which people took his claims that he could not read or write at face value and therefore provided him with too much support, such as acting as a reader or a scribe when he could have accomplished such tasks himself. These demonstrations of support might be appropriate supports for an exam situation, however, during a typical geography or history class Stephen could have done some of the reading independently or with *some* level support. In class, often he did not request support although it was provided to him. For example, I observed situations in which classmates automatically joined Stephen at his desk to support him with a reading task. Although some of this support might have been necessary, it was often provided at stages when he could have been successful independently. By providing him with support within his actual development level and not within his zone of proximal development, members of Stephen's social network are perpetuating his learned helplessness and his inability to access appropriate support. The questions that arise are: Is he being lazy? Is he being manipulative?

Vygotsky posits that learning occurs in the potential. In other words, the distance between a student's actual development and their potential development depends on an adult or more competent peer problem solving through guidance and collaboration. Learning is a creative process that requires a students to socially construct knowledge for themselves. As Stephen's peers are supporting him within his actual development level and not within his zone of proximal development he is not learning to self-regulate. Stephen's claims that he often knows when he does not need the support provided but is afraid to turn it down in case support is not available when he perceives he does need it. Like Michael, Stephen is often aware of what he needs and in fact is able to provide

appropriate support to others in areas of strength for himself, such as physical education and information technology class. Recall when, Stephen was able to move into Donald's zone of proximal development during a physical education class. Stephen was able to successfully scaffold and demonstrate for Donald how to serve a volleyball over the net.

Matthew is also unable to use social support well. However, it will be interesting to observe Matthew's development, as much is changing in his life. Like Michael and Stephen, accessing and using social support was not modeled in his home situation. Matthew and his mother both describe having had a difficult home environment. Recall how Matthew's mother felt that she needed to do everything for her children in order to be a good parent. In talking about her son Greg she said that she was always, *"right there, so he never learned to be independent."* She also used this parenting style with Matthew. Parents who are over protective and hence controlling, as Mrs. Rogers describes herself, can prevent a child from being able to self-regulate. In other words, by not providing Matthew with opportunities to problem solve with guidance and in collaborative situations, he does not appear to be able to socially construct knowledge for himself.

However, changes in the family have prompted Matthew's mother to re-evaluate her parenting strategies and she feels that she is now better able to encourage independence in Matthew. This has resulted in a greater emphasis on providing Matthew with appropriate support. She has allowed him to make his own mistakes with his knowledge that she is there to support him. She explained her change in parenting style, *"kids should be aware of what's going on and you should be open with them and they should be allowed to express themselves. They have to learn by their mistakes. You can't expect them to be perfect..."* Changes in Matthew's behavior have already been observed within the Rogers' home. Mrs. Rogers described Matthew's increasing ability to access support from family members. Recall in chapter four when Matthew was able to seek

support from his mother when he and his girlfriend broke-up. It will be interesting to see if this ability to use support will be transferred to the school environment. How do students who do not use support well learn to transfer social support from one context to another?

### Interpretation and Implications

There are adolescents with Lds who use support well and there are those who do not use support well. This also in and of itself is not surprising. However, understanding why this is so is interesting. The major difference between these two groups appears to be embedded within their family dynamics. Using a Vygotskian theoretical framework, I have observed that the use or non-use of social support was learned through social interactions within the students' families. The students who use support well appeared to have social support demonstrated for them at home and support was provided to them within their zones of proximal development. This enabled them to internalize and self-regulate how to access and use social support independently. The students who do not use support well were not provided with this modeling in their home situations and were not provided support within their zone of proximal development. Thus, they seem to experience more difficulty accessing appropriate support. The good news for teachers, parents, professions in social services and friends is that it is never too late to begin the process of scaffolding and demonstrating as we observed in the case of Matthew. Adolescents can learn to self-regulate and begin to access and use social support when adults or more competent peers are able to listen and validate the students concerns and by moving into their zone of proximal development.

A second interesting finding in this study was that among the students who do not use support well, all of these students were able to appropriately express their needs under particular situations, such as when they felt that they were being heard, validated

and respected. In fact two of the students in this group, Stephen and Matthew, were able to provide excellent support to others. This is an important finding because it shows that these students know what they need and what others need, even if they can not act on it for themselves. One reason they may not be able to appropriately ask for support maybe due to a fear of dependence on others. In order to seek social support individuals have to accept their own vulnerability and neediness. In other words, they have to allow themselves to be dependent on others in some situations. The students who use support well appear to be able to accept this dependency and neediness and trust that they will be supported in a respectful manner. Those students who do not use support well appear to have a fear of dependency. Understanding how students may interpret social support differently would be an important consideration for any program that was developed to help adolescents with or without Lds use social support more appropriately. Any program that aims to address these needs would have to consider the type of evidence offered by Michael and Stephen's case studies, such as suggesting appropriate ways of encouraging these adolescents to express their needs. There must also be a consideration with regards to an adolescent's possible fear of dependence. Alleviating such a fear may be accomplished in a mentoring environment where individuals, mentors and students, learn skills such as active listening and are taught about dependence and risk-taking.

#### Students' perceptions of perceived support

One difference between the two groups of students appears to be that those who USW perceive people in their social networks as accessible and responsive to their needs. Students who DUSW often do not seem to expect to be understood, nor do they perceive people within their social networks to be as available or supportive. It appears that they often expect to fail even if they try to solicit support from others or try to support themselves.

The data reveals considerable variation with respect to the availability and responsiveness of individuals within the social networks of these two groups of students. I return here to my earlier point that the parents of the students who USW seem to have the ability to move into their children's zone of proximal development and provide them with support in such a way that the adolescents do not feel victimized and judged. The parents of the students who DUSW were not able to move into their children's zone of proximal development in the same way. The question becomes why not? Both groups of students did have people within their social networks who did try to move into their zone of proximal development. Occasionally, the students who DUSW were able to use the support provided by individuals other than their parents. At other times, I observed that they were not able to do this. Could it be that by not experiencing the support they needed at home, it was difficult for them to accept the support of others within their social networks outside the home situation. However, we must keep in mind that Nancy, who USW, does not perceive to have the social support at home that she feels that she requires yet, as discussed earlier she is able to access and use social support well. Another possibility is that the students in the group who DUSW may have more difficulty expressing themselves and hence it is extremely difficult for the parents of these students to know exactly where their child's zone of proximal development lies.

Furman (1989) examined the differences between elementary aged students and adolescents in the area of perceived support. He reported that adolescents rely on specific people for specific kinds of support. His findings were not confirmed by data in this inquiry. My findings suggest that within the group of students who USW, all three of them have a variety of people whom they deliberately chose to rely on for support for a variety of complex reasons. For example, in terms of emotional support, Patrick reported relying on his mother, parents, friends, and cousins. Within the group of student who DUSW, Matthew and Stephen appeared to have a variety of individuals to rely on,



whereas Michael seems to rely solely on his father for emotional support, or suppressed his feelings and did not seek support from anyone. One of the themes that emerges from this study was the notion of proximity. Not only did the students have a variety of people with whom they could rely on for support, all of them, with one exception, Michael, talked about seeking support from a member of their social network who was closest to them physically, meaning geographic proximity. Hence whoever was in close proximity and was a member of their social network was accessed for support when the individual student deemed it necessary. Thus, my findings are in contrast to those of Furman (1989).

Within Furman's (1989) study he reported that grade seven students in his study perceived higher parental conflict and punishment than elementary school children. He also reported grade seven and grade ten students identified having less power during social interactions with their parents than grade four students. These particular findings from Furman's (1989) study reflect some of the patterns I observed among the students who DUSW in this inquiry. For example, Michael described a high degree of parental conflict with his mother. He also described feeling powerless that his mother did not understand him. Furman's (1989) findings also connect to Matthew's situation in that he did not expect to be understood by the adults in his social network. Stephen described a degree of conflict with his father concerning academic matters. Two of the students who USW, Patrick and Karen, described their parents as an important part of their social network and providing them necessary and useful support. It was interesting to note that these two students did not describe a high degree of parental conflict or punishment. They presented their parent relationships as open, trusting, and respectful. Nancy, on the other hand, viewed her mother as being unable to cope with life and unable to support or take responsibility for her as a daughter. Yet, what provides Nancy with the inner strength to access and use support well? As I suggested earlier in this chapter perhaps

Nancy's positive and negative social interactions with her mother have added to her resilience. It would be interesting to follow a case like Nancy or others to see how they develop such inner resilience.

In research conducted in the area of perceived support, Robinson (1996) and Ryan and Lynch (1989) suggest that the level of closeness to and support from parents remains high throughout adolescence. These researchers added that perceiving parents as supportive continues to be important to adolescents. Perceiving parents as supportive appears to be true to some degree with all of the students in this inquiry. They all had at least one parent or significant other whom they perceived as supportive. Within the group of students who DUSW, Michael was the one who perceived a close relationship with his father. On the other hand, Matthew reported having a close relationship with his mother and relied on her more often for social support. Stephen reported that his girlfriend's mother provided him with a level of closeness and support. Within the group of students who USW, Patrick and Karen describe close relationships with their parents. Nancy, described a closeness with her foster mother. It would seem that each student in this inquiry has experienced some level of bonding with a parent or surrogate individual who nurtured them. These findings suggest that students find surrogate parents, if for whatever reason they do not feel comfortable relying on their own parents. Identification with a significant other may relate more to empathetic relationships than gender. In other words, students identified with significant others who were able to understand their feelings and concerns.

#### Enacted/Received support

Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) study reported that all types of support from mothers was consistently high across ages. These researchers added that fathers were seen as sources of support as children became older. The older participants

in their study (12 year olds) reported siblings as sources of support more than elementary school students. Although age was not a factor in my inquiry, I can compare their results with the older participants to my findings. In my inquiry, siblings were reported as possible sources of emotional and informational/instrumental support. For example, Karen described her sister as very helpful to her when she is having difficulty with her homework. In the Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) study, teachers were consistently reported as providers of informational support across ages. This was the case for all of the students in this inquiry. Although Michael, Stephen, and Matthew may not access this support, they each mentioned teachers as providers of informational/instrumental support.

Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) also reported that teachers were named as companions only with the elementary students. In my inquiry, although teachers were not mentioned as companions, they were reported to be sources of emotional support for Karen, Nancy, and Albert who USW and for Stephen and Matthew who DUSW. These students reported feeling comfortable accessing emotional support when they required it from particular teachers. I would suggest that the teachers at Vanguard act not only as the students' teachers but also as their mentors. By that I mean that the students are each assigned a teacher who they can rely on throughout the year for all of the types of support described in this study. The students are encouraged to talk with their teachers and mentors when they are experiencing difficulty, academic or otherwise. I would further suggest that the non-competitive nature of the school allows the students to see not only the teachers but also their peers as collaborators in all types of learning situations and social interactions. Vanguard school has developed a mentoring school culture and ethos.

Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) claim that friends were sources of informational/instrumental support consistently across ages. These are consistent

findings as compared to my findings. All of the students in my inquiry reported friends or classmates as sources of informational/instrumental support. Cauce, Reid, Landsman, and Gonzales (1990) also reported that older children considered friends sources of companionship and emotional support more often than young children. All of the students in this inquiry reported friends as sources of companionship and all but Michael reported friends as sources of emotional support. Michael seems to have difficulty in areas such as self-disclosure and the communication of his feelings. This might be why it is difficult for him to have friends as sources of emotional support. As was discussed in chapter one, friendships are of particular importance for all children but for adolescents in particular. Michael's difficulty in relying on friends for emotional support may have serious repercussions as he matures. According to Hartup (1989) social competence emerges mainly from the experience of close relationships, particularly with peers. He claims that the quality of these relationships affect the individual in enduring ways. Socio-linguists agree that language and social contexts are intertwined. With respect to Michael perhaps his difficulty verbalizing his feelings and his language based learning disability which affects his ability to clearly express himself contribute to his inability to use friends for emotional support.

Newman (1990) and Newman and Goldin (1990) collected data from children at varying ages and reported that differences appear to be in the type of support sought from parents and other adults. For example, they found that grade seven students sought support depending on how they weighed the costs and benefits of asking for support (e.g., fear of embarrassment, awareness of peer acceptance and conformity). Weighing the costs and benefits of seeking support are major considerations for students like Michael and Stephen who do not want to upset individuals within their social networks. These types of students are inhibited about seeking support when they perceive greater costs may be incurred as compared to the possible benefits. Perhaps, if these students were

more self aware and more confident in themselves then they would not be quite as quick to withdraw from particular situations that are precarious or that trigger past experiences that have not led to receiving the support they require. These students may have fears which involve the lose of affection or losing face. However, this appeared less evident in the patterns which emerged with Patrick, Nancy, and Matthew each of whom described experiences in which they took risks despite the costs of losing friendships and fear of embarrassment. Recall for example, an excerpt presented in chapter four in which Nancy was worried about her friend Tony going to a party where there would be drugs. Despite the possible costs involved, such as the risk of losing a friend, she pursued the issue of Tony not going to the party. She confronted Tony himself and the two boys who invited him to the party in order to convince him not to go. It would appear that Nancy created a conflict with her friend and the two other boys without fear of embarrassment. She reported that her goal was to protect and provide her friend with support although he had not asked for it.

Thus, the results from my inquiry indicate two things: (a) Students who USW expect to be supported and tend to receive support that is within their zone of proximal development; (b) The parents and families of students who DUSW are less able to provide the necessary scaffolding and support within their adolescents' zone of proximal development. The question remains why not? The challenge for people working in social services is how to change this situation.

#### Empathy and accessing support

The ability to perspective take and empathize with others appears to be related to being more skilled in making and keeping friends and positively interacting with one's self and others. Dodge (1985) connects social information processing with social competence, which he suggests can relate to peer rejection, isolation and popularity. He

posits that social information processing may be important in *obtaining* social support from one's social network. In other words, perceiving social cues and interpreting them appropriately could be important as to whether or not another person may be willing to provide a particular type of support. Therefore, identifying potential support and getting it may depend on one's ability to verbalize and assess whether the support provided is useful or not given a particular context.

All of the students in this inquiry have some degree of social information processing abilities that enabled them to *obtain* various types of social support. This was even the case for those who do not use support well. For example, there was no evidence that Michael seeks informational/instrumental support in the domain of academics. However, I believe that Michael does have the ability to interpret social situations. By interpret, I mean that I observed occasions when he was aware when something was not working for him, such as the situation when he was working on his Biology project with his tutor. He was aware that he was having difficulty but his reaction to that difficulty, as I observed it, was to withdraw and take on a defeatist stance. However, I occasionally observed when he was provided with some time, privacy and his feelings were validated, he could explain what he saw as the area of difficulty and he could come up with a solution. For example, in the project situation Michael could explain that he had tried his tutor's method of working on a project and it had not worked for him. This time he wanted to read the material independently and have his tutor type his ideas for him. Thus, when provided with appropriate support, Michael could assess whether the support being provided was useful or not. He could verbalize his feelings and ideas about what would work better.

The findings in my inquiry suggest that the students who DUSW often are aware of whether or not the support being provided is useful, as Michael and Stephen specifically reported. The difficulty appears to be in the students' ability to verbalize

their needs to the provider of support. Central to Vygotsky's theoretical framework is the importance of language in the learning process. Language is a psychological tool that is considered to be central to the understanding of higher mental processes or cultural functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky further argues that language is the central mediator of learning. Thus, if it is difficult for students like Michael and Stephen to verbalize their needs it is not surprising that it is difficult for them to access social support. As I discussed earlier in this chapter the findings suggest that Michael needed to feel as if his concerns were being heard, validated and respected in order for him to risk identifying potential support. Stephen was also aware of whether the support being provided was useful or not. He reported that his fear was that if he communicated that a particular support was not necessary he was worried that support may not be available if he needed it in the future. Social information processing may be important in order to seek social support, as Dodge (1985) suggests. However, the findings in my inquiry go beyond social information processing and address the fears and concerns of particular students. Students in my inquiry were well aware of their own needs and the type of support that they perceived would be useful for them. Each student had their own personal reasons that affected whether or not they could access the social support they required. These subtle differences among the students that emerged help me to better understand these adolescents' social worlds that I could not have uncovered using a quantitative methodology.

In summary, all of the students who participated in the case studies were able to obtain social support in particular situations. This suggests that each student in this inquiry had some degree of ability at perceiving social cues and interpreting them appropriately. Questions that arise for further study are: (a) How do adolescents interpret these social cues?; (b) How do their individual interpretations relate to their own

interpretive processes and sense of themselves?; and (c) How do adolescents from different cultural backgrounds interpret social cues?

The claims of Tyler and Varma (1988) and Newman (1990) are similar to those of Dodge (1985). Tyler and Varma (1988) and Newman (1990) suggest that the more socially competent one is the more likely one will be able to seek support when needed. As I discussed above, in my inquiry having social competence did not necessarily mean that a student was more likely to seek support when needed, especially those students who DUSW.

The research findings of Dodge (1985), Newman (1990), and Tyler and Varma (1988) are fascinating and relevant to my inquiry in that they help me to understand and interpret the meaning of some of the differences between the two groups of students in terms of their ability to perceive and receive support, perspective-take and empathize. However, these researchers do not address the question of why there are such differences among students in their abilities to access and use social support. I agree with Dodge (1985) that the process of obtaining social support is related to one's ability to process social information. I further posit that social information processing is learned through positive and negative social interactions. I believe that by using Vygotsky's principal of working within a student's zone of proximal development a student can learn the necessary skills in order to be able to process social information and thus, access social support. I would add that as a student begins to internalize the processes they are experiencing, in time they will learn to self-regulate. Thus, they will no longer require an individual to provide support within their zone of proximal development. However, in order to support a student successfully one must listen to the student. One can only move into a student's zone of proximal development by listening and understanding an individual's perspective. Parents, teachers, professionals and friends can not presume to know what another is thinking or feeling. The case studies of Michael and Stephen have



helped to illuminate the fact that each student had very different fears and concerns which affected their ability to access and use social support. It seems that by listening to the adolescents, validating their perspectives and by being respectful of how they perceive particular situations that we can move into their individual zones of proximal development.

Perspective taking and empathy: Providing support to others

Perspective taking relates to perceived support and being attuned to another person. Perceiving support requires an individual to have the ability to process social information from experiences and interactions with others. Selman (1980) claims that between the ages ten and fifteen children exhibit mutual role taking once they understand the recursiveness of reciprocal perspectives. In other words, children by the ages of ten and fifteen tend to have the ability to empathize, to understand the feelings and concerns of others and to take their perspectives. By the age of twelve, one is expected to be able to understand the thoughts and feeling of others without experiencing them themselves, i.e., empathize. In this inquiry, all of the students seemed very attuned to one another. Regardless of which group they were in, they were each able to support their peers with some particular type of support. This was particularly noticeable among the students who do not use support well. I am not sure if this is characteristic of all adolescents, adolescents with Lds, or only the students in this inquiry. Perhaps, the non-competitive nature of the school encourages students to support one another. Perhaps, the students have a shared tacit understanding of each other's learning difficulties as they all reported having difficult school experiences prior to starting at Vanguard. Regardless of the reason, all of the students in this inquiry were able to support their peers. For example, Matthew used his artistic talent to support Michael in Information Technology class. Matthew was also able to provide his mother support and verbally help her to see the big

picture (e.g., "(mum) will this be important to you five years from now?"). Stephen provided support to Donald in physical education class by breaking down a task into manageable steps and demonstrating each step for him. Although, Michael was not able to provide emotional or informational/instrumental support to his peers, he was observed providing companionship to others. Among those who USW, all of them were able to provide different types of support to their peers, suggesting that they have a well internalized repertoire of support strategies.

This ability to perspective take and empathize connects to Vygotsky's concepts of self-regulation and internalization. In order to be able to self regulate, an individual must be able to internally organize a way to respond to and relate to the environment. All of the students in this inquiry were able to self-regulate to some degree with respect to providing support to others. The fact that they were able to provide support in a way that another person could use it, demonstrates their intuitive sense of what type of support was necessary, their ability to empathize, and their ability to provide it within a students' zone of proximal development. For example, Matthew demonstrated his ability to provide his peers with informational/instrumental support in situations in which he could use his artistic talents or his strength in poetry. In information technology class Matthew was able to empathize with Michael and support him in finding an emblem for the clock Michael was building. In poetry class, Matthew demonstrated his perspective taking abilities by observing that Kevin required support and he tried to provide it to him. Both of these examples illustrate Matthew's ability to internally organize a way to respond to his peers in a particular context. In other words, he demonstrated an ability to self-regulate his behaviors with reference to others. However, Matthew does not seem to be able to provide emotional support to others. It could be that Matthew is not able to perspective-take or empathize in situations that require him to express his own emotions, such as caring, affection, intimacy and self-disclosure to another. He was able to seek

emotional support for himself as he needed it; however he could not provide it to others. An interesting finding to highlight was the student's ability to provide support to others but not ask for the same type of support themselves as they required it.

Like Matthew, Stephen demonstrated his ability to provide his peers with informational/instrumental and emotional support in situations in which he could capitalize on his personal strength; thus he demonstrates his ability to perspective-take and empathize in particular contexts. What was unusual with respect to Stephen, was that he was able to provide emotional support when someone was upset. However, when he was upset he could not access or use support provided to him. It would seem that despite his ability to self-regulate in particular contexts and provide support to others, this does not necessarily mean that he is able to access or use the support provided to him. Regardless of the reasons why one may or may not be able to use support, the ability to perspective-take and empathize, to be attuned to another and provide support, does not necessarily mean that one will be able to access and use support in the same areas. In other words, it is not a linear process, but highly context specific.

#### Social information processing and providing support

In my inquiry, all the students, with the exception of Michael, were able to *provide* support to others. In the previous section, I described how social information processing may be important in order to obtain support. I now posit that it may also be very important in order to provide support to others. Perceiving social cues and interpreting them correctly is necessary in order to determine how to best provide support to another person in a given context. All of the students who USW were able to obtain and provide support to others in given contexts. The findings were more complex among the students who DUSW and raise some interesting questions. Michael reported that he could access emotional support from his father at times. However, there was no evidence

that he could provide any type of support to others. Stephen was able to provide support to his peers in very socially competent ways. For example, in physical education class Stephen observed that Donald was having difficulty serving the volleyball over the net. Stephen moved into Donald's zone of proximal development and was able to break the task down into smaller parts and demonstrate for him how to serve the ball. This type of dynamic is yet another example of what Vygotsky would call, other regulation.

Other regulation refers to a dialogic pair such as an expert and novice interacting and working collaboratively. Stephen appears to be able to self-regulate with respect to providing social support to others. Yet, he appeared to have difficulty accessing support when he required it. Matthew provided particular types of support to his peers and his mother. His ability to provide support in specific social contexts would seem to demonstrate a skill in social information processing. However, like Stephen, Matthew had difficulty accessing support at times when he appeared to require it. Stephen and Matthew seem to have social information processing skills which they can use in order to provide support in a socially competent manner to others in particular social contexts. Yet they themselves have difficulty accessing and using support provided to them.

In chapter two, I discussed the fact that social context influences a child's ability to plan, guide, and self-regulate his/her behavior. Perhaps, understanding the contextual factors that enhance or inhibit students' abilities to self-regulate or not will shed light on a student's ability to provide support to others. These students may not be able to access and use social support in some situations as it would require them to self-disclose. This might also be a critical factor for students from different cultural backgrounds. Perhaps students like Michael, Stephen and Matthew have not learned the value of being open and building trusting relationships. It could be that they do not know when it is safe to risk talking about their feelings and concerns. It is particularly difficult for adolescents to open themselves up and become vulnerable. As was mentioned in chapter one,

adolescence is a period in one's life when one becomes very self-conscious. This self-consciousness can lead to feelings of inferiority, withdrawal and depression (e.g., Heath, 1992, 1993; Kavale & Forness, 1996; Lerner, 1995).

### Educational Implications and Program Development

A parent or teacher may believe that they exemplify the characteristics that demonstrate support of adolescents such as, allowing them to take risks and being accessible when there is a problem. However, it is crucial to understand how adolescents are experiencing the parent, teacher, or particular situation. Does the adolescent see the parent/teacher as supportive and available, allowing them to make mistakes and helping them when things fall apart? Does the adolescent feel that their feelings are being validated and heard? Availability and validation seem to be crucial in order for students to use support well. Despite the traumas that the students may have experienced or the type of LD that they may have, it appears that availability and validation are key characteristics which contribute to students who use support well.

I believe that, understanding how an adolescent perceives and interprets situations and how parents and individuals within each person's social network tries to understand a student's perceptions is what makes the critical difference between whether students use support well or not. Once students feel validated, maybe then they can be more open to social interactions that promote self-regulation. By this I mean that the student may feel like a collaborator in the process of self-regulatory functioning. Three characteristics which were highlighted in chapter two as key characteristics of adult (or more capable peer)-student interactions which promote self-regulatory functioning are: (a) the use of reasoning and verbal rationales; (b) the gradual relinquishing of adult support; and (c) both of these in combination with a sense of affective nurturing and emotional warmth.

Next I discuss a program that I believe would teach students, parents, teachers and education students how to promote seeking, using, and providing social support.

### Theory to Practice

I would suggest that a tutor-mentoring program that provides relevant contextual background information to the theoretical constructs being discussed would be an ideal way to teach students, teachers, education students and parents how to learn to access, use, and provide social support. A program such as the one I am considering could be set up as an in-school or after-school program which would train teachers, education students and parents how to work one-to-one and collaboratively in groups with adolescents with Lds. Using a Vygotskian framework, this mentoring program would provide the participants with an opportunity to learn about one's zone of proximal development and achieving self-regulation.

The program would be designed to help adolescents with Lds be more competent in and out of school, more strategic and skilled both cognitively and socially. The resource model used would be a collaborative one, in that the director, team-leaders, mentors and students would work collaboratively. In this program there would be a six-week orientation course before mentors and students begin working together. When the program begins, mentors would spend the first hour and a half of each session working with an adolescent or a small group of students under the supervision of the director and team-leaders who would share backgrounds and experiences such as teachers, psychologists and special education consultants. The mentors and students would work collaboratively one to one or in small groups. The dyads or groups would be set-up in meaningful authentic situations for positive social interactions and promote goal directed behaviors. The final hour each day would be spent in a supervisory group meeting where

the mentors would discuss their sessions and together the team would brainstorm and plan for the next session.

Mentors and students would be provided with the opportunity to learn the value and importance of listening and probing in positive and supportive ways. These listening and questioning skills would encourage dialogue between individuals. Findings in this inquiry suggest that open communication in which the parties involved feel heard, validated, and respected is critical in order for there to be mutual understanding and in order for the individual providing support to be able to move into the students' zone of proximal development. Questioning can be done in a non-direct way, which would enhance a students meta-cognitive skills and would ensure that the student felt heard, validated, and respected. For example a mentor or more competent peer might say, "It looks like this is hard for you. Have you noticed this too?" "What do you think is happening?" "What do you think might help?" The answers will enable an individual to more appropriately move into the students' zone of proximal development.

This notion of listening, questioning and open communication is likely to help the building of trusting relationships. The experience of this type of trusting relationship may promote a comfort level with components such as self awareness, self disclosure and self acceptance. Self awareness is the ability to recognize feelings, build a vocabulary for them and understand the relationships between thoughts, feelings, and reactions. This concept also involves a recognition of one's own strengths and weaknesses. Self disclosure is the ability to value open-ness and build trusting relationships. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is the ability to know when it is safe to risk talking about one's feelings. Self acceptance promotes feelings of pride in oneself and seeing oneself in a positive light. Other key components which may be involved in accessing social support and could be included in a mentoring program are empathy, assertiveness, personal responsibility and conflict resolution. Each of these components would enhance

an adolescents sense of self which is often so precarious at during this developmental period.

Within the program I am proposing mentors and more competent peers would be encouraged to demonstrate how a task can be broken down into more manageable parts. Through demonstration, mentors and students would have the opportunity to learn how to break a task down into manageable parts and gradually relinquish support as the student is ready. The students and mentors would also be encouraged to provide positive and constructive feedback to each other. Recall when Stephen was supporting his classmates in a physical education class when they were learning a variety of martial arts kicks. Stephen was able to provide feedback to his peers and explanations, within their individual zones of proximal development, while fine tuning their technique, "*Good, but a little more like this*" and he would demonstrate for the person. Positive responses can be used in order to provide the student with information on their performance as it relates to a standard. This comparison allows the student to self-correct.

Students and mentors would also be provided with relevant theoretical and applied information with respect to the differences between what Vygotsky calls *tasks* and *activities*. Tasks can be conceptualized as the "blueprint" of action (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). For instance a task could be what a teacher asks a student to do. Whereas an activity is what a participant individually constructs. In other words, the activity is the students' perception of what was asked of them and what they actually do.

Understanding and talking about these differences would allow students and mentors to appreciate and be aware of how individual perceptions and interpretations can effect learning and production. It is important to recognize that regardless of what we teach, students are going to learn what they are ready to learn. We each construct our own knowledge therefore it is important that mentors keep checking with students in order to ensure that they are communicating, thinking and hearing things in the same way. With



the knowledge of the differences between tasks and activities perhaps students and mentors could structure tasks together. Task structuring can be conceptualized as chunking, sequencing and breaking a task down into more manageable parts. Task structuring may help to ensure that learning is occurring in the potential. Strategies such as breaking a task down into parts can be used to help the student to see a task as more manageable and hence fits the learners zone of proximal development when the entire structured task is beyond their zone of proximal development.

### Future Research

Drawing from ethnographic studies, researchers interested in adolescents' social worlds and use of social support might consider the following different types of studies. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study to the one described in this dissertation comparing adolescents with Lds who attend schools within an inclusive setting as compared to a segregated setting. This type of study may have implications for segregated and inclusive settings and shed additional light on adolescents' use of social support. A second area of interest may be a comparative study looking across different schools and family contexts in multicultural settings. Perhaps, a study such as this one would also help further understand adolescents' ability to access and use social support as multiculturalism would add an interesting dynamic. In each of these studies researchers should examine adolescents within their social peer groups, networks and understand them as individuals. Schools and families are complex socialization institutions that shape student's construction of identity. It is fascinating to listen to the perspectives of the adolescents and their families and begin to understand the complexity of their contextual worlds and how this relates to their abilities to access and use social support.

In this chapter I described a tutor-mentoring program which I suggest would provide mentors (parents, teachers, education students) and adolescents with

opportunities to learn how to move into a students zone of proximal development and enable them to better access and use social support. Perhaps, studies exploring the effectiveness of such a program would add to the existing theories in adolescents, social support and self-regulated learning. I would be interested in knowing not only if these programs lead students to becoming more adept in the domain of social-emotional competence but also if the students are better able to access and use social support. A study exploring collaborative approaches of teachers and parents working together as partners would also be another interesting direction to pursue. The results of which would likely have major implications for teacher education.

Perhaps an interesting study using siblings or matched pairs with and without Lds and their use of social support would add to the current findings by distinguishing between the contribution of Lds, family structures, personality, etc. Future research may well reveal that students with Lds face the same social issues as students without Lds. Another interesting study involving a similar methodology to this inquiry, would be a comparative study between home and school in urban and suburban settings. This would allow for more robust data and would provide a window into the ecological niches of families from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

### Implications for Theory and Conclusions

My study lends support to Vygotsky's claims that: (a) Learning is primarily social and is enhanced through social interactions with significant others; and (b) Learning is a culturally and socially mediated process. Evidence from this inquiry demonstrates that adolescents construct their own meanings from the social interactions in which they are involved. It is through active listening, probing and validating that members of an adolescents' social network can gain insight into their social world and be able to support them within their zone of proximal development. By mediating learning within an

individual's zone of proximal development learners are able to socially construct knowledge from themselves. When knowledge becomes internalized one can say that the student is able to self-regulate in a particular area. We know very little about the process involved in the successful transfer of task responsibility from adult or more competent peer to adolescent. I would suggest that the present inquiry has shed some light on this from the perspectives of students themselves. Evidence from this inquiry would suggest that creating an open and trusting environment in which students feel comfortable to risk-take and self-disclose is crucial in the process of accessing social support.

The adolescents in my inquiry would benefit from a mentoring program in which each individual involved is encouraged to learn within a collaborative environment how to listen, probe, reflect and validate and thus create a trusting relationship. This would enable mentors to move into a student's zone of proximal development and provide the necessary scaffolding to support a student. Mentors and students would have opportunities to learn how to gradually relinquish support at a rate comfortable for the student. This would enable students to access and use social support and function better in their day-to-day life. Take for example a student like Michael. When he felt that he was given time and privacy and he felt that he was being listened to and his feelings were being validated, he was quite competent at assessing situations and problem solving with someone. However, Michael was not able to access that type person. If someone from his social network had been able to demonstrate to him that they were listening, then Michael might have occasionally taken the risk of using the social support being provided. Perhaps in learning strategies such as communication, self-awareness, self disclosure, self acceptance and personal responsibility within a mentoring program adolescents such as Michael could better access the social support needed.

With a mentoring program such as the one I am suggesting, perhaps one might find more accepting classrooms, with improved collaboration among students, teachers

and parents. This might help students and teachers bridge gap between student differences. If we began this type of programming in kindergarten and grade one perhaps by adolescence students would feel included in inclusive settings as opposed to feeling isolated and rejected. I am not suggesting that this is a miracle cure to inclusive education. However, I believe that dialogue and understanding are fundamental principles which will promote learning and acceptance in inclusive settings.

It is crucial that teachers, parents, professionals and friends pay attention and listen to the way adolescents experience the world. Adolescent perceptions are very accessible and extremely valuable and yet, they are rarely used. The perceptions of the students is an excellent source of data for those who wish to facilitate change in the lives of adolescents, especially those with Lds. Listen, validate, question, and be respectful, "What do you think is happening here?" Rhodes and Dudley-Marling (1988) remind us that "students are our most important collaborators" (p. 273). We must remember to include students and invest in their perceptions.

*Patrick, "...they (people at Vanguard) listen differently so it's easier (to succeed)"*

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APPENDIX A

Definition of Learning Difficulties from the  
Ministère de L'Éducation du Québec

## APPENDIX A

DEFINITION OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES FROM THE  
MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC

**Definitions: Students with handicaps or learning or adjustment difficulties**

Although the specific needs or characteristics of students difficulties or handicaps call for individualized planning of the services to offer, the fact that all students with the same disability or difficulty share common characteristics has permitted to Ministère to define some major categories for the purposes of planning the general education services offered by the school boards. These categories are also used for financing school boards. The definition of Serious Learning Difficulties selected by the Ministère and used in this inquiry is as follows:

**Students with Difficulties****Students with Learning Difficulties**

This category includes students with learning difficulties that are apparently quite different. The students, however, all share the following characteristics:

- they do not exhibit permanent and significant mental, sensory or physical handicaps.
- they experience difficulties in learning at school or in preschool.

Students who require special educational services because of serious learning difficulties are identified as the following:

## **Definition**

### **Serious Learning Difficulties**

**A student is deemed to have serious learning difficulties:**

- when the summative evaluation of the language of instruction or mathematics program shows that he or she is two or more years behind in either of these subjects in terms of what is expected of him or her, given his or her abilities and the frame of reference constituted by the majority of students of the same age in the school boards (severe academic delay);
- or when the assessment carried out by qualified personnel primarily through long-term observation shows that he or she has specific learning difficulties manifested by a developmental delay (especially in the area of communication skills) that is severe enough to cause him or her to fall behind in school without the help of appropriate support measures.

### Interpretation\Comments

The student may be classified as having serious learning difficulties either because of a significant academic delay or because of specific learning difficulties.

### Significant academic delay

For the purpose of classifying a student as having serious learning difficulties, summative evaluation must show or he or she is two or more years behind in either the language of instruction or mathematics. The student's academic delay and the services to be provided to him or her must be taken into account.

Thus, a student who attended elementary school for seven years and whose summative evaluation has shown that he or she barely achieved Grade 5 objectives will be considered as having serious learning difficulties.

(Corresponding code: 02)

### Specific learning difficulties

For the purpose of classifying the student with specific learning difficulties, the qualified personnel include a remedial teacher, a psychologist, neurologist and a speech therapist. An analysis of the student's global situation (i.e., academic, psychological and mental histories as well as any of their relevant information) must be taken into account when diagnosing specific learning difficulties.

The term "specific difficulties" refers to a heterogeneous set of persistent difficulties. Specific difficulties are manifested as difficulties in one or more of the processes that are essential to the development, use or comprehension of language. The following manifestations are observable with respect to learning in both the language of instruction and mathematics:

- difficulty in the area of reading skills;
- difficulty in the area of writing skills;
- difficulty in the area of oral communication skills;
- difficulty in the areas on conceptualization or reasoning.

These difficulties may be considered impairments, which are often associated with various forms of neurological dysfunction that cause major attention deficits, certain disorders such as dyslexia, dysorthographia, severe language problems and central auditory disorders.

Both are diagnostic and the services to be provided to the student must be taken into account in classifying him or her as having specific learning difficulties.

(Corresponding Code: 02)



## APPENDIX B

### Social Networks

## APPENDIX B

### SOCIAL NETWORKS

The following information was collected from the students throughout the interview process:

- (a) Whom do you feel close to?
- (b) Whom do you care about?
- (c) Who supports you at home?
- (d) What does support mean to you?
- (e) Give me some examples of how someone can support you?
- (f) Who supports you at school?
- (g) Who supports you in your neighborhood?
- (h) Who supports you with school stuff?
- (i) Are there any relatives who support you, who live near or far?
- (j) Do you have friends that support you?

- the persons first name and initial of their last name,
- students were also be asked some demographic information about the people they named.

Questions asked included gender and age of the person (when appropriate), where they met, how long they have known them, would they consider the person a friend, if so how long they have been friends, where they currently interact, how often do they get together with the person outside of school, and how often do they telephone each other.

- the parents and teachers were asked similar questions about the people named in the students' network and asked to answer them as best as they can.

## APPENDIX C

### Social Support Scenarios

## APPENDIX C

## SOCIAL SUPPORT SCENARIOS

The following are the social support scenarios in the order that they were asked to the participants. At the end of this document one will find follow-up questions that were asked throughout as a way to probe and prompt the students. As this is a qualitative inquiry the conversations with the students went in many different directions, however, the following scenarios were used as a starting point. The additional questions in parenthesis were asked only to the students involved in the case study interviews.

1. Informational/Instrumental:

When someone in your class is having trouble, maybe in math or reading something in class? What do they do?

If the response involves another person they were asked: What do they expect of the person helping them? What would that person expect of them? (i.e., tell them the answer, explain..)

(Case study only: What would you do in the same situation?)

2. Companionship

When you want to "hang out" or do really fun things, what do you do?

If the response involves another person they were asked: Who would you do them with?

What would you expect from....

3. Emotional: *Happy*

If someone in your class won a contest on the radio, you know they could name the right song and they won concert tickets or a shopping spree at there favorite store. What do you think is the first thing they do?, And Then?

Do you think they'd want to share there news with anyone? Who?

What would they expect of that person? How would they want that person to react?

What if you had won the contest, what would you do?

(If student says they would never enter a contest, answer, What if every student in your school had there named entered automatically, and your name was picked..)

#### 4. Conflict

Everyone copes with fights differently. What are some of the things your classmates do, when they get into a fight?

Who do your friends fight with? (i.e., other friends, parents, siblings, teachers)

#### 5. Informational/Instrumental:

When your brother/sister needs help doing something around the house, such as making or fixing something, or finding something they lost, or moving something, what do they do?

(Case study only: Think of a time when you needed help doing something around the house, What did you do?)

If someone, what did you expect of that person?

What do you think that person expected of you?

#### 6. Companionship

When you want to be with someone who makes you feel happy, just because you are together. Who would that be?

#### 7. Conflict

When a classmate gets upset or angry, even if they don't show it to the other person, what do they do with the angry feeling?

(Case study only: When you get upset or angry, even if you don't show it to the other person, what do you do? )

8. Informational/Instrumental:

When there is something that (you or) your classmates don't know too much about or when they need more information about something at school, what do they do? Like a school project or if they don't know when something is due.

Do they ask someone? Who?

What do they expect of the person they asked for help from?

Do you think that person will expect something in return?

(Case Study only: What do you do when you don't understand something in school?)

9. Conflict

What if one of your classmates is angry, what would they do?

10. Informational/Instrumental:

What are some of the things your friends do when they're working on a homework assignment and it's really challenging and they get stuck. What do they do?

What do they expect of the person helping them?

What would that person expect of them? (i.e., tell them the answer, explain..)

(Case study only: What would you do in the same situation?)

10. Informational/Instrumental:

What's your hardest subject? What do you do when you need help?

11. Emotional:

If someone in your class did something that they feel really badly about, what do you think they would do? For example, if they did something they were not supposed to do and they felt bad about it, what would they do? (Case study only: If you did something that you feel really bad about? What would you do?)

Would you tell anyone? Who? If no one why? Who could you tell if you wanted to?

If you told someone what would you expect of them?

What do you think they would expect of you?

12. Informational/Instrumental:

When someone in your class needs help with their schoolwork (homework) What do they do?

What do they expect of the person helping them?

What would that person expect of them? (i.e., tell them the answer, explain..)

(Case study only: What would you do in the same situation?)

13. Emotional: *Sad*

I know this guy/girl who's your age who was getting ready to go on this amazing trip, they were so excited about. The day before they were supposed to leave they broke their leg and couldn't go. They were so sad.

What is the first thing they would do when they realized they couldn't go on the trip? And then?

Do you think they would tell anyone? Who?....

What would they expect of that person?

(If student answers there mum, I would ask, what if your mum wasn't home, go through the family members,...

What if that person was you? What would you do?

14. Informational/Instrumental:

When a person needs help with reading, What do they do?

If a person who and what is the expectation of both involved?

(Case study only: is reading hard for you? What would you do.....?)

14. Informational/Instrumental:

If a friend of yours needs help with projects, What do they do?

If a person who and what is the expectation of both involved?

(Case study only: Are projects hard for you? What would you do.....?)

15. Conflict

When your classmates get upset or angry at someone, what do they do?

(Case study only: What do you do when you get upset or angry?)

(Case study only: Can you think of the last time you were angry or upset? What did you do?)

16. Emotional:

How do you know when someone else understands you or knows you very well?

Who do you think understands you well?

17. Informational/Instrumental:

When someone you know needs help with spelling, What do they do?

If a person who and what is the expectation of both involved?

(Case study only: is spelling hard for you? What would you do.....?)

17. Informational/Instrumental:

When a classmate needs help with math assignments, What do they do?

If a person who and what is the expectation of both involved?

(Case study only: is math hard for you? What would you do.....?)

18. Emotional: *Mad*

Think of something that makes someone in your class really mad. Can you think of anything?

What if someone was kicking the back of your friends chair and wouldn't stop?

What if someone takes something that belongs to you?

What if you see someone being treated badly?

(the idea is to have the students come up with their own scenarios of what makes them mad, if nothing makes them mad try (a) or (b))

(a) What if everyday you look forward to lunch because you really want to buy this one special thing at the caf. and every day the staff tells you that it will be there the next day and



it never is. I know people who would be really mad about that. What do you think they'd do first?

(c) What if you were running to catch the bus and you were sure that the bus driver saw you, but just before you got to the door, the light changed and the bus drove away?

I know some kids who would tell someone and others who would not tell anyone. What would you do?

Everyone copes differently when they get mad. What are some of the things you do to make yourself feel better? Then probe, some people go to others, some keep it inside. What would you do?

If you go to someone who?

What do you expect of that person?

What do you think they expect out of you?

#### 19. Informational/Instrumental:

When there is something that your friends don't know too much about or when your friends need more information about something at home, what do they do?

Do they ask someone? Who?

What do they expect of the person they asked for help from?

Do you think that person will expect something in return?

(Case Study only: What do you do when you need don't understand something when you're at home?)

#### 20. Emotional:

Think of the last time you felt really good about yourself, what was happening?

How do you know when someone else does or says things that help make you feel good about yourself?

**Follow-up questions:**

- (a) How does that person.... (e.g. help you to feel better)
- (b) Why did you chose X to.....
- (c) Tell me about the last time you asked X for support, what was happening?
- (d) How did the person help during that particular situation?

If the participant does not answer the above questions using a particular person, the follow-up questions would be slightly different.

- (a) Tell me the last time you .....(felt., or accomplished X.....)
  - (b) How did you cope on your own.....(in X situation, with X feelings)
- or How did you get the information you needed?

APPENDIX D

Sample of a Transcript from a  
Focus Group Interview

## APPENDIX D

SAMPLE OF A TRANSCRIPT FROM A  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Middle of the transcript:

**Tara:**

Yeah, perfect, all wonderful definitions. OK, so what I'm gonna do is I'm going to ask you some questions and just, you can feel free to answer them or not answer them, it's up to you. So, when someone in your class is having trouble, maybe in math or in reading, um, just anything in school, what do they do? Anybody.

**Patrick:**

If someone's having trouble?

**Tara:**

Uh huh.

**Patrick:**

Well um, if there's someone who's doing good in your class, they'll get helped by someone. That's what I do if, if I'm doing good and I understand, I'll help someone who doesn't understand.

**Tara:**

Thanks, sounds good.

**Lindsay:**

If I don't understand something, I'll either go to my best friend and, like, who does understand most of it, or, like, I'll ask my teacher or...

**Tara:**

Who's your best friend?

**Lindsay:**

Nancy

**Patrick:**

\*\*\*\*

**Tara:**

Right. So your best friend and the teacher, those are good answers.

**Luke:**

I, I'm, I'm agreeing with Patrick.

**Tara:**

You're agreeing with Patrick? So you'd either, like, if you were good at it, you'd tell the person. What if it was you that was having trouble? What would you do?

**Patrick:**

I would go ask the teacher and tell them I don't understand this and, and, or I'll ask another, a person who does understand it.

APPENDIX E

Sample of a Transcript from a  
Case Study Interview

## APPENDIX E

SAMPLES OF TRANSCRIPTS FROM  
CASE STUDY INTERVIEW**Case Study Interview: Karen****June 15, 1998**

Middle of the interview.....

**Karen:** Lindsay understands me. Cause like when I'm mad she knows to leave me alone and I'll come to her when I'm ready. Like, someone like Nancy and Tanya, they're also good friends, but they don't know me as well.

**Tara:** How does Lindsay support you?

**Karen:** She like, comforts me and she'll know what to do basically.....Nancy, is a good problem solver

**Case Study Interview: Matthew****June 30, 1998**

**Tara:** When you are asked to do a project, but you don't really understand it, what do you do?

**Matthew:** I ask the teacher in class. Then she tells me to ask after class, cause usually I take a chance to see if she will tell me in class and if not then I have to go after class and ask her. They're like, 'ask me after the period' .

Later in the interview.....

**Tara:** Everyone copes differently when they get mad. What are some things you do when you're mad? Can you think of the last time you were mad?

**Matthew:** I just kicked things and punched walls and stuff and just kind of like got all my anger out and then just chilled.

**Tara:** Where were you?

**Matthew:** Outside.

**Tara:** What did you do next?

**Matthew:** I talked to one friend about it because I trusted this friend and my friend didn't tell her. Because he didn't like her either.

**Tara:** What did you expect from your friend?

**Matthew:** Well he did what he should have did. He just sat back and just listened.

**Tara:** Is that what you usually expect from people?

**Matthew:** To understand and to listen, because that's usually what I do when someone is mad.

APPENDIX F

Sample of Field Notes



## APPENDIX F

## SAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES

Peter's Class: MRE

April 22, 1998

Summary:

- kids talking about speech ideas
- discuss article: Natural Born Killers, George and Stephen, interesting contributions
- Peter asked all the students what they were going to do their speeches on (I only wrote a few down); Luke: drugs; Jill: date violence; Lindsay: Family relationships; Stephen: teenage violence
- Newspaper article titled: Natural Born Killers
- Why is it called "nbk"?
- George explains that the movie was about, "2 people on a killing spree and the media was feasting on it"
- George says "the title means natural urge"
- "They know they're killing someone, but don't know consequences" Stephen. Articles confirm kids don't what they're doing.
- violence in movies and sports
- kids think they can't get caught
- movies: you don't see the consequences (never meet families of victims)
  - :often don't get caught
- Patrick does a skit of Little Billy 6, getting his first gun and dad says "There you go Billy, now you can kick ass" he never said kill someone, never taught not to either.

APPENDIX G

A Sample from My Researcher's Journal

## APPENDIX G

A SAMPLE FROM MY RESEARCHER'S JOURNAL**Researcher's Journal****May 1998**

Today Michael shared with me how angry he was at his mum just recently. He explained that she is unreasonable and that he's almost 18, soon he can do whatever he pleases. He talked about wanting to go and live with his father. He called his dad to talk about the idea. He said his dad said he could, but it wasn't a very good time right now, as he and his girlfriend were fighting a lot.