NOTE TO USERS

Running Head: An Exploratory Study of Derogation in Quebec

An Exploratory Study of Derogation in Quebec: The Case of Three Students

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my loving father, the late Orlando Pazzia, a hard-working and spirited man who believed in my ambition and encouraged me to persevere on any task that meant something to me. Grazie papà.

I also dedicate this thesis to my daughter Paola, who shows me the wonders of perseverance every day of her special life.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the consequences of advancing three pre-schoolers into kindergarten in the province of Quebec, where the *derogation* exemption enables younger children to start school before they reach the age of admission of five years by September 30th. The rationale for this study came from an interest to discover the perspectives of the students, their teachers, and their parents on the topic of derogation. This study examines how these students, one in grade 4 and two in grade 6, feel about being the youngest in the class, and how teachers and parents perceive them as learners and socializers. The research design is based on an exploratory qualitative case study approach. The methods used to collect the data consist of interviews conducted with the three selected students, their homeroom teachers, and two parents; observations of the students in their school settings, and the analysis of documents such as field notes and journal entries. The interviews are analyzed within a socio-cultural interpretive framework in order to examine the way that derogation has affected the social and emotional lives of the three selected children. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is explored. This concept presents the idea that children develop their learning potential in a setting where they can learn with more capable peers and adults who provide guidance and support. When these younger children are advanced into a kindergarten class, they are placed in a setting with older peers and adult teachers. One of the issues addressed in this study is how the social milieu encourages derogated children to develop their cognitive approach to problem solving and learning. The themes that emerged from this study include the importance of parental support, peer acceptance, and self-esteem. The younger derogated students are more likely to experience success in their academic and social-emotional lives if they have good parental support, a satisfactory circle of friends, and a positive self-esteem. Parents and teachers require more information about the derogation process in the province of Quebec and the possible consequences of early entry on the social-emotional development of younger children. Suggestions are made regarding further studies on the topic of derogation and implications for derogation practice are outlined.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude qualitative explore les conséquences de l'entrée précoce à la maternelle de trois enfants d'âge pré-maternelle au Québec, où une dérogation de l'age d'admissibilité scolaire donne droit aux enfants plus jeunes de débuter l'école avant qu'ils aient atteint, au 30 septembre, l'âge d'admission normale de 5 ans. L'idée de cette étude provient d'un intérêt de comprendre les perspectives des enfants, des parents et des éducateurs sur la dérogation de l'age d'admissibilité scolaire. L'étude examine la façon dont ces enfants, un maintenant en 4^{e} année et les deux autres en 6^{e} année, se perçoivent, étant les plus jeunes de leurs classes, ainsi que la façon dont les parents et les éducateurs les aperçoivent au plan de leurs processus d'apprentissage et de socialisation. Le modèle de recherche est basé sur des études de cas descriptives. Les méthodes de collecte de données utilisées comprennent des entrevues auprès des étudiants sélectionnés, leurs instituteurs, un parent d'un des élèves, des observations des étudiants dans leur milieu scolaire ainsi que l'analyse de notes éthologiques et la tenue d'un journal. Les entrevues sont analysées dans un cadre socioculturel afin d'examiner la façon dont la dérogation de l'âge d'admissibilité a affecté les vies sociales et émotives des trois enfants. Dans ce contexte, la zone de développement proximale de Vygotsky est franchie. Cette notion introduit l'idée que les enfants développent leur potentiel d'apprentissage dans un milieu où ils peuvent apprendre en présence de pairs compétents et d'adultes fournissant support et orientation. Lorsque ces jeunes sont admis dans une classe de maternelle, ils se retrouvent dans un milieu avec des pairs plus âgés et des éducateurs adultes. Un aspect de l'étude envisage la façon dont le milieu social encourage les enfants préscolaires à développer leur apprentissage cognitif et la résolution de problèmes. Les notions émergeant de l'étude comprennent l'importance du support parental, l'acceptation provenant de pairs, et l'estime de soi. Les jeunes préscolaires sont plus aptes au succès dans leurs vies académique et socio-émotionnelle s'ils ont un bon support parental, un réseau d'amis satisfaisant et une estime de soi positive. Les parents et les éducateurs requièrent plus d'information concernant le processus de dérogation à l'age d'admissibilité scolaire, ainsi que des renseignements concernant l'avancement précoce et les conséquences potentielles sur le développement socio émotionnel des jeunes. Des suggestions sont avancées pour des études additionnelles sur l'entrée scolaire précoce et les impacts de la pratique de dérogation à l'age d'admissibilité scolaire au Québec.

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SITUATING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Overview

In this qualitative inquiry, I explore the phenomenon of accelerating children into classes in which their peer population is older by exploring the derogation experience of a selected group of Quebec children from my private practice. In this chapter, I introduce the process of derogation as it is applied in the province of Quebec at the time these children were accelerated and provide relevant background to this study. In the province of Quebec, "derogation" is the term used in reference to early school entrance. The following excerpts from my psychological reports are descriptions of Angela and Lenny, two children whom I observed prior to their starting kindergarten. Throughout this document, I use pseudonyms for all the individuals in the study.

> ...When Angela's mother was asked why she felt that her daughter should be admitted to kindergarten in the fall, she mentioned that Angela gets along well with the other children, is very observant and quick to learn, and looks forward to being in school ... upon meeting the examiner, Angela was initially shy, but warmed up soon after. She demonstrated interest and initiative in her general approach to tasks ... (Psychological Report, April 1997)

> ...Among the many activities that Lenny enjoys are outdoor sports such as hockey, soccer, baseball, and cycling. When at home Lenny likes to play with model cars and Sega games, and watching his favourite television programs and videos ...throughout the assessment Lenny moved along smoothly from one activity to another and, he was able to maintain his level of concentration. Lenny was well coordinated on all fine and gross-motor tasks ... (Psychological report, June 1996)

I met Angela and Lenny when their parents brought them to see me for a derogation assessment. They were not yet five years of age. As a psychologist, I was asked to evaluate their psychological development because their parents had requested

early admission to kindergarten for them. There is considerable and controversial literature on the acceleration of children in school especially with respect to pre-schoolers. There are longstanding controversies over the issue of appropriate age at school entrance (May & Welch, 1986; DeMeis & Stearns, 1992). In Quebec, the age of entrance to school is 6 years. In other countries, it can vary from 5 years to 7 years (UNESCO, 2002).

Context and Background to the Study

According to the Ministry of Education of Quebec (MEQ) legislation on school entrance, children can normally enter kindergarten if they are five years of age before September 30th of the calendar school year. All children whose date of birth falls within the twelve preceding months can be admitted to school. However, many children born after the deadline date for entry are ready and willing to start school. In response to many requests from parents of children who are younger than 5 years of age before September 30th to start school, the Quebec Ministry of Education found it necessary to create a number of exceptions to its policy for accelerated admission. One of these exceptions was the derogation for early school entry. The word "derogation" is translated from French into English as an "exception" or "dispensation" (Larousse Dictionary, 1994). Dispensation is defined as "an official permission to disregard a law or obligation without penalty". Dispensation can also be used in reference to "the writing and giving such a permission" (Gage Canadian Dictionary, 1997, p. 450).

According to the regulations outlined in the Law of Public Instruction: L.R.Q., c. I-13.3, children who demonstrate exceptional abilities are presently entitled to early admission into Quebec schools. Table I indicates the number of students who have been

derogated in the province of Quebec, between 1996 and 2001. Code H illustrates the number of cases of early entry and there appears to be a decrease in more recent years.

Table 1

Statistics on the Number of Students who were Derogated between 1996 and 2001

	Codes	09/96	09/97	09/98	09/99	09/00	09/01
A	Faible densité de population	3	7	17	1	3	8
B	Affection temporaire	46	28	17	11	21	13
C	Poursuite de la scolarité	128	101	76	84	78	52
D	Situation familiale	5	5	3	1	9	2
E	Moins de 12 mois de différence d'age entre deux enfants de la même famille	5	2	3	1	0	0
F	Déficiences graves	49	34	43	29	73	69
G	Aptitudes particulières	1194	1073	975	939	828	609
***H**	**Passage précoce au primaire**	**76**	**83**	**119**	**83**	**86**	**58**
I	Reprise	371	676	672	755	838	668
J	Entrée tardive	91	131	78	98	107	84
K	Extension de l'enseignement primaire	600	398	259	354	373	307

* H: Early entry to elementary school

Derogation is an exception or dispensation that is applied to children who are chronologically younger than their peers, yet exceptionally ready to start kindergarten. Children are considered to be 'ready' when they are able to demonstrate advanced cognitive ability, social-emotional maturity, perceptual-motor skills, and language. The criteria used for evaluating children for derogation are clearly outlined in the guide that was most recently revised in 1998 by the Order of Psychologists of Quebec (MEQ, Ordre

des Psychologues, 1998). The Order of Psychologists recommends that the criteria in this guide be used to obtain an overall impression of the children being evaluated.

The general admission policy in Quebec was initially implemented in 1965. However, it was not rigorously applied until 1968, when it was first introduced to the public school sector. The Ministry of Education (MEQ) was created in November 1964; one of the topics reviewed was age of children at the time of school entry. Government officials decided to establish a date of admission to school and established September 30th as the common date of entry. In addition, children were admitted into school only if they were 6 years of age before October 1st. Officials believed that moving back the deadline from December 31 to September 30 would reduce the number of admissions that were not regulated or approved, as illustrated in the following excerpt in French, followed by the English translation. The excerpt appears in the Hebdo-Education, 1965, as cited by Gagné (1986).

Excerpt 1:

> Ce recul de trois mois de la date limite, soit du 31 décembre au 30 septembre, réduit de moitié les admissions dites libres c'est à dire non régies par la loi de la fréquentation obligatoire qui touche les enfants ayant eu six ans avant le 30 juin. (Gagné, 1986, p. 62)

> Moving back the deadline date three months from December 31st to September 30th reduces the amount of irregular admissions to school by one half. This includes admissions that were not administered by the law of obligatory attendance of children who have reached 6 years of age by June 30. (Author's translation of previous excerpt from Gagné 1986, p. 62)

However, this decision had serious consequences on the admission procedures in school boards. Thus, it took three years to put this article, Article 241.1, into effect. During this time, the school boards continued to admit students who were not yet five years of age by

the deadline date of September 30th. It was only in May of 1968 that the MEQ was able to enforce this article. As a result of the new regulation, there were less cases of early school entrance of younger children, although the practice was still found in private schools. However in 1978 this policy was also adopted in the private school milieu (Douance Quebec, Ministry of Education of Quebec, 1986). Since that time, a child in the province of Quebec who does not meet the December 31 deadline for age requirement is not permitted to start kindergarten when the school year begins.

In 1987, the Ministry of Education of Quebec adopted regulations regarding early entrance for children who did not meet the age requirement by the 30th of September. The latest version of the "Loi sur l'instruction publique" (L. R. Q., c. I-13.3, a. 457.1; 1992, c. 23, a. 16) of the "Règlement sur l'admissibilité exceptionnelle a l'éducation préscolaire et a l'enseignement primaire" includes article 1.7 as follows.

Excerpt 2:

> Les cas dans lesquels une commission scolaire peut, conformément au paragraphe 1 de l`article 241.1 de la Loi sur l`instruction publique (L.R.Q., c. I-13.3), admettre un enfant qui n`a pas l`age d`admissibilité sont :
>
> 7. l`enfant est particulièrement apte a commencer l`éducation préscolaire ou la première année du primaire parce qu`il se démarque de façon évidente de la moyenne sur les plans intellectuel, social, affectif, et psychomoteur. (English translation in Appendix A; 1:7)

This exception suggests that children who are born after the deadline, but meet the criteria of exceptional ability in the areas of cognitive, social, and psychomotor skills are entitled to early school entrance. Article 241.1 states the following:

Excerpt 3:

> Pour des raisons humanitaires ou pour éviter un préjudice grave a un enfant qui n`a pas atteint l`age d`admissibilité, la commission scolaire peut, sur demande motive de ses parents, dans les cas détermines par règlement du ministre :
>
> 1. admettre l`enfant a l`éducation préscolaire pour l`année scolaire au cours de laquelle il atteint l`age de 5 ans, ou l`admettre à l`enseignement primaire pour l`année scolaire au cours de laquelle il atteint l`age de 6 ans. (English Translation, Appendix A)

This excerpt from the law suggests that the request for derogation must indicate how the progress of a child would be hindered if early entrance were not granted.

The official document issued by the Order of Psychologists (Order of Psychologists, 1998) asserts that the progress of children can be delayed if they are not advanced into kindergarten.

Excerpt 4:

> "Préjudices causés aux enfants particulièrement aptes par un refus d'une entrée précoce ou toute autre forme d'accélération. Certains théoriciens affirment que ces enfants risquent de subir les préjudices suivants: 1) frustration et ennui.... 2) démotivation ... 3) baisse de l'effort.... 4) sous-performance" (OPQ document p. 12)
>
> Children who are particularly competent and refused early admission or another form of acceleration may experience prejudice. Theorists believe that these children risk the following experiences: 1) frustration and boredom .... 2) lack of motivation .... 3) reduced effort .... 4) lack of performance. (Author's translation of excerpt from OPQ document, p. 12)

Children who demonstrate the ability to succeed but are not advanced into kindergarten can experience frustration and boredom, lack of motivation, lack of effort, poor academic performance, and poor social skills. My interest is focused on children who have succeeded in being advanced into kindergarten in spite of their younger age. Given the Quebec legislative context for early entrance to school my research questions are

threefold: If the existing literature claims that children are perceived to be hindered in their progress when they are not advanced into school, then what can be said about and what can we learn from those who have actually succeeded in starting kindergarten at an earlier age? Does their performance in school suggest that they have progressed to their optimal academic level because they were advanced into kindergarten? How well are these younger students in the classroom socializing with their peers?

Derogation Assessment and the Quebec Context

Generally, children who are granted early entrance (derogation) to kindergarten in the province of Quebec should demonstrate exceptional skill in a variety of areas. These include language development, fine and gross motor skills, and facility interacting with peers and adults. According to the preconditions of derogation, it is of primary importance that the children demonstrate cognitive ability that is higher than that of their same age peers. This precondition is required because the purpose of derogation is to 'accelerate' the entrance of 'bright' children into a regular class where peers are chronologically older.

The criteria for derogation assessment are described in the official guidebook on the derogation policy from the Ministry of Education of Quebec that was issued by the Quebec Order of Psychologists in 1998. Children's intellectual level is usually evaluated according to one of the following standardized intelligence tests: the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Revised Edition (WPPSI-R) or the Stanford Binet, 4th Edition. Generally, the Wechsler Scale is the preferred test for this task; it is the test that I used in derogation assessments. The Stanford-Binet is not as widely available, but frequently used in cases where a second opinion is required. The WPPSI-R cannot be re-

administered within two years. When there is a need for re-testing, the Stanford-Binet can be used as an alternate scale. In order to qualify for derogation, children are required to demonstrate an intelligence level that is considered to be at least high average. In retrospect, I would have used use other assessment tools than the ones I used in my practice. I return to this assessment issue in chapter five.

In the development and standardization section of the WPPSI-R manual, there is a section that indicates a way to describe the child's performance quantitatively and qualitatively (Wechsler, 1989). The quantitative classification system has been defined statistically, with specific IQ ranges and their corresponding qualitative diagnostic categories. Table 1 presents specific IQ ranges and their corresponding qualitative diagnostic categories.

Table 2

Intelligence Scores and Corresponding Categories (WPPSI-R Manual, p. 125)

IQ Range (Quantitative)	Classification (Qualitative)
130 and above	Very superior
120-129	Superior
110-119	High Average
90-109	Average
80-89	Low Average
70-79	Borderline
69 and below	Intellectually Deficient

For example, an IQ level that falls within 110 and 119 defines high average intelligence. Accordingly, the derogation guide has specified a minimum requirement of 113 in full scale IQ in order for a child born in October to qualify for derogation. If a child is born in

November the minimum IQ is raised to 115, and further raised to 118 if a child is born in December of the qualifying school year (Guide d'évaluation, p. 23). It is questionable whether normative testing can or does provide an appropriate and authentic portrait of individual children, including their skills and interests, strengths and weaknesses, and their personalities. These types of testing sessions are limited in their explanatory power in understanding what children are about and can do. More naturalistic methods offer much potential for evaluation of children's capabilities and potential. This shift in assessment approaches is especially necessary in view of the present climate of diversity and globalization. In her book entitled *Learning Denied* (1991), Taylor gives a detailed account of one family's difficulties in dealing with their child's learning problems and the school board's endless bureaucratic approach to evaluate and label him.

Excerpt 5:

> 'Learning Denied' … is a cautionary tale of educational decision making gone wrong – a tale of reliance on a legalistic decision- making process that allows participants to forget that there is a real child involved; a tale of prevailing assessment paradigm that reduces learning to the scores on standardized tests and the cumulative interpretive myth of "experts" who have rarely worked with, or ever tried to teach, the child; where the focus is on what a child is unable to do rather than on what the child is capable of doing. (Learning Denied, 1991, Forward, p. xi).

In conventional approaches to assessing children, tests like the Wechsler are often the norm in clinical practice and approaches. Since I used this test in my private practice, I describe its features. The Wechsler is made up of two sections, the performance scale that evaluates non-verbal skills and the verbal scale that evaluates verbal abilities. Each scale is composed of six sub-tests (See Appendix B for examples of questions from verbal and performance scales of WPPSI-R). The composite score or general intelligence

quotient is based on a combination of the scores on each scale. In the case of derogation assessment, it is essential that a child display above average abilities in the verbal areas. (see example of a psychological report for derogation in Appendix C).

The socio-affective development of children at the pre-school level is defined as their ability to participate in groups, to solve interpersonal conflicts, and interact with peers, adults, and new individuals (MEQ, Ordre des psychologues, 1998). Socio-affective development also refers to children's respect for rules in different settings such as sports activities, day care centres, and related social experiences. Excerpt 1 in French is from the derogation guidebook and refers to the evaluation of socio-affective maturity in children (Ordre des Psychologues, 1998, p. 25). An English translation is found in Appendix D.

Excerpt 6:

Evaluation de la maturité socio-affective

Une revue de la littérature scientifique sur le sujet montre qu'en regard de l'entrée précoce à l'école, le développement socio-affectif de l'enfant est l'aspect le plus controverse. Cet aspect doit donc être évalue avec beaucoup de rigueur et avoir au moins de poids dans la recommandation de dérogation que les résultats de l'évaluation intellectuelle.

Eléments a évaluer :

On évaluera particulièrement les habilites sociales suivantes :

- facilité d'intégration dans un groupe de pairs (capacité de se faire des amis, de prendre sa place, de partager l'attention des adultes, de coopérer et de négocier, etc.) ;
- facilité à entrer en relations interpersonnelles (avec les pairs, les adultes, les personnes nouvelles, capacité de résoudre des conflits interpersonnels, etc.)

- respect des convenances et des règles de vie en groupe lors des différentes expériences de socialisation (garderie, activités sociales, sportives, musicales, etc.) ;

et sur le plan affectif, les éléments suivants:

- niveau d'autonomie affective (assurance et confiance en soi, sécurité, réaction a la séparation d'avec les parents, réaction a la nouveauté, etc.)
- tolérance a la frustration;
- attitudes face aux taches (attention, concentration, intérêt, persévérance, réaction devant la difficulté et devant l'échec, etc.).

The psychologist is asked to evaluate social-emotional or affective development by observing the children and by using a psychometric tool such as the Vineland Maturity Scale (Doll, 1962). The test is obviously dated, but the lists are still appropriate if modified with discretion. (See Appendix E for sample of items from the Vineland Maturity Scale). At the time of derogation assessment, I thought that some type of standardized measure was required because this was outlined in the guidelines for testing. However, I saw that the checklist from the Vineland Test was incomplete, lacking depth and context. The checklist required some modification and I used it as a guide, although now I would use alternative assessment approaches such as asking children questions directly. These questions would cover subjects similar to those of the Vineland Scale, but would allow for discussion from the children and parents.

The psychomotor development of children is evaluated by examining their use of what Vygotsky calls 'cultural tools" as well as their familiarity with directionality (Vygotsky, 1978). These tools include crayons and scissors, reproduction of geometric shapes, manipulation of blocks, puzzle pieces, and beads. In these observations, the children's fine-motor skills are evaluated because these skills are normally deemed

necessary for tasks such as writing, drawing, and colouring in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, the assumption here is that children's manipulation of objects indicates their level of dexterity, and their knowledge of directionality provides a sense of their coordination. The psychometric tools that are recommended for the evaluation of psychomotor development by the Order of Psychologists are the Beery Buktenica Test, the Rutgers Test, and the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test. Indeed the continued use of these tests is questionable because they are very traditional, outdated and culturally biased, and not context specific. Nor do they tap an individual child's learning, perspective, or "speaking personality" (Maguire & Graves, 2001).

Although not indicated in the guide for evaluation, I chose to include language development as another criterion in my assessment of pre-schoolers for the purpose of derogation. At that time, I did not have an appreciation of children's language development. However, I thought that including this measure in my evaluation would give me further insight into their abilities to interact and learn. In retrospect, I realize from a Vygotskian perspective, how important it is to examine the language development of these children because language is one of the 'tools' that children use to interact with others around them and to learn from these interactions. Vygotsky believed that language learning occurs through social interaction. Vygotsky considered language to be a central aspect of cognitive development and emphasized the relationship between language and thought. He saw language as a primary mediator of knowledge as well as a tool for communicating with others.

The Peabody Vocabulary Test-Revised (Dunn, 1981) purports to evaluate the children's receptive language. It does not assess expressive language, however it did

provide me with some information about the children's understanding of language, such as their receptive vocabulary. The use of the Peabody test did not offer a comprehensive evaluation of children's language usage, so I engaged in active conversations with the children. I looked at their ability to carry on a conversation, their use of vocabulary and concepts, sentence structure, and verbal expression.

A number of students were from families in which English was not the first language spoken in the home. A common feature of these families was that the parents spoke to the children in their first language (e.g. Italian or Polish) until one or two years of age. As the children started to interact with others more frequently (e.g. siblings or friends), a second language was introduced. Thus, it seemed important to me that these children demonstrated the ability to comprehend the English language in order to follow instructions and to interact with their peers and adults in school. According to Lindfors (1987), children entering kindergarten demonstrate language development that is unique to their personal situations and experiences and contexts.

Renowned sociolinguist Halliday who studied his own son's language development had an interest in language and its social-cultural and educational context. In his classic work *Learning How to Mean* (1975), Halliday embraced a functional view of language, which related the "context of situation" to the "context of culture" and the social system. According to Halliday, a child learns behaviour and language in a meaningful way that becomes functional. This learning does not occur in isolation but within a social context of meaning potential. While Vygotsky emphasized "learning in the potential", Halliday highlighted "meaning potential" in this semiotic theory of language. Language is a progressive mastery of meaning potential.

Excerpt 7:

> A child is learning how to mean; but meaning takes place in an environment, not in solitude. What is the nature of the environment? On the one hand, it may be thought of as 'what is going on at the time': the situation in which the language is actualized and comes to life. On the other hand, it may be conceived as the social system, with the child himself in the middle of it. (Halliday, 1975, p. 65)

As a child learns language, he actively creates meaning for himself that goes beyond the events that he experiences and the people whom he meets. In the process of learning language, a child learns about or is socialized into the cultural norms of his community. Halliday adopts a functional view of language. This view relates the meaning of text that is spoken or written to the meanings that are evident in the environment or culture or that children co-construct.

Excerpt 8:

> In terms of the developmental functions ... the new words function mainly as a means of categorizing observed phenomena, and provide the earliest instance of the use of language as a means of learning." (Halliday, 1975, p. 43)
>
> The child is constructing a heuristic hypothesis about the environment, in the form of an experiential semantic system whose meanings are realized through words and structures, and which is used in context of observation and recall and before long also a prediction. (Halliday, 1975, p. 43)

The child learns through a process of discovery and investigation as this process relates to his personal experiences and context of situation.

> The learning of language and the learning of culture are obviously two different things. At the same time, they are closely interdependent. This is true not only in the sense that a child constructs a reality for himself largely through language, but also in the more fundamental sense that language is itself a part of this reality. The linguistic system is a part of the social system. Neither can be learnt without the other. (Halliday, 1975, p. 120)

Such an approach to language learning resembles Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which

assumes that children learn through social interaction with more capable peers or adults.

Relevant Background to the Study

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory

Vygotsky's fundamental hypothesis was that higher mental functions are socially formed and culturally transmitted (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky viewed two levels of mental functioning as essential to this process; lower-level functions which primarily depend on maturation and higher-level functions that are cognitive processes acquired through teaching and learning. A child's actual developmental level is defined by the functions that have already developed or can mature. However, Vygotsky believed that the discovery of actual learning capabilities should not be limited to developmental levels. These actual learning capabilities are discovered in the *Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD*, which has become known as the "Zoped" in the socio-cultural theory literature. The zone of proximal development refers to those functions that have not yet matured but will mature as the child interacts with more capable others in his social and cultural environment. Vygotsky defines the Zoped 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)*

From a Vygotskian perspective higher mental functions such as voluntary memory, attention, and rational thought are based on the mediation of behaviour by using sign systems, and especially speech. These signs function as psychological tools that are used to control behaviour in the same way that ordinary tools control nature. Vygotsky argued that human beings control these signs and this control leads to the development of

higher mental functions. The most important aspect of the sign or symbol system is language because it provides a means for expressing ideas and asking questions, for creating categories and concepts for thinking, and making links between the past and the future. Vygotsky argues that the concept of private speech, which has been loosely interpreted as talking to oneself, is significant in guiding cognitive development and in the development of higher mental functions. In time, these verbalizations are internalized as silent inner speech.

Excerpt 9:

> In our conception, egocentric speech is a phenomenon of of the transition from interpsychic to intrapsychic functioning, i.e., from the social, collective activity of the child to his more individualized activity – a pattern of development common to all the higher psychological functions. Speech for oneself originates through differentiation from speech for others.... Our experimental results indicate that the function of egocentic speech is similar to that of inner speech. (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 133)

Language also plays another important role in cognitive development because it provides opportunities for conversations and offers semiotic tools and resources for children to interact with more capable members such as adults and more able peers. In turn, these people act as the guides and teachers, by providing the information and support that is necessary for a child to grow intellectually. When an adult listens to a child, she encourages the appropriate operations such as classification or conservation. Significant interlocutors such as family members, teachers, and peers mediate such a discovery.

Excerpt 10:

> The greatest change in children's capacity to use language as a problem-solving tool takes place somewhat later in their development, when socialized speech is

> *turned inward.* Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves; language thus takes on an *interpersonal function* in addition to its *interpersonal use.* (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 27)

Some psychologists (e.g. Bruner, 1976) refer to this type of adult assistance as 'scaffolding'. This term suggests that children use the help as a support while they build a firm understanding that will allow them to solve the problems on their own (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Most of this type of support is communicated and mediated through language used between children and the mediators. Scaffolding is a specific technique that is used to focus on what experts provide for novices. To illustrate, Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) describe the role of the tutor in scaffolding a child's performance, and it includes 1) recruiting the child's interest in the task, 2) reducing the number of steps by simplifying the task, and 3) maintaining focus on the goal by motivating the child and providing direction.

As a metaphor, scaffolding is too mechanical (Valsiner & van der Veer, 1992). It is a term often used in building construction; and it refers to holding up of a passive structure until the external efforts to construct it are completed. In this metaphorical definition of scaffolding is the building being compared to the passive child? In fact, a child is not a passive observer but an active participant who interacts with adults and significant others. In the example of tutoring, the notion of scaffolding includes a child's progress and recognizes that a tutor's approach will depend on the performance of the child. This suggests that there exists an active communication between the expert (tutor) and novice (child) but that the process is linear rather than recursive.

Another related concept that is used in Vygotskian theory is *mediation.* An activity that leads to a higher mental process is a socially mediated activity. The source of

mediation is either in a material tool, in a system of symbols, or in the behaviours of another individual, or significant interlocutors. Mediation is the transformation of biologically determined processes into higher mediated and self-regulated psychological functions. Vygotsky believed that this transformation of cognitive processes begins when children start to use language for the purpose of guiding, planning, and self-regulating their own activities. This use of language and self-regulation leads to private speech and consequently results in *"... the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence ..." (Vygotsky, 1978; pg. 24)*

Wells (1986), a social-constructivist researcher, argued that there is a common sequence of development in every language system despite the differing experiences and backgrounds of children. He drew on Halliday's work on children's functional development of language. He described three types of linguistic systems in every language; a language system concerned with functions such as making requests and asking questions, a language system concerned with meanings such as the description of events, and a language system concerned with form or grammatical structures. By the age of five years, children should be able to use their linguistic resources for major functions. Halliday (1975) identified seven major functions in children's language development. I list them and provide an example for every function: 1) the instrumental function to satisfy the child's material needs, e.g., "I want that ball", 2) the regulatory function to control the behaviour of others, e.g., "Let's play dodge ball", 3) the interactional function to interact with those around him, e.g., "Mommy, I'm here". 4) the personal function to express awareness of self, e.g., "I like to play dodge ball" 5) the heuristic function to

name and categorize objects in the physical world, e.g., "Lassie is bigger than your hamster", 6) the imaginative function to pretend and create a world of his own, e.g., "I'll be the lion and you be the bear", and 7) the informative function to communicate information to one who does not already possess it, e.g., "Do you know what Daddy told me today?"

Halliday's functional view of language assumes that there are some common general features among five-year old children; the characteristics that kindergarten teachers normally tend to expect in 5 year-old children. Kindergarten-age children should have ample vocabulary that allows them to interpret and create sentences of varying lengths and styles, and possess phonological systems that approximate that of adults. They should have the ability to use language in different ways, as in the recounting of personal experiences that occur outside of the immediate context of the classroom. An example of the expected vocabulary of kindergarten children is to tell about a personal incident that occurred over the weekend, such as opening presents at a birthday party or going for a walk to the park, as illustrated in this excerpt from an interview with Judy when she was four years and six months old. In this passage one assumes that Jenny understood the meaning of the word "weekend".

> *Olga: Jenny, what did you do on the weekend?*
> *Jenny: I went to the park with my grandpa, and then we went to grandma's house and she made lunch for me and my baby sister. (Interview taken from initial psychological assessment with Jenny, April 1996)*

During the derogation assessment, I frequently had such conversations with the children. These conversations provided me with more authentic examples of their language development. However, in order to comply with the testing requirements of the

derogation guide from the Order of Psychologists (MEQ, Ordre des Psychologues, 1998), at that time I felt it important to select a test that provided some standardized scores. I selected the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test because it was a familiar and widely used test by many clinicians and school boards and gave an age equivalent and percentile rank for each result. In retrospect however, the Peabody did not look at children's actual use of language in authentic meaningful contexts and did not even require that the children speak when they responded. If they chose, they could simply point to the selected items. The test claimed to provide a measure of children's receptive vocabulary in the form of a standardized score. However, this standardized test did not look at other aspects of language development such as expressive language, vocabulary usage, conversational skills, and speech fluency. For this reason, I found it important to not only use the children's normative results and pay attention to their actual language use during the assessment. The following excerpt shows an example of questions from the Peabody Test and the psychological assessment.

Excerpt 11

> I show Sandy the page with 4 pictures on it. There is a doll, a fork, a table, and a car on this page. I ask Sandy "Sandy, can you point to the doll on this page?" She smiles brightly and points her finger toward the doll in Box. A. I write in the letter A on the test protocol for this question. I go back to the figure and say to Sandy "Sandy, can you tell me the name of the letter that goes with the picture you chose?" Sandy answers "A". That's great Sandy! (Example of questions from the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Revised, Sandy, a derogated child, 1999)

Sandy is responding to the word 'doll' by pointing to her choice of response. The Peabody Test purports to be evaluating her receptive vocabulary. However, there is no indication of what Sandy's use of language is actually like in this exercise. I do learn that she is able to identify the letter 'a'.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about children's abilities from their assumed normative behaviour during an isolated testing session. In order to be an ecologically valid assessment of the children's abilities, decisions must consider observations of children in a variety of situations such as the classroom setting and recess time in the school yard, and home contexts and interviews with the family. An example of how this can be accomplished is Taylor's (1991) work. Taylor's book documents how a family struggles to obtain the proper education for their child, Patrick, who has a reading disability. Taylor recounts the lengthy bureaucratic procedures that confronted the parents and the frustrations that they encountered along the way. Ultimately, these parents decided to have their son home schooled because the school system was not willing to acknowledge their requests or adjust the methods of instruction to accommodate Patrick's needs. Patrick was able to read at home, but the standardized tests did not reflect this ability at school. Therefore, the school board officials stood by their test results and proceeded to label and code him because he was not able to learn in 'conventional' ways.

Patrick had some difficulties with his reading. Taylor describes the ordeal that his parents went through in their efforts to oppose the school system's rigid testing and coding procedures. The goal of the parents was to provide the best possible education for their son. The parents attended countless meetings with teachers and school board officials yet they felt that Patrick's needs were not being addressed. Priority was given to the school board procedures. Taylor presents the frustrations of the parents and child in this excerpt:

Excerpt 12:

> The director of special education … recommended "an individual measure of achievement", which he stated "would provide a comparative score with other students" and a formal classroom observation. The meeting was coming to a close; no one had asked about Patrick's reading and writing outside of school. (Excerpt from *Learning Denied;* Taylor, 1991, p. 47)
>
> We are talking about making a decision about Patrick's situation, and these points to the questions are very important that they have to be addressed by everyone in this room because we just can't base this on an individual achievement test or a WISC-R, especially when we know other information, and what we've been through and Patrick's been through. (Excerpt from *Learning Denied;* Taylor, 1991, p. 69)
>
> The director spoke with finality … I am not willing to change the curriculum dramatically on the face of the evidence that we have. "Even though you know that this child is writing much more complex texts than he is reading in the basal reader? …I'm not sure that I know that, the director replied. The discussion continued. The questions had been ignored. The reports were never discussed … All that counted was the director's interpretation of the test results. (Excerpt from *Learning Denied;* Taylor, 1991, p. 72)

These parents were expressing their frustrations about not being heard by school officials. The school board's approach in dealing with Patrick and his learning problem was rigid; officials were not willing to accept the parents' input or eagerness to help their child. Patrick did not fall within a category as clearly as other children did. Much time was wasted and Patrick's parents became increasingly more frustrated and displeased with the school and their child's lack of progress. Their only option was to home school their child. Taylor provides an account of this family's journey through the school's bureaucratic policies and restrictions in teaching a child with special needs. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the literature on the assessment of children's learning needs is controversial. In the next section, I review the relevant existing literature on screening and effects of "age at time of school entrance."

Relevant Background Literature to the Study

Age at time of school entrance

The appropriate age at school entrance is a topic that has been investigated for several decades. As early as 1934, Bigelow (1934) expressed an interest in examining the performance of students who were younger than their peers. Throughout the years, research findings have not been conclusive. Although developmental psychologists have tried to determine an 'absolute age' at which academic, social, and emotional success is ensured, international research shows that age for school admission can vary between four and seven years of age (Austin & Postlethwaite, 1974).

Recent figures provided by UNESCO (2000) indicate that the age of children entering grade one varies between 5 and 7 years across the continents. Regardless of the age and country, it is often reported that younger members of the group are at a disadvantage compared to older members. No matter what age is in question, there is always an age span of at least one year in each grade with one child being the youngest in every group. Thus, the 'young-ness' problem is a relative one because the raising of entrance age will only be a temporary solution. If the Quebec cut-off date were September 1st, the children born at the end of summer are at a disadvantage. If a school district responds by adopting a cut-off date of July 1st, then children born in May and June might be at risk, thus producing a 'new youngest' group (Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Across the United States and Canada, cut-off dates vary by at least six months (Shepard & Smith, 1985). These age differences at school entrance may be the result of using contrasting definitions of 'readiness' for entrance to kindergarten (Wood, Powell, & Knight, 1984) and differing expectations of appropriate kindergarten activities.

Developmental readiness is a concept based on the notion that children will not be successful in learning until they have reached a requisite stage of development (May & Welch, 1986; DiPasquale, Moule & Flewelling, 1980). This developmental point of view considers behaviour as a function of growth that is structured, orderly, predictable, and measurable (Gesell Institute, 1980). According to research in developmental psychology, the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the development of children are interdependent, and children will perform at their best if they are started and promoted in school on the basis of developmental age (Ilg, Ames, Haines, & Gillespie, 1978; May & Welch, 1986). In particular, Ilg et al (1978) argue that a five-year-old child who is functioning at a four-year-old level will not be ready for kindergarten. Thus, the use of chronological age as the only eligibility criterion for school entry may result in some children starting school who are not cognitively or emotionally ready (Kinhard & Reinherz, 1986). Studies have demonstrated that children entering school before they are developmentally ready have an increased chance of experiencing difficulties that can last throughout their academic careers (Uphoff & Gilmore, 1986).

Entrance to school is generally based upon the chronological age of children, and not the developmental age at which they are functioning at that time. *Chronological* refers to something arranged in the order in which the events happened (Gage, 1997, p. 277). *Developmental* is a term used in reference to the process of growth, or successive stages of growth and change (Gage, 1997, p.427). Thus, chronological age is the actual age of the child, such as 4 years, 9 months and it is measured from the date of birth of the child. Developmental age is the age at which this child is actually functioning, and is usually determined by means of a standardized test. Research has

suggested developmental screening before children start kindergarten. Freberg (1991) found chronological and developmental ages to be good indicators of success in kindergarten; however, the largest variability in performance was among the younger children. With these findings, Freberg suggested that the younger children be screened to determine whether or not they are developmentally ready to start school, but the chronologically older children need not be screened. Older children meet the age requirement for school entrance, so their qualification is not questioned and screening is not required. However, if older children are not tested before starting school, we cannot assume that they all have reached the same stage of development and will be successful because of their age. This would suggest that all children develop at the same pace but this is highly unlikely. There is an immeasurable amount of variability in children's development because of their differing social, physical, and cultural environments and experiences.

Developmental theory from the socio-cultural perspective presents a number of challenges to the notions of readiness and development. Alternatively, socio-cultural theory depicts a natural interplay between internal and external factors for every child. The following excerpt from Vygotsky's *Mind in Society* disputes stage theory:

Excerpt 13:

> Our concept of development implies a rejection of the frequently held view that cognitive development results from the gradual accumulation of separate changes. We believe that child development is a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes which overcome impediments that the child encounters. (Vygotsky, 1978; pg. 73)

There are different views in developmental theory and different views about screening children of pre-school age.

Screening before school entrance

The literature on early entrance includes many studies in which screening procedures were used to identify early entrants who were intellectually and academically advanced, and experienced academic success in later years. Although some of the following references are dated, they do provide a comprehensive look at progress in acceleration studies over the years and up to the present time. Recently, there appears to be a lack of work in the area of early school entrance. Thus, this inquiry into the topic of derogation and early school admission is timely.

A founding study done by King in 1955 discovered that younger grade six students who were not screened before entrance had lower achievement scores than their same-grade peers. Carter (1956) conducted another study of children who started school at a younger age and obtained similar results. Carter used the Metropolitan Achievement Test to measure academic achievement and performance in the areas of spelling, reading, and arithmetic with sixth graders who had not been screened for early entrance. Miller (1957) examined the performance of students who entered school early, but had been screened according to an admission policy. Young entrants were accepted into school on a six-week trial basis, after the school psychologist saw them to determine that they possessed the mental, physical, and social maturity needed for success in school. Among the preselected students, Miller found that the majority of these students were performing within the average range, and 40% were in the top quarter.

Hall's (1963) study of younger school entrants showed how younger students had more difficulty than their older peers in certain subject areas, with greater differences found in reading

and spelling. In their study on the effects of younger age at school entrance, Davis, Trimble, and Vincent (1980), looked at students from grade 4 and 8 who had not been screened before starting school. They administered the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills as a follow-up measure. Results supported previous work where the younger students performed lower than their older same-grade peers. The assessment procedures are questionable in these studies. Results from these studies show that the older students were more successful on the follow-up achievement tests. It appears that decisions were based on the results from one standardized test, and such group-administered tests cannot accurately describe children's individual performance. A thorough appraisal of children's general performance would necessitate looking at their progress in a variety of contexts and in a more personable manner. Braymen and Piersel (1987) examined the advantages and disadvantages of children beginning kindergarten at an earlier age, and reviewed the screening procedures used to identify the children more apt to succeed. Results from their review suggested that screening for early entrance increases chances for success. Additional research is recommended in order to determine which variables are the best predictors of future success in school.

Researchers often make reference to Ahr's (1967) study, in which a programme for early entrants is described and long-term effects on academic performance are discussed. Children who had not met the chronological age criteria for automatic entrance to kindergarten were included in this programme. However, these children born after the cut-off date were only considered for early entry if they displayed the social and emotional maturity of another kindergarten student, had an intelligence quotient that was above average according to the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, and passed a physical examination. Therefore, the mental age of early entrants would be well above their actual chronological age, and social and emotional

maturity was expected to be at least equal to that of young kindergartners. This study included results on these early entrants between the period of kindergarten and grades six. The results indicated that throughout their elementary school experience, the students who were screened for early entrance were able to maintain excellent grades and surpass the regular entrants in their class. The results of this study indicate that the screenings of early entrants helped to identify children who were ready to start school and were most likely to succeed in later grades.

Proctor, Black, and Feldhusen (1986) found that early entrance to kindergarten is a favourable practice that has no negative impact when proper screening procedures are used to select the children. Proctor, Black, and Feldhusen (1988) also discussed several studies in which older children performed better than their younger classmates. They concluded that these results could not be generalized to the early entrance of intellectually advanced children. They believed that early admission supported the philosophy of providing an appropriate education for children's individual needs. Early achievement may have prevented underachievement of children who were ready for challenging experiences. They also believed that intellectually advanced children were also advanced in social and emotional development.

Alexander and Skinner (1980) investigated the subsequent academic and social development of children who had been advanced into kindergarten. They referred to a policy that was implemented in Delaware Ohio years before, in which children, whose birthday was between September 30 and January 1, would qualify for entrance into kindergarten that same calendar year. In order to qualify for early entrance, these children had to demonstrate advanced mental maturity and social skills appropriate for a kindergarten child. Mental maturity was defined as a mental age of 5 years as determined

by a standardized test. No efforts were made to define or describe the social skills or the socialization patterns that were expected of the kindergarten children. In order to qualify for early entrance, each child needed an individual assessment conducted by a qualified psychologist.

The follow-up investigation included eleven students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at the time of the study, selected from the initial group of students that had entered kindergarten early. Data were collected on these eleven students, including group test scores, grade point average, and comments made by school counsellors, as well as general academic achievement. In addition, two questionnaires were prepared, one for the parents and one for the students. Parents and students were asked a variety of questions related to the social and academic implications of early entrance to school. The results indicated that the advanced students' academic performance was maintained at a high level throughout the years of schooling. The advantages of being advanced into kindergarten were avoiding boredom in academic work, entering the work force earlier, and associating with other advanced students. The disadvantages of early entrance were that of being the youngest in the class and not qualifying for certain extra-curricular activities such as swimming or playing soccer with their classmates because of different age categories. Parents viewed the advantages as also avoiding boredom in schoolwork, developing better work habits in order to maintain good grades and keeping up with the working pace of their peers. Negative remarks by the parents were made in reference to the earlier grades because the students' level of immaturity was less evident as they grew older and progressed through the grades. The difference between this study and others is the inclusion of students' and parents' comments and observations. Questionnaires were

distributed to students and parents with questions including the social implications of early school entrance and how this affected the students selected for the study. Interviews were also conducted, and participants were given an opportunity to discuss their reactions and concerns.

Effects of early entrance on academic performance and social skills

In this section, I review the relevant literature on the effects of early entrance on academic performance and social skills. Many studies indicate that a relationship exists between age at school entrance and later school progress. In these studies, younger children are more likely to experience later academic difficulty (Bigelow, 1934; Dickinson & Larson, 1963; Hall, 1963; Miller & Norris, 1967; DiPasquale, Moule & Flewelling, 1980 and Breznitz & Teltsch, 1989), repeat a grade (Langer, Kalk, & Searls, 1984), or be referred for special services (DiPasquale, Moule & Flewelling, 1980). Additional studies report no academic discrepancies among younger students (Gredler, 1980; Dietz & Wilson, 1985; May & Welch, 1986), or find age to be an independent predictor of school success (Gredler, 1980; Shepard & Smith, 1986).

Dietz and Wilson's (1985) study examined whether or not there were differences in the later performance of early entrants that could be attributed to chronological age and gender. Results showed no significant differences between age groups at the second and fourth grade levels and no differences between genders. This study suggested that there was no effect on academic achievement that could be attributed to the birth date of students. The authors recommended that school entry not be delayed because of age or gender. If these studies suggest that age discrepancy and gender do not account for differences in academic performance within a classroom, then can we assume that the

variations in performance are a result of the children's individual abilities, regardless of age and gender differences? Are there other factors responsible for success amongst early entrants? One can speculate that social interactions and other environmental factors may account for the differences in performance. This will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Another finding in the literature suggested that age differences in achievement seen in the early grades disappear in later grades. May & Welch (1986) examined the relationship between children's month of birth and gender, by using a developmental screening test and academic measures. The results indicated that there were differences between age groups in the early grades, but this age effect seemed to disappear in the later grades. In their study Shepard and Smith (1986) reviewed the question of within-grade age effects and made the following conclusions. First, the disadvantages of being among the youngest in a class are compounded when there is also low ability. Second, the disadvantages of being youngest in the class seem to disappear in later grades. Third, in making judgments about children, teachers attribute great importance to age in their recommendations and younger children are more likely to be held back a grade than older ones.

The literature covering the topic of early entrance is rather extensive, but it is also quite contradictory. Morrison & Griffith (1997) described how achievement differences found between younger and older children were generally small in terms of educational relevance, and how other background variables may have been affecting students' performance. These variables could include cognitive potential, previous day-care experience, parental education, and occupation. The authors felt that the progress of younger students was difficult to assess. Thus, they used a pre-post design that would

enable them to examine growth in reading and mathematics and standardized tests to evaluate the students. They found that younger first graders progressed academically as well as their older peers, so that entrance age failed to produce a main effect on academic achievement. However, they suggested that entrance age could be interacting with other variables such as intelligence, gender, and social maturity. Findings from this study supported those of an earlier study by Shepard and Smith (1985) that indicated differences between the younger and older students were evident in students in the lowest 25th percentile of performance or cognitive skills. Results from Morrison and Griffith's (1997) study suggest a closer examination of the interactive role between entrance age and other psychological factors.

Several studies suggested that younger age at school entrance could result in academic and social differences. Uphoff & Gilmore (1986) found that younger age was a cause of differences in academic performance and social skills. They found that students born between the months of June and December experienced greater stress because they were young for their grade and were unable to compete with the older classmates. Other findings suggested that initial entrance age effects on academic performance and social differences did not persist into the high school level. There were no consistent findings in the studies that examined the age, or grade level at which these differences disappear. Other studies indicated that the effects of early school entrance diminish by grade three (Shepard & Smith, 1985), grade four (Miller & Norris, 1967), and grade eight (Davis et al, 1980).

DeMeis and Stearns (1992) aimed to determine whether or not children's chronological age was related to academic and social performance in school. They were

interested in finding out if the younger children in the classrooms experienced more difficulties in these areas. If this were the case, then children born between the months of September and December would be the ones more frequently referred for psycho-educational assessments. Consequently, these younger children would be the ones more frequently referred to programmes designed to improve social adjustment, and less likely to be considered for gifted programmes. The results of this study did not support the idea that children who were younger at the time of school entrance experienced more academic and social difficulties than older peers. However, the results did indicate that teachers used the age criterion when they considered children for placement in transitional classes or gifted programmes. They strongly suggested that teachers and other educational professionals needed to be informed of the normal variability that can be expected in children's development. The study indicated that school age can be a factor in academic and social-emotional difficulties of specific children but this was not generally the cause for student failure.

Kinard and Reinherz (1986) explored the effects of entrance age on academic performance and social adjustment, between the period of school entry and grade four. One of the variables considered for investigation was the use of psychological and academic services in the schools because the authors believed that younger children were referred for services more frequently. The results of this study indicated that the youngest children did have the lowest cognitive ability at school entry, but there were no age differences with respect to performance and adjustment in later years. With respect to the frequency of services offered to these children, it appeared that boys received more services than girls, independent of age. These gender differences were evident on many measures of school performance and adjustment.

Breznitz and Teltsch (1987) found a relationship between school entrance age and the academic and social-emotional domains in first grade pupils. Their sample included the oldest children in the class, born between January and March, and the youngest children born between October and December. Results indicated that the oldest first graders surpassed their younger peers in all the academic parameters examined, including reading comprehension, reading time, decoding skills, and arithmetic skills. These older students were better adjusted to social situations, on a social and emotional level. Breznitz and Telsch (1989) conducted a follow-up study on the effects of school entrance age, and the academic performance and social-emotional functioning of children were examined in grade four. The children selected for this study were also a group of the oldest students, born between the months of January and March, and the youngest students, born between October and December. The results of this second study showed that significant differences persisted on four of the five parameters examined; oral and silent reading comprehension, reading speed, and arithmetic skills. One of the most frequently used reading test is the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test where grade levels and percentiles are provided for silent reading, reading speed, and reading comprehension. The Key Math is a widely used test for diagnosing math performance. In the Breznitz and Teltsch study the only area where there were no differences between groups was in that of oral reading.

Hale, McKay, and Neale (1986) also sought to investigate how an additional year in pre-school affected the reading ability of students in later grades, as compared to those that did not take an extra year before entering kindergarten. These students were selected according to their results on the Neale Scales of Early Child Development. The children were placed in three groups; children ready for kindergarten and advanced, those not ready for kindergarten but advanced and, children not ready for kindergarten and retained

for one extra year in pre-school. In this ten-year follow-up study, they found that the 'ready' group was reading significantly better than the 'doubtfuls', but not as well as those that had had the extra year in pre-school, or 'extenders'. When the authors questioned the developmental issues in this study, they came up with two explanations; one was that the teachers were more aware and sensitive to these students' needs within the classroom and the other was the issue of maturation.

In this study, maturation referred to the concept of allowing children to mature, grow, or develop in skills and processes that are necessary for academic learning to occur. This growth or maturity also includes personal and social growth. If maturation is the accepted explanation for a stronger performance in later school years, then this would suggest that the extended pre-school experience allowed these children to mature in skills that were necessary for success in later academic learning. Vygotsky addressed the issue of maturity when he described the zone of proximal development in *Mind and Society.*

Excerpt 14:

> The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions can be termed the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development. The actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86-87)

May and Welch (1984) talked about a "buy a year" concept in which children were placed in an interim class where they are expected to "grow a year" without specific intervention, before they entered kindergarten. In response to this study, perhaps it would be feasible to provide a flexible programme that could be individualized to meet the actual needs of each child. A developmental placement class or buy a year

class would not offer the stimulation of an optimal learning environment. The other questionable aspect of this study was the lack of consideration of the children's self-concept as well as the perceptions and attitudes of teachers. It would be interesting to see how teachers view children who are held back one year and if there is any indication that they actually perceive them to be more successful learners. It would also be interesting to examine how these children view themselves.

Self-esteem

The concept of self is usually considered in terms of self-image, as the person we think we are. Self-esteem is concerned with the worth that we attach to this self-image. Children's self-esteem refers to their feelings of self-worth, competence, and acceptance. Theories on self-esteem stress the role of social experience in shaping global self-concept and its specific aspects. According to Bandura (1986) and Harter (1993), the most important contributors to children's self-esteem are the positive and supportive treatment by significant others such as family members and peers, as well as their self-observation of functioning ability and their social comparisons. The development of self-esteem is also related to a student's self-perception of academic abilities and social skills among peers.

William James (1950) was one of the first psychologists to study the concept of 'self" James proposed that self-esteem was a function of a person's successes and aspirations, where aspirations were described as something that the person wanted to do. In this way, a child's self-esteem will increase when he is successful in achieving his goals and diminish when he is not.

Carl Rogers' (1951) theory of self was a theory of personality, human development, and growth. According to Rogers' theory, self-concept is affected by a person's perceptions of the world and it affects the way a person acts in this world. In this way, a person that sees himself as

weak and insecure will behave differently from a person who sees himself as confident and able. Rogers proposed that people always evaluate their experiences in terms of their self-concept. Rogers' notion of the 'ideal self' referred to the person that we would most like to be. The closer the 'real self' is to the ideal self, the better adjusted and happy a person will be. Rogers also introduced the concept of 'unconditional positive regard', where the person grows up in an environment where he is valued even if he may have undesirable characteristics. In such a supportive environment, this person will be better adjusted, healthier, and happier.

In his hierarchy of needs, Abraham Maslow (1973) proposed that all individuals need a high evaluation of themselves for self-esteem and that self-esteem is based on real capacity, achievement, and respect from others. The satisfaction of the need for self-esteem can lead to feelings of self-confidence, self-worth, strength, capacity and adequacy of being useful in the world.

Morton and Courneya (1990) were interested in studying the long-term effects of early school entrance because previous studies had suggested that academic performance and self-esteem problems were relevant outcomes (Diamond, 1983; DiPasquale et al, 1980, & Gredler, 1980). They focused on the effects of reading, mathematics, language development, and self-esteem. The results of this study indicated that there existed a delay in general language development and reading among the early entrance students of the control group. This suggested that these types of difficulties were more prevalent with early entry students. In this study, early entry students were identified as those born in the fourth quarter of the year. Results also revealed that there was a high rate of early entry students among the group of students with learning disabilities. Within this group, the younger students demonstrated more problems with self-esteem. The authors suggested that perhaps these children were considered to have a

learning disability, when in fact they were chronologically immature or younger, according to date of birth and date of school entry.

In a study by Plummer and Graziano (1987) it was shown how children who were retained in school had higher self-esteem than did the non-retained students. This finding was based on the suggestion that retained children had more experience with tasks on hand. This study suggested that the impact of grade retention was not necessarily negative, but rather, dependent on the social context surrounding each child's situation.

Hammond (1986) recounted the unsuccessful experience of a child who was 'over-placed', or advanced into kindergarten. The boy was 4 years, 10 months old when he started classes, but the teacher found him to be distracting to himself and others, impulsive, emotionally volatile, lazy, and dependent. In addition, he was perceived to be socially and emotionally immature and lagging developmentally compared to his peers. Seven weeks into the school year, this child was pulled out of the kindergarten class and placed back in his pre-school programme where he excelled for the rest of the year. The following year he started kindergarten and maintained a strong academic performance throughout school. Hammond described the behaviours that are generally expected of five-year-olds who were ready to start kindergarten class. On a very basic level, these behaviours include the ability to sit down, wait, and listen to instructions, the ability to focus their attention on a required task, compliance and the willingness to please.

Children who are not ready to start school are socially and emotionally not prepared, and relate better to others of younger age. They may exhibit anger or withdrawal when they are unable to cope and demonstrate erratic achievement skills. Hammond (1986) suggested that one third of all five-year olds are not ready for school because they are 'developmentally' younger

than their classroom peers. She proposed that all children be tested before entering school in order to obtain a 'developmental age'. The Gesell Institute of Human Development considers children who are ready to start kindergarten to be developmentally between 4 ½ to 5½ years old (Hammond, 1986).

Readiness defined

One of the difficulties in discussing the issue of "readiness" is the definition itself. Generally, readiness is defined as the developmental preparedness of school-age children that are entering kindergarten or grade one (Ilg et al., 1978). Readiness classes are designed for children believed to be developmentally unready or lacking the maturity for formal education at the kindergarten or grade one level ((Matthews, May, & Kundert, 1999). When professionals in the school wish to know how well prepared children are to start school, readiness tests are used. Readiness tests describe children's current achievement, performance, and general knowledge levels. They are skill or criterion referenced and used to help teachers plan and implement their curriculum (Raforth, 1997). However, they do not provide an authentic portrait of a child's literacy abilities.

With new developments in the cultural-historical tradition, post-Vygotskian theorists define readiness as a child's propensity to engage in a learning activity. In this definition, a child needs to develop social and cognitive abilities that will allow him to be a self-regulated learner who can develop social relationships with peers and adults in the classroom. These abilities can include the ability to regulate behaviour and the ability to use age-appropriate cultural tools to solve problems. Other attributes that will help students succeed are an interest in the process of learning, a willingness to learn according to the rules, and a readiness to follow the teacher's instructions.

Traditional readiness assessments typically assess children's knowledge of the alphabet and basic literacy skills in hopes of gaining information that help teachers identify children who may have difficulty reading. This approach is based on the belief that children who have not mastered reading skills by the end of grade one will have difficulty in other curriculum areas (Boehnlein, 1987). Kelly and Peverly (1992) indicated that screening instruments that evaluated specific skills associated with linguistic memory and basic reading skills were more successful in predicting reading ability in children. In fact, the term *readiness* is commonly used to mean "ready to read" (Katz, 1992). This definition is extremely limited and does not consider the whole child as a learner. Readiness needs to be defined more globally and take into account the richness of talents, skills and interests of every child. Readiness cannot simply be evaluated by means of a reading scale.

Developmental theory from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective emphasizes social factors in development. Vygotsky's emphasis on the profound impact of maturational factors on development cannot be ignored. These factors are defined as factors that set limits on when and where social interactions may be effective. Vygotsky believed that there was a "natural line" of purely biological changes that influence the process of development. This concept of a natural line is illustrated in the following excerpt from his writings

Excerpt 15:

> ... the cultural development of the child ... is not an outward, ready-made creation. It originates in conformance with definite laws at a certain stage of the natural development of the child ... it is modelled by the deciding influence of external problems with which the child is faced and the external signs with which it operates ... the structure ... does

> not remain unchanged, but it is subject to lengthy external change which shows all the signs of development. (Vygotsky, 1929)

The maturing functions are the source of changes in the internal structure of a given age period. Thus, assessment procedures should be aimed at identifying the current status of these maturing functions.

When the assessment of skills is necessary, observations of children in preschool settings or early school environments provide more information about the children than short screening sessions in unfamiliar settings (Raforth, 1997). Vygotsky's theory promoted learning before development and consisted of five domains: physical health and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, use of language, and general knowledge. Children's potential for learning skills would best be assessed through repeated observations of children and interactions with children in authentic and natural environments. Since family background factors are useful predictors of school achievement, involvement of family would also seem a necessary part of the screening process (Raforth, 1997). Parents could contribute perceptions of their child's progress through interviews and questions about the child's behaviours and skills outside of school.

Acceleration defined

Early entrance to school is one of the options available within the rubric of acceleration (Benbow, 1991). Feldhusen (1989) argues that acceleration is the process of bringing gifted students to a level that corresponds to their achievement levels and readiness so that they are properly challenged to learn the new material. Acceleration shortens the period of time that students are placed in an educational setting. The meaning of acceleration is generally perceived as going through school or academic material faster

than the normal pace, but it is more accurately defined as "curricular flexibility" (Benbow & Stanley, 1983). Curricular flexibility refers to a number of curricular or administrative modifications that allow students to reach their academic goals at a faster rate or at a younger age (Cross, 2002). The following forms of acceleration are the best-known and most commonly used methods. *Grade skipping* involves bypassing a school grade, and is usually done at a natural transition point when the move should be less disruptive to the child, such as passing from end of grade 5 to grade 7 or junior high. Several factors need to be considered in this process. The child's emotional maturity, physical maturity, attachment to friends, and the attitude of the receiving teacher are important factors. *Special-progress classes* are a form of group acceleration where, for instance, bright students complete 3 years of schooling in 2 years. This approach is less disruptive to the lives of students but not as common as other acceleration options. *Subject-specific acceleration* is more common and occurs when arrangements are made to meet the needs of students who are ahead in certain subject areas. As an example, a student in grade 2 is placed in grade 3 for mathematics. *Ungraded school and multi-age classes* are classes where students progress through the curriculum at a rate that is appropriate for them. This option has never matched the rigidity of American and Canadian education and is rarely used. *Early entrance* refers to students entering preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, high school or college, at an earlier age than is usual. Early entrance often requires grade skipping.

The literature suggests that acceleration of intellectually advanced students has positive effects on their academic and social performance. Acceleration improves the motivation, confidence and scholarship of these students. Benbow (1991) suggests that

students who are not accelerated show lower achievement levels, more behaviour problems and poor attitudes, when compared to students who are advanced. The widespread belief is that the students who are intellectually advanced will achieve highly, regardless of their experiences. However, Benbow's studies do not agree with this idea. Her studies suggest the need for educational interventions, as some will not achieve without appropriate educational placement. According to Feldhusen (1989), provisions for gifted students include homogeneous or ability grouping and acceleration. The benefits of acceleration include the completion of education sooner and at a higher level, and the addition of one year to an individual's productive life. The contradictory results in the previous review could be attributed to the different approaches and interventions applied across the variety of studies. The studies are varied in terms of age groups examined and the methods used to evaluate children who are considered for acceleration.

Why the need for this study

The literature on child psychology indicates that there have been many studies done in the area of acceleration and the effects of early school entrance. The need for this particular study is simply explained. There are studies that provide information on the effects of early entrance, but the information described in these studies is generally based on standardized test results and is limited, misleading, and controversial.

There is little qualitative information on how children who have been advanced are developing socially and emotionally, nor is there information on early entrance into kindergarten and how children actually perceive themselves as the youngest students in the class. In addition, there is little qualitative information on how students who have been advanced into kindergarten feel about their relationships with peers, family

members, and the community at large. In particular, there is no information available on how derogated children in the province of Quebec perceive themselves, after having been advanced into kindergarten. Results might differ in Quebec because of the derogation exemption that is used to screen possible early entrants. This suggests a pre-selection of children who demonstrate the ability to succeed as early starters. In addition, there does not appear to be information on how teachers perceive derogated students as learners and socializers within the classroom and the school, and how their parents perceive them outside the school and in the home. Thus, this inquiry on derogation is an exploratory, descriptive study that examines the advancing of children into kindergarten in the province of Quebec from the perspectives of the students, their teachers, and parents.

Purpose of study and focal questions

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how it feels to be a derogated child in a classroom or school culture setting that also includes the teachers and parents. My goal is to examine how these children perceive themselves, and how their teachers and parents perceive them as well. I investigate the phenomenon of derogation and its impact on the socio-affective development of a selected group of children. I use three tools of qualitative inquiry to accomplish this task; in-depth interviewing, on site observations, and document analysis. The focal questions in this inquiry are the following:

1) What is the impact of derogation on the children who were selected and volunteered to participate in this study?

2) How do these children describe their school experiences and accomplishments?

3) How do the parents and teachers of these children view them as learners and socializers?

4) Does the accelerated or enriched environment provided by kindergarten advance the cognitive, academic and social development of these younger children who were granted early school entrance?

In order to answer these questions I use a case study approach. Yin (1994) views a case study as *"... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1994, p.13).*

Since the focal questions concern the academic performance and social development of derogated students, I focused the interview questions on topics from these two areas. The following excerpts taken from the first and third interviews with Abby, are two examples of the types of questions I posed to the students about their academic performance and socializing experiences with their peers.

Excerpt 16: How she's doing in reading

Olga: How are you doing in reading?
Abby: I'm doing better than the other years
Olga: Were you having and difficulty the other years?
Abby: Yeah, but now I read at my house, so it's not bad anymore.
(Abby, April 9, 2002)

Excerpt 17: Getting along with friends

Olga: How are you getting along with your friends in school?
Abby: They're nice. We always get along well. Um, whenever we get in fights after we always come together again, and we always play nice. And I always play with the same people.
Olga: Can you tell me a little about that?
Abby: Well, I like playing with the same people but sometimes when I want to play with other people, my friends say "No, no, no" but then I want to

play with everyone. Then we all come in a big fight. (Abby; April 23, 2002)

These two excerpts yield information about Abby from the two domains of academic development and socio-affective skills. In the first excerpt, Abby makes reference to the difficulties she had had with reading over the years. She mentions that her performance had improved. However, I sensed that this academic area was still of concern to her and probably was not one of her strongest subjects in school. In the second excerpt, she brings up an issue regarding her friendship patterns at school and I assumed that these difficulties with friends or socializing had happened before. Abby talks of the way that she played with the same people all the time, but would like to play with others as well. However, she also mentioned that her desire to play with others caused a negative reaction from her friends. As Abby presented this social dilemma during our interview, I sensed that getting along with her peers was very important to her. She seemed caught between doing what her close friends expected of her and following her desire to socialize with other students as well.

These issues of socializing and friendship patterns are common to all children of elementary school age. However, I was interested in looking at children's perceptions of their lived experiences with the younger group of children who had been advanced into school and were often the youngest in the class.

Rationale for the Inquiry

I have often encountered parents and teachers of children whom I had seen for reasons of derogation outside of the clinical setting. The parents readily discussed their children's progress; teachers gladly gave their impressions as well. Generally, parents and teachers of these children who had been advanced into kindergarten were doing well

as they moved up through the grades. I was pleased to know that my professional advice had positive outcomes for their children. However, in the descriptions of their children's progress, I recalled how parents frequently made subtle references to the difficulties that these high-achievers were facing as the youngest students in their classrooms, as illustrated in excerpt 18 where I encountered Connie, the mother of a derogated child.

Excerpt 18:

Connie: I think I made a mistake having Johnny derogated.
Olga: Why do you say that?
Connie: He doesn't listen to me or to his father at home, and only wants to play. He's never serious about his homework, and he should be doing better in school.
Olga: How old is Johnny now?
Connie: He'll be 11 years old in October.
Olga: When did you notice he'd started having difficulties?
Connie: It started in grade three. He was ok until then.
(Informal Interview with Connie, a parent, August 2001)

Some teachers described how these children who had been advanced into school were physically immature compared to their peers, and how this prevented them from participating in sports or social activities. Other teachers described how the interests of these children were not like those of their classmates, and how this also limited their social experiences. In excerpt 19, a teacher named Debby gives her general opinion about the process of acceleration and its effects on children.

Excerpt 19:

Debby: I don't know why parents feel that they have to push their children into School when they're younger than the others. Sometimes these younger children don't fit in with the others and they're smaller than their classmates too. But then, I guess it really depends on each case. Every child is different. (Informal conversation with Debby a grade school teacher, August 2001)

These casual conversations with parents and teachers furthered my interest in studying a select group of students who were in my private practice and for whom I

recommended derogation. I decided to locate the children by contacting the regional school boards, presenting my study and asking permission to locate and visit these children. Once located, these children and their parents would be contacted and asked for their consent to participate.

I initially became interested in the phenomenon of derogation approximately ten years ago, when it became part of my responsibilities as a psychologist working in the Montreal area. The phenomenon caught my attention because it was not clear to me exactly what became of the children who were advanced into kindergarten as the result of derogation. I looked for follow-up studies on the topic of derogation but did not find any. I approached the Ministry of Education of Quebec in November 2000. I was informed by the department of Statistics at the Ministry that any information available would be in the form of statistics, and that this would probably be found at the school board levels. I discovered that 1) this information was not readily available from the school boards, and 2) the Ministry of Education was only able to send me documentation that was composed of charts with numbers of students enrolled at different grade levels (see Table 1). These numbers told me how many children were derogated for every school year between 1994 and 2001, but the numbers did not tell me anything about the children themselves (Table 1, Code H, p. 3). This basic chart was not going to help me understand the effects of the derogation phenomenon, and I realized that my research would require an exploratory approach.

Summary

Research indicates that academic difficulties with early school entrance surface in the lower grades, but disappear in later levels (Sweetland & De Simone, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1988). Other studies suggest that acceleration may actually promote the development of higher order thinking skills (Benbow, 1991; Perkins & Salomon, 1989). However, research also suggests that early school entrance can lead to socio-emotional problems in children (Uphoff & Gilmore, 1986; DeMeis & Stearns, 1992). This inquiry investigates the effects of accelerating kindergarten children into school in the province of Quebec because of the derogation exemption for early entrance of students. It is a timely study because it examines how these students feel about being the youngest in class and how this affects their lives at school and outside of the educational setting.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Any higher mental function necessarily goes through an external stage in its development because it is initially a social function. (Vygotsky, 1981)

In this chapter, I present a theoretical framework and relate the focal questions of my study to Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural development. Lev Vygotsky, a developmental Russian psychologist, has influenced Western education, especially in the areas of development and learning. A major tenet of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development is that social interaction plays a major role in the development of higher mental functions. He argued that behaviour is too complex to be isolated and should be studied in the social and historical contexts in which it occurs. From a Vygotskian perspective, all children are born with natural cognitive abilities, but people, instruction, and language are the mediators for the development of higher psychological functions. Vygotsky considered that higher psychological processes have a cultural socio-genetic origin. He argues that

> ...child development is a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form or another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes ... (Vygotsky, 1978; p.73)

A fundamental concept of Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural development is that, in order for education to develop children's cognitive skills, instruction and learning should occur within an area where a child's abilities are in a state of development. This area is known as the "zone of proximal development" or 'Zoped'.

> The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. These functions could be termed the "buds" or "flowers" of development rather than the "fruits" of development. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Vygotsky's well-known definition of the zone has been widely quoted by Vygotskian and Neo Vygotskian theorists and elaborated further. When they considered Vygotsky's concept of Zoped, Cole and Wertsch (1985) paid attention to the social aspects of learning, and the role of imitation in behavioural transmission. Moll (1990) was interested in integrating the two aspects of individual learning and participation in socio-cultural activities as a form of student collaboration. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) introduced the concept of 'activity settings', which are organized and structured in such a way that learning takes place. In a similar way, Lave and Wenger (1991) discussed 'situated learning' and proposed that all activities are situated and occur within action contexts. Cole and Engestrom (1997) refer to an 'activity system' where activities between individuals and the community occur by means of mediating artifacts and rules. Engestrom applied his theory to a primary care medical facility; a concrete activity system where transitions and reorganizations occurred within its boundaries.

In this study, I am applying the concept of Zoped and investigating how the *'buds or flowers'* from Vygotsky's definition have grown into *'fruits of development'* for three children who were advanced into kindergarten at an earlier age. The following excerpt from an interview with a parent in my study illustrates how Jenny has been learning 'in the potential' as a result of being advanced.

> *Cathy: Jenny's academics have been very good. The teachers always cite her as having a lot of enthusiasm, being the leader in the class ...all through elementary. Every year the teachers are telling me "this one is something ... look out for her". (Interview with parent, September 11th 2002)*

The next excerpt is taken from my journal notes; and it describes the comments made by the mother. In this excerpt I stress how Cathy is confident of her daughter's excellent performance in school. It seems that she is pleased with the decision that she made to advance Jenny into kindergarten, years before. Cathy strongly believes that the decision to advance her daughter in school was the right one for her.

> Cathy believes that her daughter Jenny is doing very well in school, as a result of being advanced into kindergarten, seven years ago. Cathy's comments reaffirm her belief that the decision to advance Jenny into school was a good one. She mentions how her daughter continues to excel in academic performance and how her teachers have singled out her achievements every year in elementary school. (Field Notes from journal following the interview with Cathy, September 11th 2002)

The process of derogation that is practiced in the province of Quebec enables children like Jenny to enter school at a younger age. This means that they are interacting with students who are older than them. Once granted permission to advance into school, these younger children are placed in a classroom where students are older because they are already five years of age on September 30th. Is this practice of derogation supported by the concept of the Zoped, and do the younger children experience higher mental development within this 'zone'? Does the advanced placement provide a setting where the children's functions are in an optimal state of development? How do these children benefit from this advanced placement?

In this study, I am interested in knowing more about the social and emotional development of children who were granted early entry into kindergarten. All the children in this study were given cognitive assessments and deemed to possess the ability to succeed in school. Given that these test results validated their academic abilities, I assumed that their overall academic performance continued to be strong throughout their

school years. However, I question the ways in which these children are socialized into classroom settings where their peers are older than them.

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory of Human Development

The role of the social world in cognitive development

From a Vygotskian perspective, external processes such as social contexts, activity settings, cultural contexts, and situations can affect a child's emerging cognitive development. Social and cultural factors have gained increased recognition as playing a central role in learning and development. In psychology, there has recently been a wave of attention towards contextual and socio-cultural theories (Engestrom et al, 1999). In education, situated learning that occurs in practice is considered to be a sociocultural phenomenon and offered as a new approach to understanding the relationship between teaching and learning. In situated learning, knowledge and skills are learned in the contexts that reflect how knowledge is obtained and applied in everyday situations. Learning is conceptualized as creating meaning from the real experiences taking place in daily lives. Lave and Wenger (1991) stated that

> Situated learning ... took on the proportions of a general theoretical perspective that meant that ... there is no activity that is not situated. It implied emphasis on comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than "receiving" a body of factual knowledge about the world; on activity in and with the world; and on the view that agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 32-33)

Lave and Winger described how general knowledge is only meaningful in specific circumstances. Generality is often associated with abstract representations and ideas that are taken out of context. Situated learning suggests that such abstractions are meaningless unless they are made specific to the situation at hand. When learning is viewed as a situated activity, this suggests that learners participate in a sociocultural practice.

Activity Theory

Activity is a central concept in Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development. Vygotsky was looking for a theory that opposed the passive receptivity of existing empiricist models. Behaviourism avoided the issue of defining consciousness by declaring that all psychological phenomena are derivatives of a reflex-like behaviour. Vygotsky believed that socially meaningful activity or behaviour creates human consciousness. Vygotsky added activity theory to his socio-cultural theory of higher mental functions, along with his theories on language development and concept formation.

Activity Theory first emerged in the 1920's when Marxism dominated Soviet psychology. It was also a time when many modernist theories evolved, especially in the fields of linguistics and literary theory. In psychology, the most popular approach at the time was that of Pavlovian or reflexology theory, which claimed that the notion of a reflex could explain the whole of human behaviours. However, Russian psychology also depended greatly on European psychology and was influenced by the works of psychologists such Wilhelm Wundt, who proposed the introspectionist method and was the pioneer of cultural psychology. The French psychologist, Pierre Janet had a number of followers in Russia, and he proposed that psychological functions appear first on an interpersonal level and then as an intrapersonal one. There was also the influence from the French sociological school of Emile Durkheim and the anthropological approach of Lucien Levy-Bruhl, the latter of whom had presented the notion of 'collective representations', a concept that was quite useful in the sociocultural approach to the human mind. In addition, there was also the influence of Gestalt psychology from Kurt

Lewin and Kurt Koffka who studied cognitive functions. Vygotsky and his followers were initially enthusiastic about the early writings of Jean Piaget. However, it was in the writings of Marx that Vygotsky sought and found a social theory of human activity that opposed the naturalist tradition and challenged stage theories of human learning.

Over the years, activity theory has undergone many transformations and other versions have evolved since Vygotsky's account. A group of his students and fellow researchers continued to elaborate the concept of activity theory. Leontiev, a disciple of Vygotsky, went on to define an activity as being socially mediated.

> Various concrete activities can be classified according to whatever features are convenient ... however; the main feature that distinguishes one activity from another is its object. After all, it is precisely an activity's object that gives it a specific direction. (Leontiev, 1981, p. 59)
>
> ... when a concrete process – external or internal – unfolds before us, from the point of view of its motive, it is human activity, but in terms of subordination to a goal, it is an action or a chain of actions. (Leontiev, 1981, p. 61)

Leontiev held that activities correspond to their motives and actions correspond to more specific goals. Therefore, an activity system is a community of actors who have a common object of activity. This collective activity system is seen as a unit of analysis that connects the psychological, cultural and institutional perspective to analysis. In this way, the study of activity is no longer that of an individual, but rather, focuses on the interaction between an individual, systems of artifacts or tools, and other individuals in the historically developing settings. Leontiev believed that the properties of any given activity are determined by the socio-historical setting and by the goals and socio-cultural history of every human being. In this way, activity differs between and within individuals.

Alexander Luria also worked in the cultural-historical Vygotskian tradition, which assumes that human mental processes are influenced by culture and can only be explained through culture. Luria showed how change within culture leads to changes in the mind. Luria's goal in research was to validate or confirm Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. He sought to demonstrate that under conditions of rapid social change, the mental processes of people involved in these changes would also change. Luria did find confirmation for this central feature of cultural-historical theory and provided a new explanatory principle for the human mind.

Vygotsky's Activity Theory is made possible through the use of intermediaries such psychological and material tools. Both kinds of tools are social by nature and both are artificial formations. The difference between these two kinds of tools is that the material tools control processes of nature, yet the psychological tools enable individuals to master their natural behaviours and cognitive processes. Vygotsky made a distinction between natural or 'lower' mental processes and cultural or 'higher' mental processes that are influenced by symbolic tools.

> The use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate. In this context, we can use the term higher psychological function, or higher behavior as referring to the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55)

This passage suggests that the constructive principle of higher mental functions lies outside of the individual, as in psychological tools and interpersonal relations. The functions first appear as interactions between individuals, and consequently these functions become internalized.

Generally, Activity Theory consists of a set of basic principles that constitute a conceptual system serving as a foundation for more specific theories. The first of these basic principles is object-orientedness, which assumes that human beings live in a reality that is objective according to natural sciences and socially and culturally defined properties. Secondly, activity theory discriminates between internal and external activities, but emphasizes that internal mental processes cannot be understood in isolation from external activities because external activities become internal ones, and vice versa. Thirdly, activity theory emphasizes social factors and the interactions between individuals and their environment. This interaction explains how the principle of tool mediation plays an integral part in this approach. In Vygotsky's Activity Theory, tools define how human beings interact with reality. Shaping external activities ultimately results in shaping internal activities. Tools also reflect the experiences of other people who have tried to solve the same problems in the past and how they have modified the tools in the process. In this way, tools are created and transformed during the process and development of the activity itself. Tools carry with them cultural and social information; these tools help to transmit social knowledge between individuals. From a Vygotskian perspective, a child neither internalizes concepts in a ready-made manner, nor constructs them independently. Rather, a child needs to be involved in learning activities that are especially designed to provide a framework for collaborative construction of knowledge.

In its simplest terms, an activity is defined as an engagement of a subject toward a goal or objective. While animals have only the world of direct objects and situations mediated through instincts, humans have the worlds of other humans that they can address by means of language and artifacts. An artifact is a material object that has been

modified by human beings as a means of regulating their interactions with the world and with each other (Cole et al., 1997). Thus, an activity can be explained as follows: a human being is motivated toward the solution of a problem or purpose and mediated by tools or artifacts in collaboration with human beings. The structure of the activity is defined by cultural factors that include rules and division of labour. Artifacts are recognized as transforming mental functioning in fundamental ways. In Vygotsky's view:

> The inclusion of a tool in the process of behavior (a) introduces several new functions connected with the use of the given tool and with its control; (b) abolishes and makes unnecessary several natural processes, whose work is accomplished by the tool; and alters the course and individual features (the intensity, duration, sequence, etc.) of all the mental processes that enter into the composition of the instrumental act, replacing some functions with others (i.e., it re-creates and reorganizes the whole structure of behavior just as a technical tool re-creates the whole structure of labor operations) (Vygotsky, 1981, p.139-140)

Artifacts shape and transform mental processes and remain, culturally, historically, and institutionally situated and context specific. However, there is no tool that is adequate to all tasks; there is no universally appropriate form of cultural mediation, not even language, which is considered to be the 'tool of tools' (Cole, 1999). Language was the form of mediation that preoccupied Vygotsky the most. However, when he spoke of signs or psychological tools, Vygotsky listed a number of semiotic means: "various systems of counting, mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbolic systems; works of art; writing; schemes, diagrams, map, and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs, and so on" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137).

Knowledge is internalized through the use of psychological tools. Vygotsky's colleague, Leontiev (1981) used the term 'appropriation' to describe the adoption by an individual of these socially available psychological tools and he wrote that children

cannot and do not need to reinvent the artifacts that have taken a millennium to evolve in order to appropriate such objects into their own system of activity. Children have adequate understanding to use the culturally elaborate objects in their new life experiences.

Activity theory has contributed a great deal to this increasing wave of interest from a range of disciplines (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki; 1999). Activity theory can be viewed as a broad approach that offers new perspectives on a variety of theoretical issues in the social sciences. Generally, micro studies address relevant issues within their respective contexts, but they offer little to the macro theories of social institutions and the general structure of society. Activity theory offers the concept of networks between activity systems. It is based on the notion that local activities resort to or can be traced to some form of historically based mediating artifacts. Vygotsky used a socio-cultural analytical approach to study the interactions between the natural and social forces of individuals that lead to higher consciousness.

Vygotsky viewed consciousness as a highly complex system based on the interrelationships among all mental functions ranging between lower-level functions such as memory to higher-level functions such as reasoning, and also included the functions of affect and motivation. Consciousness was a central concept in Vygotsky's approach because it allowed him to study the mind as a whole; "there exist many psychologies, but there does not exist a unified psychology" (Vygotsky, 1934, p.18). He rejected reductionist interpretations of mental phenomena where consciousness was disregarded as a scientific concept and all psychological phenomena were considered to be neuropsychological or behavioural. He wanted to create a way to avoid this fragmented

view of psychology that existed at the time, and placed consciousness as a matter that coexisted with the material substance of the brain.

Vygotsky argued that it was possible to avoid this division in psychology by viewing consciousness as the organization of behaviour that humans experience in their socio-cultural practices. In Vygotsky's hierarchy, consciousness is placed on the highest level, and affect and intellect are the 'subcomponents' (Wertsch, 1985). Intellect consists of memory, attention, thinking and perception. These subcomponents are the 'higher functions' that Vygotsky spent most of his time studying in his research.

Using a macro and micro 'genetic' developmental approach, Vygotsky placed the human activity of tool and symbol use at the center of his belief that consciousness transformed humans. This transformation was possible through the creation and application of mediated tools. Vygotsky believed that human activity was mediated through the development and use of signs, psychological tools and other humans as mediators.

> The use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate. In this context, we can use the term *higher* psychological function, or higher behavior as referring to the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity. (Vygotsky, 1978, p.55)

In socio-cultural theory, the mediating function of language and other symbolic systems is accomplished through *semiotic mediation*, which is defined as the use of signs and symbols to augment our actions. Through semiotic mediation, linkages are created to enable individuals to construct meaning. Semiotics refers to the signs and words that trigger action and language to create meaning. In the study of semiotics, one looks at the

continuous use of language, signs, and thought to generate meaning and developmental abilities. Historically, Vygotsky believed that consciousness originated at the intersection of interactions among language use, tool use, society, and culture. He argued that

"...the social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30)

Vygotsky criticized the individualistic bias of psychology at the time and rejected individual psychological reductionism, and introduced the social origins of consciousness to human psychology. He held that consciousness was formed by personal relationships and by the products that result from the cultural development of society. Vygotsky considered that the traditional theory of evolution of mental processes paid no regard to the significant role of man's practical activity in the development of consciousness. Consciousness can be seen as a particular form of human reflection; it is created by external conditions outside of consciousness itself and by the social forms of practical activity.

Funds of knowledge refer to the cultural artifacts, resources and bodies of knowledge underlying household activities that are found in communities surrounding schools (Moll, 1990; 2000; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Moll highlighted the importance of communities of learners within large cultural and familial networks, where the zone of proximal development is manifested in a variety of ways. In his research, Moll examined the social histories of households in an American southwest, Hispanic community, especially in terms of labour and language. In their work, Moll and Greenberg (1990) looked at the networks that formed social contexts among households. They examined how these networks formed social contexts that were used for the transmission of

knowledge, skills, and information, as well as cultural values and norms. "Funds of knowledge" refers to the bodies of knowledge that include broader sets of activities requiring specific knowledge that is of strategic importance to households. For instance, many of the family members in Moll's study were farmers and ranchers, and different households possessed knowledge and skills related to these fields. Examples of this knowledge included how one household possessed the knowledge about cultivating plants, water management, and different soils. Another household had the knowledge about veterinary medicine, carpentry and electrical wiring. Not all households had knowledge about all these things, thus illustrating Moll's theory that knowledge becomes accessible through social networks.

Moll considered every household to be an "educational setting in which the major function is to transmit knowledge that enhances the survival of its dependents" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 320). Moll considered Vygotsky's concept of mediation to be constantly evolving, and it included the broader social and cultural processes such as school and households. Moll did not only regard culture in its broadest term as a nation or different population, but rather as the social "milieu in which life of the people is imbedded" (Moll, 1990, p. 257).

This study draws on a socio-cultural, constructivist framework that emphasizes the importance of social interactions, context, mediators, and mediating tools. In light of Vygotsky's view of Activity Theory, a child needs to be involved in learning activities that provide a framework for collaborative construction of knowledge. Learning and development are possible in the zone of proximal development. Children who are early school entrants can experience the 'potential for learning' because they are learning in a

setting that includes children who are older in age but matched for ability. Learning in a situation where there are more capable peers or adults will ensure children's development and optimize their skills.

Main Points in Vygotsky's Theory

Learning is a Social Activity

Basic to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development is the notion that mental activity is unique to humans and the result of social learning and interaction with significant others. Vygotsky argued that psychology should focus on human behaviour, and what sets human behaviour apart from animal behaviour is the role that language plays in an individual's social actions and interactions with significant others. Vygotsky proposed that humans are distinguished by the way that social and cultural forces influence their behaviour and development "... *the animal merely uses external nature, and brings about changes in it simply by his presence; man, by his changes, makes it serve his ends, masters it. This is the final, essential distinction between man and other animals". (Vygotsky, 1978; p.7)* The human brain possesses neuro-psychological systems that allow the higher neural activity to occur. Mental development and higher neural activity occur when the superior nervous activity of the human brain internalizes social meanings through cultural activities and the mediation of signs. Vygotsky believed that human beings never react directly to the environment because their actions are mediated by cultural means or artifacts. These cultural means include signs and tools. Social learning occurs when social signs and cultural and social relationships are internalized. The process of *internalization* occurs in three steps:

> a) an operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally...

> b) an interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one…
> c) the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events ….(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Generally, there are three themes that form the core of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of human development. Vygotsky relied on a genetic method. He claimed that higher mental processes have their origins in social processes. He also claimed that mental processes can only be understood if the tools and signs that mediate them are also understood. The use of signs and tools are recurring themes that appeared in most applications by scholars of Vygotsky's work.

> The tool's function is to serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is *externally* oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature. The sign, on the other hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is *internally* oriented. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55)

Wertsch (1995) proposed a socio-cultural theory of mediated action in which the focus was placed on individuals performing actions in sociocultural settings. Wertsch distanced himself from the collective nature of human activity and emphasized the sign-mediated and interactional aspects of action instead. Wertsch (1999) argued that

> Once we recognize the importance of the fact that one and the same setting can be represented and defined in several different ways, we can proceed in a more concrete way on other issues…. We also need to recognize that in the zone of proximal development more than one situation definition is involved. (Wertsch, 1999, p.75)

Wertsch refers to 'situation definition' as describing the way in which a setting or context is represented by those who are operating in that setting. It is misleading to describe the task setting as if it can be represented in one way. Even if a child and an adult are functioning in the same context of space and time, they may not understand the task in

the same way and not actually construct the same task. A hypothetical example would be an adult and child working on a problem of long division. There is more than one way to carry out a long division, and the adult may try to explain this task in a way that he learned in school many years ago, while the child is learning a different procedure at school. The goal of the task is to come to the same answer for the long division and the adult and child will need to discuss how to come to that answer.

Wertsch introduced the notion of *intersubjectivity* and its negotiation through semiotic mediation. What this means is that there is asymmetry in the way that adult and child understand the situation. They can negotiate their situation definitions in order to better understand the task. The adult's shift in position or 'semiotic flexibility' (Wertsch, p.78) does not indicate that the adults will actually change their perspective, but they will take a temporary stance in order to complete a task with a child. It is advantageous that the child shift in position and experience a change in position definition from this adjustment.

Use of Cultural Tools

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of human development suggests that development first occurs between people and then within the individual. Vygotsky termed his psychology *genetic* in the developmental sense, and this term stemmed from the Marxist belief that any phenomenon was explained by studying its origin and development. Thus, Vygotsky considered mental processes to result from a social and cultural evolution as well as the individual's ontogenetic development or philosophical beginnings. This developmental process is illustrated when children interact with adults

from the time of their birth, and they are socialized into their cultures by means of languages, customs, habits and beliefs.

In Vygotsky's view, child development is not conceptualized as a theory of stages. He did not accept Piaget's stage theory of child development because he believed that children's qualitative changes occurred in distinctive stages. Vygotsky was more interested in finding an explanation for the changing qualitative relationships among multiple forces of development and their corresponding principles. Vygotsky believed that learning systems could not be identical for all children because of their differing social experiences and social trajectories. Piaget also proposed that instruction should follow a child's cognitive development. However, Vygotsky argued that instruction and learning contribute to the development of higher psychological functions that would be absent in the cognitive make-up of a child and "learning in the potential".

Vygotsky proposed that cognitive development is a function of mediated activity; he suggested three major classes of mediators: material tools, psychological tools, and other human beings as mediators. A tool is an instrument that facilitates performing an action. A material tool is directed at processes of nature, a psychological tool mediates man's own psychological processes, and a human mediator selects, interprets, and makes possible these processes. A simple example of a material tool is a lever that helps us to lift a rock because it is too heavy to move with our arms; a lever is a physical tool that extends our competence beyond our natural abilities. Psychological tools or "tools of the mind" enable humans to extend their mental capabilities and to interact with the environment. They help them attend, remember, and learn. Memory strategies are an example of psychological tools because they enable learners to increase the amount of

information they recall. The most essential feature distinguishing the psychological tool from the technical tool is that it directs the mind and behaviour. The technical tool, which is also inserted as an intermediate link between human activity and the external object, is directed toward producing one or another set of changes in the object itself.

Mediation as a Learning Tool

Vygotsky believed that both the mind of a child and the learning process have socio-cultural characteristics from the very beginning. Authentic learning occurs when a child, an adult, and the symbolic tools provided by society are integrated as a whole. This concept of psychological tools as mediators in human learning is one of the basic tenets in his socio-cultural theory. These mediating tools help children to master natural psychological functions such as memory and perception. In order to interact with others, children make use of "psychological tools" or signs that give them control over their mental behaviour. Children use language in the act of speaking and as a tool to develop thought. At the same time, they develop language through thought. In this way, the social action of using language leads to cognitive growth and development. Learners use language to communicate thoughts in and out of the classroom. As they interact with significant others, the process of learning continues.

Vygotsky proposed a socio-genesis approach in his theory. This socio-cultural theory accounts for two types of psychological functions; natural functions that reflect the maturational processes in a child's mind, and cultural functions that are dependent upon the use of symbolic tools available and used in a given culture. Children's development is a process of gradual self-regulation of their own natural psychological functions with the help of the symbolic psychological tools. These tools include signs, symbols, oral and written language, formulae and graphic-symbolic organizers. Real and symbolic tools,

number and math systems, signs and codes, and language play important roles in cognitive development.

> As a result of several such experiences in the transition from an external operation to an internal one, all the intermediate stimuli turn out to be no longer necessary, and the operation begins to be carried out in the absence of mediating stimuli. (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 183)

Self-regulation is defined as the child's capacity to plan, guide, and monitor his behaviour from within, and to modify his behaviour according to changing circumstances. Vygotsky's view of this concept of self-regulation placed emphasis on a child's increasing mastery and eventual independence from incentives in the environment and an increasing mastery of his own behaviour through the active use of signs. A child continues to develop an increasing ability to regulate his behaviour from sources that are in the care-giving environment and eventually from sources within.

Vygotsky believed that learning leads to development. In his theory of learning and development, a child is viewed as an active participant and agent in the developmental process. In effect, cognitive development depends more on social interactions with the people in the children's worlds and the tools that the culture provides to support their thinking. Vygotsky was interested in the way that children co-construct meaning through social interactions because their knowledge, ideas, attitudes and values develop through interaction with others. He argued that instruction and learning contribute to the development of higher psychological functions that would be absent in the natural cognitive gifts of the child.

Zone of Proximal Development

> *"... the teacher must orient his work not on yesterday's development in the child but on tomorrow's". (Vygotsky, 1987, p.211)*

As mentioned previously, the Zoped is another significant construct in the Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. From Vygotsky's perspective, a child's learning fully develops when instruction takes place in the zone of proximal development (Zoped). Vygotsky used this concept to differentiate between two levels of development: the actual level of development achieved by independent problem solving and the potential level of development reached with the guidance or collaboration of a more capable peer or adult. Vygotsky believed that it was not enough to establish how much a child had developed because we must strive for the potential level of development. Productive instruction can only occur within these two thresholds of instruction. Vygotsky's original theory defined 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. 73)

In this region of the Zoped, a child's functions are in a state of development. These functions are seen as a result of collaborative activity that occurs when an adult or more competent peer is there to assist the child and maximize learning potential. Vygotsky believed that cognitive growth and development are a function of interpersonal exchanges.

> What the child can do in cooperation today he/she can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening functions. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 188)

Vygotsky invoked the Zoped to explain the significance of social interaction in human development. At first the assistance that is usually provided to children is from their caregivers. However, studies in social and educational psychology studies have found

that peers play the role of co-constructivists. Peer support programs or peer tutoring offer one way to help students experience benefits within the classroom (Copeland et al., 2002; Hughes et al, 1999). These studies described programs where general education students helped their peers with disabilities in the classroom. These programs enabled the students with disabilities to acquire assistance from more capable same-age peers and to develop socially appropriate skills. The general students obtained opportunities to get to know their peers better, broaden their perspectives, and become more aware of issues dealing with learning disabilities.

When two peers work together to solve a common problem, they are co-constructing knowledge. Collaborative learning in school-age children is a well-established phenomenon. Collaborative learning is a process of co-construction between students and not a simple transmission of knowledge from one individual to another. If co-construction is to succeed, students engaged in the interaction must be able to criticize the others' criticisms of what they have said. Once they reach an agreement of ideas, they then internalize their co-constructions. Studies have shown that problem solving for school-age children in collaboration with a peer will often lead to a better understanding of the task at hand.

> … an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in collaboration with his peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

The competing perspectives of students working together are revealed in their interactions. In their efforts to reach a consensus, these students integrate their

perspectives and co-construct a new one together. Consequently, as co-constructivists, they understand the task better (Perret-Clermont & Brossard, 1985).

Pairing children with more competent and expert peers may assist them to move through the Zoped. Vygotsky believed that collaboration and pooling of ideas promotes change. From a Vygotskian social-constructivist perspective, children make cognitive advances when they collaboratively exchange and discuss conflicting perspectives. In addition, when children discuss problems with more competent peers, it is more likely to result in an intrapersonal conflict and cognitive advancement than discussion with less competent peers. Zack and Graves (2001) worked with children who were learning in interactional collaborative learning contexts and found that differences such as including disagreements and misunderstandings are an important part in generating knowledge. Zack and Graves also found that learning within the zone of proximal development requires that intersubjectivity between individuals include a shared understanding; however there should be some disagreement and misunderstanding between them. The disagreement and misunderstanding can lead to discussion that can further result in a better understanding between the participants who are collaborating.

Bakhtin (1981) refers to 'alterity', which is the opposing need to distinguish oneself from the other. It is only through the use of language in dialogue that individuals come to understand how differences are considered a 'thinking device'. Bakhtin (1981) sees *"communication in continual tension between contrary forces, especially between forces, which push towards unity, agreement, and a single voice, and those forces which permit multiplicity, disagreement and multiple voices"*. Zoped is the difference between what the child can accomplish alone and what he can achieve in conjunction with another

more competent person. Therefore, the Zoped is something created in the process of social interaction. What a child can do alone and without assistance is a task that lies within the zone of actual development. A task is defined as a 'behavioral blueprint', and an activity is defined as the ... *"behavior that is actually produced when an individual (or group) performs a task."* (Coughlin & Duff, 1994, p. 175). However, activity theory states that motivation determines the realization of any task and that individuals have their own objectives and act according to their objectives. Coughlin and Duff further describe activities as having ... *"no inherent parameters or boundaries, except those imposed by the task and by the interpretations and expectations of the individuals involved in a given task"* (Coughlin & Duff, 1994, p. 175).

In an educational setting, a task consists of what the instructor would like the learner to do, and an activity is what the student actually does. The activity is how learners construct the tasks as agents (Roebuck, 2000). Lantolf (2000) discusses the role of 'orientation' as the way that a person approaches a task. He mentions that instructors cannot assume that their particular way of approaching a task is the way that the students will approach it as well. Learners' orientation can change as the task unfolds because of their individual abilities and backgrounds relative to the task. In addition, the meaning and intent of a task can be re-interpreted.

The zone of proximal development describes the area of learning and instruction that lies just beyond what the child can do alone. Learning awakens developmental processes that only operate when children are interacting with people in their environment and in collaboration with their peers. Vygotsky believed that when children work alone on activities, this independent action underestimates their competence and

real potential. However, interactive contexts encourage their actual developmental potential because in these contexts they can use the assistance of others (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development distinguishes between children's autonomous activities and their potential developmental capabilities. When children interact with adults, this increases their ability to go beyond what they can do alone. Vygotsky held that children should be challenged with the appropriate questions and not simply given answers to assigned tasks. He also believed that children's learning potentials and not their actual performance levels are indicative of their success or failure in school (Kozulin, 1998).

Children's learning potentials are evaluated by giving them more challenging tasks, providing assistance through guiding activities, and asking leading questions that will help them solve these tasks. An example of working with students' learning potentials is taken from an article by Englert, Rozendal, and Mariage (1994), where the teacher advanced the performance of students with special needs by leading their cognitive development into their zone of proximal development. She was able to improve students' writing skills by involving them in writing activities in advance of their competence. The teacher used text representations to 'scaffold' performance. Scaffolding refers to the supportive behaviours that are provided to an individual in a learning context. These supportive behaviours can be informative or coordinative by nature. Bickhard (1992) states that scaffolding

> reduces the complexities of problems and breaks them down into manageable chunks that the child has a real chance of solving. It can do this by reducing the complexities demanded by normal selection pressures, or by providing resources that are otherwise unavailable.... Scaffolding has been seen as the provision of knowledge or skill that is otherwise absent ... (Bickhard, 1992, p.35)

By using scaffolding, the teacher in this study modeled and apprenticed children's social dialogues and assisted their performance through social interactions with peers. The following excerpts from the study illustrate the researcher's application of Zoped in the classroom setting.

Adam was a student who was insecure about his writing ability. As part of the learning activity, the teacher allowed Adam to copy texts in his own way. She encouraged him to use invented spelling strategies within the social and meaningful context of his own needs to complete the tasks. Adam's teacher

> knew that she needed to delicately balance the tasks by providing and removing support as she worked with students in their ZPD's. Thus, while she continued her efforts to wean Adam from copying words, she added instructional scaffolds to bolster his writing performance in other areas where he had difficulties. (Englert et al, 1994, p. 193)

With these strategies, Adam started to generate his own text and he used the writing forms that the teacher had modeled and prompted with him.

Another example of this teacher's attempt to advance the performance of her students was her effort to improve the reading skills of students by matching weaker readers with stronger readers. This example of peer tutoring enabled all students to practice and develop oral fluency and comprehension skills. The teacher

> ... formed student pairs or asked students to select a partner so they could provide reciprocal assistance to each other. For example, with their partner, students read or rehearsed books to develop their oral fluency and comprehension. Together, pairs of students were able to perform beyond the levels at which each child could perform alone. (Englert et al, p. 200)

Together, the student pairs were able to perform beyond the point that they would perform on their own. Such a learning approach helped the teacher to work within the

students' zones of proximal development, while guiding them to become more strategic learners and more active members in the literary community. In addition, these efforts enabled the teacher to help Adam and his classmates to develop their self-esteem because they were given opportunities to construct knowledge.

The notion of mediators, support, and collaborative learning is related to the mediating tools that are central to Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural development. Psychological or mental tools have two forms; in the early stages of development mental tools have a physical, external and tangible manifestation. This social interaction is of primary importance and represents the interpersonal stage when children share the use of tools with others. At a later stage, the mental tools become internalized and exist in the mind with no external support; the use of the tool becomes intrapersonal and individual. At this point children can use the tools independently. Vygotsky adopted a socio-cultural, cultural-historical theory of human learning that assumes that behaviours must exist socially before individuals internalize them. He stated that

> ... every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

Vygotsky was interested in the socio-cultural *mediation* of the learning process. As a human mediator, an adult or more competent peer is positioned between the child and the environment and influences interaction. This mediating individual influences the nature of the child's social interactions and vice versa. An activity that generates a higher mental process is an activity that is socially mediated and meaningful. S*elf-regulation* is the state in which the child is able to regulate or master her own behaviour and social

actions by planning, monitoring, evaluating, and choosing his own behaviour. Self-regulation is the highest level of development and refers to the ability of the child to perform complex cognitive operations independently.

The influence of family and peers on cognitive development

As part of any social and cultural context, there are significant people in a child's life who will influence the developmental process. The two social units that normally affect children most are family and peers because these involve the individuals that are closest to them. The family is most important in young children's lives because family members provide a continuous source of social contact, different experiences and expertise. As children grow older and into middle childhood, the peer group tends to become the main social context for development. Peers play a different role from that of the family and provide different experiences for children's social and cognitive growth. The role of peers is different from that of family members because interactions with peers are often more candid and equal than the interactions that occur in the family. I discuss these two social units in the next sections.

The enduring nature of the family and the asymmetrical relations between family members create a powerful and unique context for cognitive development. The strong emotional bonds between members can or may affect the quantity and quality of the cognitive transactions that occur within a family context and the setting. One of the primary roles of parents as the primary caregivers is to provide a nurturing and protective environment in which children may develop. In addition, parents influence children's cognitive skills through the behaviours that they model and the social experiences that they provide. Parents use interactive methods when they provide appropriate support and

explanations in communicating ideas and ways of thinking to their children. Parents present occasions for joint problem solving by directing their children's attention toward manageable sub goals. For example, in approaching a task such as building a model airplane, a parent and child may discuss what is needed in terms of materials, place to work, and time required carrying out the task. A parent can encourage a child to think of the steps that are necessary and how to work accordingly.

In addition to families, peer interaction is also vital to the cognitive development of children. As children grow older, peers assume greater importance in their lives. Emphasis is placed on the function of asymmetrical relationships. In the classroom, there are a number of interactions occurring between peers that can be most beneficial to their development. These interactions include collaborating in order to successfully complete a task, assuming assigned roles, acting as a sounding board for a peer, acting for an imaginary person, and acting as an expert or the novice. Most research on peer interaction from a Vygotskian perspective focuses on the influence and guidance of people who have achieved a level of expertise beyond that of the child. Vygotsky placed greater emphasis on the role of asymmetrical relationships such as relationships between adults and children. When Vygotsky did examine peer interactions, he looked at the way that a different understanding of the same topic would affect the learning that occurred.

Children who are advanced or derogated at school are younger than their classmates. In this study I questioned how asymmetrical relationships could enhance or encourage learning among these younger students. In addition, I questioned how these asymmetrical relationships can affect the development of the younger students' social skills.

Assessment and Zoped

The classical approach to the assessment of intellectual abilities presents a static model where an examiner elicits and records a child's behavioural indicators without directly influencing his cognitive level in any way. From a reductionist view of assessment, learning is reduced to scores on standardized tests. Standardized tests are often used to identify students who are having difficulty in school, but the results are only useful when they are interpreted properly and within the context of all of the child's experiences because the format of standard tests does not provide a qualitative interpretation of individual performances and skills. In her book entitled *Learning Denied,* Taylor (1991) showed the complexity of a child's learning when observations of his abilities did not concur with his standardized test results. Taylor showed how her observations of a child that contradict standardized test results should not be denied but can be used as a positive way to learn more about the child and his abilities. Taylor discussed the experiences of Patrick when he started showing some difficulty in school with reading and his journey through the testing procedures of the educational system.

> The myth of a learning disability was socially constructed by lawmakers, administrators, and teachers and by those who, through the production of inappropriate educational programs and tests, make education such a commercial enterprise. Within these contexts, no value has been placed upon Patrick's ability to create stories, or upon the risks he takes as he reinvents written language. Patrick the child is not important ... (Taylor, 1991, p.91)

Taylor demonstrated how the goal of the school system is to have students fit in and conform to a 'pattern' of learning. This book encourages us to question the generally accepted process of standardized testing. Persons who are responsible for the educational programs of all children should be made aware of alternative ways of assessing their

needs and strengths and considering the 'leaning potential' of each child. Taylor refuted the reductionist nature of standardized testing and proposed alternative ways of assessing where the focus is placed on that which a child can do, and not the deficit model where attention is placed on what a child cannot do.

Summary

In this study, the concept of the zone of proximal development or Zoped is explored. It will be interesting to see if children who were advanced into kindergarten have reached their optimal level of academic development. The concept of Zoped presents the idea that children develop their learning potential within a setting where they can learn alongside more capable peers and adults that provide the guidance and support. Since these children have more challenging opportunities in such a milieu, then the basic questions in this study remain: Does the advancement of younger children into kindergarten provide a more challenging and stimulating environment that accelerates their cognitive and learning development? Does the assistance that is provided to these younger students who have been advanced into kindergarten lead to their optimal level of learning potential?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Excerpt 1:

Olga: Are you pleased with the decision to advance your daughter?
Cathy: Oh my God yes. Very pleased, very pleased, 'Cause I feel that if we had kept her back, it would have been very – a disaster. She'd be bored. She, she's just like ...very much where she should be. Keeping her back a year, that would have been a very, very bad decision (Cathy, mother of Jenny, 12 years of age, September 2002).

This excerpt emerged from the interview that I conducted with Cathy, the parent of a student participant. Our conversational topic was derogation. Cathy and I were discussing how she felt about having advanced her daughter into kindergarten seven years ago. It was evident from Cathy's positive comments that her daughter was doing well in school, several years later. This parent was "very very pleased" with the results of her decision. In the second excerpt, a teacher named Pamela described her observations about the performance of students who were derogated and advanced into school. From Pamela's perspective, children who are granted early entry "... somewhere somehow they suffered". This teacher suggested that children who were advanced into kindergarten were at a disadvantage, especially on a social level.

Excerpt 2:

I would say that on average these children that are derogated ... somewhere somehow they suffered. Whether it was on a social level or, uh, academically. And sometimes it was more on a social level. (Pamela,a teacher, April 2002).

In this chapter, I provide additional relevant background to the derogation process in the province of Quebec, which I first presented in chapter one. I present the focus of my study into the phenomenon of derogation, articulate the research questions and explain my

research design - a case study methodology and the methods. I discuss the data collection process and the variety of sources, including interviews, observations, and journal entries.

Qualitative Case Study Approach

I drew on selected case studies from my private practice in order to investigate the phenomenon of derogation, which is still a controversial issue. A case study descriptive approach is appropriate for this study that aims to understand children's perceptions of being advanced in school. Yin defines a case study as an

> empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 1994, p. 13)

In this study, the contemporary phenomenon is that of derogation assessment in the province of Quebec. I interviewed three students from my practice: Abby, Judy, and Jenny, and their teachers and parents. Abby was 9 years of age and Judy and Jenny were 11 years old. I analyzed and interpreted these retrospective interviews in relation to my focus questions. My purpose was to examine how these three students were functioning academically, socially, and emotionally, five to seven years following the time of derogation. I accomplished this longitudinal study by locating the students in their respective schools and conducting interviews with them in their school environments.

In the first phase of data collection, I posed open-ended questions such as *"How would you describe your progress in school?"* to obtain important leads, and then modified the questions according to the information gathered. This modification of questions suggested that my focus of study would change accordingly. Important lead questions included asking the children how they felt about being among the youngest students in class, how they got along with their classmates, and how they thought that others perceived them. I queried the teachers about their perceptions of these individual children, how these students got along with their peers, and how they thought that these students perceived themselves. I

asked parents about their children's behaviours and attitudes outside of the school, how they were getting along with their friends and siblings, and how they believed that their children perceived themselves. The interview questions for students, parents, and teachers are included in the following sections.

Questions asked to the Students

I was interested in knowing more about the students' perceptions of themselves. I used questions to address issues regarding their academic progress and their relationships with peers. In terms of thematic content, I asked about their academic performance in an open-ended way, as to invite them to select the topics that were most important in their lives. For example, I asked: "*How would you describe your progress in school?*" Once we had established the direction of the conversation with the topics, I proceeded to pose questions with more detail. In terms of social development, I also started talking about social development by asking an open-ended question about their socializing with other students. For example, I asked: *"How are you getting along with the other students in your class?"* Following their responses, I gave more specific questions such as *"How many close friends do you have in your class?"* In doing so, the student was encouraged to think about her relationships with peers and the conversation proceeded this way.

How would you describe your progress in school?

Can you give me an example of your progress in school?

Do you know that you're one of the youngest students in the class?

How do you feel about being one of the youngest students in the class?

How are you getting along with the other students in your class?

Do you have many friends in your class?

How many close friends do you have in your class?

Do you have many friends outside of your class?

How many friends do you have outside of your class?

Do you have any questions?

Questions asked to the Teachers

I asked teachers a similar list of questions. Of the three selected students in this study, only one of their teachers agreed to take part. The other two teachers were teachers of the students who did not have the consent to participate in the study. These two teachers volunteered to take part nonetheless.

When I interviewed Judy's teacher Maggie, the questions were about her perceptions of Judy at school. The questions addressed Judy's behaviour in the classroom, her general progress in school, and her socializing skills when interacting with her peers.

Are you aware that _____ was derogated for early kindergarten entrance?

How would you describe _____'s progress in school this year?

Can you give me an example of _____'s progress in school?

How would you describe _____'s behaviour in class?

How does _____ get along with other students in the class?

When out for recess, how would you describe _____'s behaviour?

Does _____ have many friends in class?

Can you tell me how many?

Does _____ have many friends outside the class?

Can you tell me how many?

Do you have any questions?

When I interviewed Pamela and Melissa, the other two teachers whose students were not part of the study, I solicited their general observations of derogated students. I did not have the consent to interview the two selected students from their classrooms, so the questions I posed to Pamela and Melissa were adapted to general comments about the *phenomenon* of derogation. The questions were adapted as follows:

Are you familiar with the use of derogations in the province of Quebec?

Have you ever had students who were derogated in your classroom?

How would you generally describe the progress of derogated children in school?

Questions asked to the Parents

I also presented questions to the parents of the student participants. I selected these questions because I wanted to obtain the perceptions of these parents regarding their children's progress. Similar to the questions for the students and teachers, the questions for parents were related to the topic of the child's academic progress and socializing skills. However, the questions were also about the student's behaviour at home. The questions provided me with insight into the student's life outside of school.

How would you describe your child's progress in school?

Can you give me an example of _____'s progress in school?

How would you describe _____'s behaviour at home?

How many brothers and sisters does _____ have?

How would you describe _____'s relationship with them?

Does _____ have many friends?

Can you tell me how many?

Are these friends from school or outside of school?

Can you tell me the age of _____'s friends?

How would you describe _____'s behaviour when interacting with friends?

Do you have any questions?

Context of the Study

Role of the Researcher and Background

My motive for conducting this study stemmed from my personal interest as a clinician and researcher in knowing about the progress of children who have been derogated and their perceptions of the experience. Many studies of acceleration indicated that there was a relationship between age at school entrance and later school progress (Bigelow, 1934; Dickinson & Larson, 1963; Hall, 1963; Miller & Norris, 1967; DiPasquale, Moule & Flewelling, 1980 and Breznitz & Teltsch, 1989). However, most of these studies primarily examined the academic performance of students who advanced into school.

Over the past 17 years, I have worked as a psychologist and arranged a number of derogations for children whose parents requested their early entrance to school. My concern about making decisions for these children was not only about immediate school entry and ability to function at the kindergarten level, but about their performance as they grew older. Therefore, when children were brought to my office, I initially met with the parents to examine their personal reasons for accelerating school entrance for their children. The following is an excerpt from notes that I took following an interview with a parent, preceding a derogation assessment. This excerpt illustrates how it was important for me to understand the motive behind a request for acceleration of a pre-schooler into kindergarten.

Excerpt 3: Meeting Michelle and her parents

Michelle, her parents, and two brothers arrived at the office 10 minutes before the appointment. Michelle was 4 years of age, her brothers were 3 and 5 years old. Nancy, her mother, seemed nervous and agitated as she fretted over the children. Father tried to engage the boys in playing with the toys in the room, while mother

reassured her daughter. I invited one of the parents to enter the room with me with Michelle, while the boys stayed in the adjoining playroom area with the other parent. Nancy agreed to come in with Michelle and we spoke for a while. Nancy explained how hectic things were at home with all three children so close in age. The five year-old was starting kindergarten that upcoming fall, and parents were interested in advancing Michelle. Nancy had planned to return to her work in the fall, and it would be easier to manage things if two of the three were in school all day. (Meeting Michelle and her mother, Nancy, May 1999)

I was surprised by the number of parents like Michelle's who were interested in accelerating their children's entrance to school for their personal needs. Some parents were returning to their workplace and were looking for day care services for their young; or others simply wanted to boast about the precociousness of their children. In these cases, I observed that the needs and perspectives of the children were frequently not considered. I also observed on many occasions how some parents expressed disappointment if I did not support their plans to advance their children. The following excerpt from the original file of a pre-schooler I had seen for assessment provides another example when I did not recommend a child for advancement.

Excerpt 4: Meeting Steven and his parents

Steven entered the testing room and was only interested in playing. It was difficult for Steven to sit still and focus. He wanted to return to the play area in the next room, ran out several times, and said that he was tired. After several attempts to engage his attention and participation, I decided to escort him to the adjoining room where his mother, Terry, was waiting. She seemed a little uncomfortable and explained that Steven was an active child. The letter from his pre-school teacher described Steven as having a positive attitude in school but needing some improvement with his attention span, completing tasks, listening skills, and fine-motor abilities. He needed help in following directions and had difficulty with basic mathematical concepts. She did not recommend that he be derogated for early admission. I suggested that the parents allow him the time to develop these skills within the upcoming year, and that he would enter kindergarten at the time originally set for him, at 5 years of age ... (Observation of Steven, a child, February 1998).

From their performance during the assessment, some children like Steven were clearly not ready to start kindergarten classes. In this particular case I felt that this child should be older and possibly more prepared to participate in a classroom setting. In such

cases, I explained to the parents the advantages of waiting one extra year before admitting their children to kindergarten. These advantages included an opportunity for them to spend more time with other children in a social context such as a day care or pre-school setting, where socialization skills were of primary importance to the their development. This would allow children like Steven to experience periods of separation from their parents. Consequently these children could feel more prepared to deal with the basic demands of kindergarten class where academic learning would begin in earnest. However, I still met parents who asked to advance their youngsters into school with their personal needs in mind. I discussed the concept of readiness with them, and how some children would not be successful until they had reached a requisite level of development. The Ministry of Education of Quebec used the term 'requisite skills' as part of the criteria set for the assessment of children's abilities, in order to qualify for advancement into kindergarten. I explained that children might experience difficulties in their academic careers if they were advanced into school before they were developmentally ready. I also gave parents examples of situations where students were over-placed or advanced into kindergarten when they were younger but not ready, and how their teachers found them to be distractive, impulsive, emotionally unpredictable, lazy, and dependent. An example regarding early school entrance was illustrated in the following excerpt with Tommy and his mother Alice.

Excerpt 5: Meeting Tommy and his Parents

Tommy was 4 years and 4 months, but seemed small for his age, and more like a three-year old. He was shy and stayed very close to his mother, Alice. Alice was also petite. His birthday was at the end of December, and he had started to attend pre-school classes for two half-days a week, only four months before our meeting. Previously, Tommy had stayed with his grandparents while Alice was at work. It was difficult for Tommy to leave his mother's side. Given that he was born at the end of the calendar year, was very small of physique, and his general behaviour at our meeting, I suggested that Tommy not be considered for early entrance that year. Rather, he should be allowed to enter pre-kindergarten classes at the same school

> *and experience a successful year there before starting kindergarten the following year. (Interview with Tommy and his mother Alice, April 1996)*

It was apparent to me that Tommy was young for his age because of his physical appearance and clinging behaviour toward his mother. Tommy's mother and I discussed his age and the start of school; he would be 4 years and 8 months old and not 5 years of age at the time of entrance. I suggested that Tommy attend pre-school instead. This year in pre-school would give him the experience of socializing with other children on a regular daily basis and the opportunity to mature, along with his peers. His mother agreed with this option. We discussed the arrangements to be made for pre-kindergarten classes at a neighbourhood school. At this point, Tommy's mother explained that she had only taken the appointment with me because a friend had suggested it.

I am an educational psychologist who became a member of the Corporation of Psychologists (OPQ) in 1985, and I have worked in the province of Quebec since that time. Over the years, I have been actively working as psychologist in a variety of settings, including the position as school psychologist in a regional school board where I was involved with assessment, evaluation, and programme development for students with special needs. I worked as a consulting psychologist in a Montreal learning centre, where my tasks were similar to those at the school board. However, the difference at the learning centre was the greater amount of time that was permitted for each client and family. At the school board, there were constant time constraints and student assessments were often compromised in terms of depth and individual attention. I also participated in the interview and assessment of children and families in the department of Behavioural Paediatrics in a clinical milieu of the Montreal Children's Hospital. This position involved follow-up therapy and counselling with many of the individuals who were

assessed there. In addition, I have worked in private practice and been successful with assessments and counselling in this setting.

Between 1990 and 1996, I worked as a psychologist in my private practice. My clients were children between pre-school and high-school age. I was responsible for psychological and educational assessments, consultations with the parents and families, school visits, and individual follow-ups. The assessments were conducted in an office milieu. The office was independent of any clinical establishment or educational setting, and located in a private residence. I ran this practice on a part-time basis. As part of my work, I prepared a file on every child that came to my office for consultation. In every file, there was a psychological report describing the results of any assessments done of the child, the relevant test protocols that were used, notes that I had written about interviews and observations from individual sessions, background information on the child that was taken during the interview with parents, and other relevant data (see Appendix F for Test Protocol).

When children were seen for derogation assessments, the personal file included the test protocols taken from the Wechsler Pre-School and Primary Scale for Intelligence (WPPSI-R), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Beery-Buktenica Test of Visual Motor Integration. Also included were drawings that the children made of themselves and other family members. When available, initial writing samples were also included in the file (see Appendix G for drawing samples and Appendix H for a writing sample). In addition to the test results and notes on individual sessions, the files also included observational notes that I took when I saw the children outside of the office setting. For the derogation assessments, I often made visits to observe children in day

care and pre-school settings. These visits allowed me to observe the children as they interacted with their peers in different environments. These visits were crucial to the evaluation process; in retrospect, I could see the value of these qualitative observations and the importance they held for learning about the children in a social milieu.

As a personal reflection, I would continue to use some of the assessment instruments in my work because they are valuable tools for finding the particular strengths and needs of a child. However, I would also look beyond the test results and examine the way that children are able to learn and how much more they can actually learn 'in the potential'.

Development Defined and the Concept of Readiness

Development refers to a progressive change in shape, organization and functioning of an organism, and the functioning of this organism from birth to death. Gage (1997, p. 427) defines development as: "progression through successive stages by a natural process of growth and change". There are many factors or conditions that can influence the emotional, intellectual, social, physical, and language development of a child. These include parental attitudes and stimulation, learning experiences, recreational activities, peer relationships, and hereditary predispositions. Development is evaluated according to developmental tasks and observations of peer relationships, day-to-day activities, cognitive ability, and academic adjustment.

Hammond's (1986) qualitative study recounted the trying experience of a child who was advanced into kindergarten. This child, Harry, was evidently not ready to deal with the demands of kindergarten because of the unacceptable behaviours he demonstrated in class and at home. He was 4 years, 10 months at the time of school entrance and his birth date was October 17th. During his stay in the kindergarten, Harry did not participate in most of the

activities and was very distracted in class. He had difficulty following instructions and concentrating on tasks. Harry's frustrations with the demands of school increased on a day-to-day basis. His parents' disapproval further aggravated his behaviour at home and he developed symptoms such as secondary enuresis. After seven weeks, Harry's parents decided to pull him out of the kindergarten class and return him to the nursery school where he enjoyed the balance of his pre-kindergarten year. Hammond (1986) argued that development could not be taught or rushed.

One of the issues in Hammond's study was whether or not development should be taught or accelerated. In light of Vygotsky's theory of human development presented in chapter two, the encouragement offered to the child in his kindergarten class should have helped him reach his optimal potential. The zone of proximal development assumes that within the classroom setting, this optimal level of development is attainable with the appropriate assistance from capable individuals like teachers and more competent peers. Recall that Vygotsky coined the term 'zone of proximal development' or Zoped to mean the difference between a child's *"actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving (and the higher level of) potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Zoped is thus defined as the situation where more capable participants structure the interactions so that children or novices can participate in activities that they could not otherwise do on their own. In the application of Vygotsky's work to education, the role of the 'social other' such as a teacher, more capable peer or adult is often presented as a helpful one with positive outcomes in a child's future advancement. Linkages between social contexts and an individual's performance are usually described as positive and educationally progressive. However, it is distinctly possible that under certain circumstances, placing

educational interventions ahead of the developmental possibilities such as the Zoped can result in harmful results and detrimental effects on a child. This consideration applies to the derogation and advancement of pre-school children into kindergarten. By advancing these younger children into kindergarten, is there any possibility of harm to their actual academic and personal development? Can the assumption be made that children who are advanced will have a positive experience because they are learning in a group that is composed of older and perhaps more capable peers, teachers, and other adults?

Another issue emerging from Hammond's study was whether or not a child like the one presented in the study should have been assessed for a developmental assessment before advancing him into school. Perhaps an evaluation of his actual abilities may have prevented the unnecessary frustrations that this child and his parents experienced. In Hammond's (1986) study, there was no indication that Harry had been assessed to determine how ready he was to start school. If someone had observed his behaviour in different contexts and evaluated his actual skills, would the same decisions about advancing him have been made? In addition, this study pointed to a more general question about whether all younger students should be assessed before starting school. This question is related to my study on the assessment of children for the purpose of derogation in the province of Quebec. Thus, a further question arises: Does the screening of children by means of the derogation procedure ensure that these children who are granted early entrance do reach their optimal learning potential as a result of the decision to advance? I am interested in pursuing this issue in this study because it deals with the pros and cons of advancing children into school at a younger age.

A unique element of my study on derogation was that the children who were advanced were selected through a screening procedure and perceived to be *ready,* prepared, or equipped to start school. As previously mentioned in the initial chapters, the Ministry of

Education of Quebec established the readiness requirements for early entry to kindergarten. The criteria clearly outlined the requirements to be met by the children who were considered for advancement. Usually, readiness assumes that children pass through the same sequence of stages but at different rates. However, this assumption is now challenged in education and certainly by socio-cultural theorists who embrace a Vygotskian view of human development.

Readiness is generally used to describe preparation for what comes next. Developmental readiness in education refers to a student's state of psychological and intellectual preparedness for a given task, a subject, or grade level. However, whenever levels of accomplishment are used to define readiness, the variability amongst children presents difficulty in finding a definition that is generally acceptable to all children in all contexts. In traditional developmental theory, four concepts of readiness are proposed: idealist-nativist, empiricist-environmental, social constructivist, and interactionist (Meisels, 1999).

In the *idealist-nativist* view of readiness, children are ready to start school when they reach a level of maturity that enables them to sit quietly, focus on their work, interact with their peers, and follow directions. Development is only slightly affected by external forces, and learning and behaviour are affected by endogenous factors. From this nativist or maturational perspective, individual children mature at different rates and children who are immature are at risk for school failure. For those who embrace this point of view, a child is believed to be ready for school on an individual basis, and his actual readiness is determined by his performance on readiness tests. Thus, the best way to prevent failure would be to provide more time for the child to mature. This is made possible by delaying a child's entry into kindergarten.

In contrast to this view, developmental theories emphasize that children are ready to learn when the content of what is to be learned and the way that it is taught is appropriate to the children's developmental capabilities (Piaget, 1950). From this perspective, learning

comes from the interaction of the child's individual abilities with the environment. This includes children's interactions and collaborations with adults and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). For those who adopt this point of view, kindergarten programmes are designed to provide experiences that are appropriate for every child in the class (Meisels, 1992). This *interactionist* view incorporates information about the child and that of the environment where the child is raised and taught. From this perspective, readiness is a concept that goes in two directions because it focuses on children's learning and the capacity of schools to meet their individual needs. In this view, the child's activity can change the expectations of the environment, even as the environment is affecting the learning of the child. The interactionist perspective on readiness reflects a joint focus on the child's importance and the characteristics of the educational setting. Readiness is thus defined as the product of a set of educational decisions that are shaped by different skills, experiences, and learning opportunities of the child, and the perspectives and goals of the classroom and the teacher. For instance, readiness for kindergarten involves both the child and the instructional situation. Therefore, any preparation for a child to be successful in kindergarten will need to take into account a kindergarten program and a teacher's expectations of a child. In an American state-wide survey, McLanahan (1998) attempted to gauge the generally accepted characteristics that defined young children's readiness for kindergarten. The following developmental dimensions were addressed: physical well being, language usage, approaches toward learning, cognition and general knowledge, motor development, and social and emotional development.

Recent practices in early childhood education have included a move away from readiness testing by suggesting new forms of assessment, away from the IQ-like tasks and more toward a portfolio of performance, observation of skills, and record keeping.

The purpose of testing is no longer to make inferences about the child's abilities or to make readiness placements available, but rather, *"the assessment is intended to guide student learning along continua of increasing proficiency"* (Shepard, 1997, p. 96). The format is based more on the direct evidence of students' abilities to perform tasks in the normal instructional content. An example of such a task is to appraise the child's ability to retell a story that is read to him, or his facility to tell what comes next.

Gaining Access to the Participants

I first obtained permission from the school board to conduct my study. In order to do this, I contacted the person responsible for research and development in the school board and arranged a meeting to speak with him. At the meeting on December 18th 2000, we discussed the topic of my study. When I met with Mr. Ross (pseudonym), I gave him a copy of my research proposal describing my research interest. This proposal included the focal questions and described the methodology for collecting data in the schools. Mr. Ross asked that I prepare a document for the school board with all the details of my research plans, and to submit this to the school board in writing.

> *Excerpt 6: Meeting Mr. Ross at the school board*
>
> *I met Mr. Ross in his office at the main building of this English school board, and the meeting was very casual. It was the first time that I had met Ross, and he welcomed me there. We took a few minutes to talk about our backgrounds and he was interested in knowing that I had worked for the school board as a psychologist eleven years ago. We discussed staff changes that occurred in the psychology department since that time. We went over the proposal I had prepared for my study and Mr. Ross wrote down some notes as I explained. He asked questions about the methodology of the study, such as how many students I would need for my study, and how long I would be in the schools to conduct the interviews. I left a copy of my proposal with Mr. Ross. He explained that he would discuss my proposal with the other members of the research committee and get back to me with an appointment to meet with them as well. (Meeting with Mr. Ross at the school board, December 18th, 2001)*

Within two weeks, the secretary of Mr. Ross contacted me and asked that I present my proposal to the research panel on January 21, 2002. When I met with the research

committee I was asked questions about my research plans. The chairman of this committee told me that someone would contact me regarding their decision. A few days later, I received a phone call confirming their acceptance of my research proposal. The next step included approving my proposal at the following school board meeting. School commissioners and other members of the board voted on accepting the research to be conducted in their school board. The proposal was passed on February 6, 2002 at the meeting of commissioners.

Once my study had been approved at the school board level, my next step was to locate the student participants in their respective schools. I selected 12 student participants from different schools. I contacted each of the 12 school principals by phone and introduced myself and the research study. I asked for the principals' permission to conduct my interviews in their schools. After a telephone conversation with the principals, I followed up the conversations with a letter mailed out to each of them, describing the research study.

Once the principals had agreed to have the study conducted in their schools I was ready to approach the teachers and parents of the students to ask for their individual consent to participate in the study. In addition to a letter for the principals, I sent out two letters to each of the selected schools; one addressed to the homeroom teacher of the individual students, and the other sent home with the selected students for their parents to read and sign for consent. In each letter I described my study, outlined the benefits and possible risks in agreeing to participate, mentioned the element of confidentiality of the findings, and provided information about my background as a researcher (see Appendix I for letter). With this letter I included the informed consent form, which provided a statement emphasizing how their participation was fully voluntary and how the results would be shared with the participants at the end of the study. Further ethical obligations toward the participants included my intention of being fair in my use of the findings and asking their permission to record their responses

by using an audio tape recorder. If they agreed to take part in my study, I requested that they sign the consent form.

When the teachers and parents agreed to take part in the study, I followed up with a telephone call. In the telephone conversations, I detected that the individuals who volunteered their time demonstrated a genuine interest in the study. This interest was evident to me by the questions that the teachers and parents asked regarding derogation. For example, Jenny's mother, Cathy, asked details regarding procedures and the number of children seen in my study. She also asked how students who were derogated were performing after several years in school. Notes from my reflective journal provided examples of the telephone conversations that I had with parents and teachers. The parents generally asked how other derogated children were doing in school. They also expressed personal concerns about their children who had been advanced. The following excerpt is from my journal notes where I described the first telephone conversation with a parent of one of the student participants. Jenny's mother, Cathy, was responsive and supportive of the study and gladly offered her time to participate in an interview.

> *I called Cathy and we spoke for some time ... she was enthusiastic about my research, asked questions about it, like how many kids, etc., and told me how interested Jenny was in participating in the research ... (Notes from my journal, June 17th 2002)*

Selection of Participants for the Study

Three derogated students are selected

I selected three students who had been derogated to be participants in this study. The initial group of selected participants consisted of 12 children whose ages were 10 or 11 years, and attending grades 4, 5, or 6. There were four boys and eight girls in the initial group of 12 children. Each child attended a different school and all were students in an English Montreal school board. From these 12 students who were initially selected, three students had parental

consent to take part in this study; Abby, Jenny, and Judy. These three students were selected because they were the ones who had volunteered out of the 12 possible candidates. The other nine students were not included in the study because their parents did not give the consent for them to participate. The following excerpt from my journal describes a meeting with the parent of a child who was originally selected for the study but not given consent.

Excerpt 7: Meeting a parent at a fundraiser

I was at a fundraiser for my daughter's school and met Mrs Boyd there. I remembered meeting her six years before for her son's derogation assessment. He was now in grade five, and one of the students I had selected to be part of my study. Mrs. Boyd had received my letter about the study and asking for parental consent to have her son participate. We chatted for a while and she told me that she had not given consent for him to participate because he was very shy. She told me that she would speak to him again and get back to me if there was a change. I sensed from our brief conversation that she was uncomfortable about participating, perhaps not only the child. (Meeting Mrs. Boyd at a fundraiser, April 20, 2002)

The teachers are asked to participate

As part of this study, the children's current homeroom teachers were asked to participate as well. The teachers were considered to be another primary source in providing information on the children's academic and social progress because they had regular daily contact with them. The teachers offered more general perspectives that were probably based on their years of teaching experiences with students in their classes and derogated children in particular. I could see that these teachers were committed to the issue and showed interest in contributing to this research topic. The next excerpts from my journal described one teacher's reactions to my request for her to participate in the study.

Excerpt 8:

In our telephone conversation, Pamela was enthusiastic and supportive regarding my study. She said that we could talk for as long as we needed, if we were to meet at the end of her school day. (Journal notes on phone conversation, April 25, 2002)

The topic of derogation was of particular interest to Pamela because she had considered it for her daughter ten years earlier. At that time, Pamela's daughter had been referred to me for a derogation assessment but did not qualify for early entrance into school. I suggested that she attend a pre-school programme where she could obtain some experience in socializing with other children her age, and that she would enter kindergarten in the following year when she would be 5 years of age. Although originally reluctant to accept that proposal, Pamela was now very pleased with the results of this decision because her daughter was thriving academically and socially. I recorded the following notes in my journal: "... *perhaps her personal experience explains Pamela's interest in this topic. In any event, she was very aware of the process of derogation and its implications on children." (Journal notes, May 7, 2002)*

The parents are asked to participate

The parents of the selected derogated students were also asked to participate because they could provide information about their children's overall development. In addition, parents could provide other insight into their children's lives outside of the classroom. The literature indicates that the experiences of children at home and in the school help develop a positive self-concept (Katz, 1987; Plucker & Taylor, 1998). I aimed to examine how the derogated children were developing in both the cognitive and affective domains. The cognitive domain referred to all forms of knowing and awareness such as the ability to reason, to judge, and to plan. The affective domain pertained to feelings, emotions, and moods (Corsini, 1999).

The parents described the children's behaviours and interests at home and in other settings with family and friends. These conversations with parents gave me an opportunity to understand the children within different contexts. These examples illustrate the types of interactions I had with the parents of the students participating in the study.

Excerpt 9:

Olga: What activities is Jenny involved with outside of school?
Cathy: Ballet jazz. She loves it ... we mostly do family things. We go bicycling every week. Usually Saturdays ...At home, she wants to be a teacher. She has boards and she draws in her spare time. She gives her sister word searches ... (Interview with Jenny's mother, Cathy, September 2002)

In this first example, Cathy talked about the variety of activities that her daughter Jenny enjoyed outside of school. In this excerpt, Cathy emphasized that weekends were a special time for their family and they did many things together. Cathy's comments suggested that she and her husband were involved in many activities with their children. Mother also suggested that she and her husband were aware of Jenny's excellent progress in school since she was advanced into kindergarten. In the second example, I interviewed Laura, Abby's mother.

Excerpt 10:

Olga: What does Abby like to play with (at home)?
Laura: She used to play with dolls. Her tutus are everything. Her dolls, no. The Barbie thing has been gone a long time ago. She's got 20 Barbie's. Sometimes I say does she play enough? Abby has less time than her sister did. But Abby does skate and socialise and play a lot. The coach makes sure that they have fun. (Interview with Abby's mother Laura, April 2002)

Laura mentioned that Abby did not play as her sister had done at the same age. However, Laura did explain that Abby was very busy with other activities and sports, and perhaps she did not have the time or interest to play. I felt that Laura wanted me to know how busy her daughter was by describing in detail all the activities that she was involved with outside of school. It was also important for her to explain how Abby had outgrown her dolls. Abby's lack of interest in toys and dolls was a topic that Laura brought up several times during the interview session and somewhat of a recurring theme.

Data Sources

In this next section, I describe the data sources that I collected for my study. These included three interviews with each of the three students, one with each of the three homeroom teachers and one with a parent of each child, observations of the three students in the school setting, and information from documents available to me such as field notes and journal entries.

Data Collection Process

I collected interview data from the students, teachers, and parents between the period of April 3rd and September 17th, 2002. I met the three students for their interviews in their respective schools. I scheduled three separate interviews with each of these students; Abby, Jenny and Judy. I arranged one interview with each of the three teachers in this study and met them in their schools, according to their individual schedules and availability. The two parents who volunteered to take part were seen outside of the school setting. One parent met me at her workplace during work hours and the other parent invited me to her home, where we had the interview after work one evening.

I conducted a total of 14 interviews. The interviews ran between 20 to 30 minutes for the student participants and the teachers, and 30-40 minutes for each of the two parents. Table 5 includes the interview schedule from the months of April to September 2002, for all of the participants.

Table 3

Interview Schedule between April and September 2002

Interview	Person	Date
Interview 1	Jenny (child 1)	April 3
Interview 2	Abby (child 1)	April 9
Interview 3	Jenny (child 2)	April 10
Interview 4	Abby (child 2)	April 23
Interview 5	Jenny (child 3)	April 24
Interview 6	Abby (child 3)	April 29
Interview 7	Pamela (teacher)	May 9
Interview 8	Melissa (teacher)	May 14
Interview 9	Judy (child 1)	May 23
Interview 10	Judy (child 2)	May 28
Interview 11	Judy (child 3)	June 4
Interview 12	Maggie (teacher)	June 6
Interview 13	Laura (parent)	June 14
Interview 14	Cathy (parent)	September 17

Interviews with Student Participants

I conducted three interviews with each student participant. In the first interview I asked semi-directed questions in order to get a sense of what was generally going on in their lives. The following are examples of the types of questions I asked the student participants:

How would you describe your progress in school?

Can you give me an example of your progress in school?

Do you know that you're one of the youngest students in the class?

How do you feel about being one of the youngest students in the class?

These open-ended questions allowed the students an opportunity to present the topics that were important to them. From the responses that the children gave in the first interviews, I asked more focused questions in the second and third interviews. The purpose of interviewing students who were derogated was to understand how they perceived themselves in their present school contexts.

The following excerpt from the first of three interviews with Judy focused on the topic of making friends and provided an example of my interviewing style and interactions with her.

Excerpt 11:

Olga: Is it easy for you to make friends?
Judy: I don't know. Like, I remember when I did that in grade one.
Olga: How was it?
Judy: A bit hard. I don't know.
Olga: Can you tell me why?
Judy: I was, like, nervous, and you know, like, I was shy.
Olga: You were younger then, so how would it be now?
Judy: Well, now I'm older and probably it's gonna be easier.
Olga: Why do you think it would be easier?
Judy: Uh, 'cause I'm older and ... I'm not as shy like I was before.
(Judy: June 4, 2002)

Judy mentioned her difficulty with shyness and how this affected her ability to make new friends when she was in grade one. However, Judy perceived that there was growth and change in her approach to making new friends and how it is should be easier for her to make friends now that she was older.

Interviews with TeacherParticipants

I invited the homeroom teachers of the three participating students to also take part in this study. I was interested in obtaining their perceptions of the students who had been derogated and advanced into school at a younger age. I sent out consent forms to the homeroom teachers of the three selected derogated students but only one of the three teachers, Maggie, agreed to participate because of a work- to-rule policy that was in effect at the time. However, two teachers of derogated students who were not in the study agreed to participate in the interviews as well. Pamela and Melissa were both homeroom teachers of students originally selected as possible participants in my study. Their students did not take part in the study because they had not received parental consent, but these teachers agreed to participate nonetheless. I felt that their input was valuable and so I included their comments in my study, even if their statements were general and not in reference to any particular child.

At the time of my data collection, a work-to-rule policy was in effect at the school board and teachers decided to boycott a number of work related activities as a result. The teachers' association decided to put pressure on the government because of the teachers' salary equity dossier, and adopted an action plan that was effective between the period of November 14, 2001 and May 28, 2002. The action plan outlined a number of points that described the work-to-rule policy. Essentially, teachers would not participate in activities beyond their basic teaching responsibilities. Outside of the classroom, teachers would only attend basic staff meetings and parent-teacher meetings.

I contacted the teachers' union and asked for a written document describing this policy (see Appendix J for a copy of the letter received from the Montreal Teachers Association). The action plan affected the teaching environment because the teachers were not participating in activities that went beyond their hours of instruction in class every day.

These activities included sports and other after-school projects that were normally included in a teacher's workday.

The three students who were selected for my study were from three different schools and the work-to-rule policy was in effect in all three schools. However, the teacher who did accept to participate did so regardless of existing conditions and the prevailing political climate. Maggie, Judy's teacher, expressed interest in the study and volunteered her time for the interview. This action suggested that she believed her contribution could help in the research findings. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I interviewed Maggie with a semi-structured interview. My purpose in interviewing the teachers was to obtain their perspectives on the student participants and to compare these perspectives with statements made by the students themselves. Here is an excerpt of an interview with Melissa, another teacher participant.

Excerpt 12:

Olga: can you tell me if you find that there are generally any differences in these children (who have been derogated) vis-a- vis social skills?
Melissa: Generally speaking, uh, there are differences. The children who are derogation cases are usually, uh, in terms of their social skills, uh, socially immature, compared to the rest of the group. (Interview with Melissa, grade six teacher, May 14th 2002)

Apart from these three interviews with teachers, an informal conversation took place with another teacher, Sandra. She had decided to respect the work-to-rule policy and to not participate in the actual study. However, she took a few minutes and spoke to me about Jenny who was the derogated student in her class. Briefly, Sandra said that Jenny was doing very well in school, and described her family as being very involved and supportive of Jenny's progress in school. The parents participated in the Jenny's academic growth, and Jenny was evidently doing well in school. Sandra also portrayed Jenny as a student who was very busy with school activities and popular with her friends.

Interviews with the Parent Participants

I also asked the parents of the three students to participate in this study. Two of the parents agreed and one could not make the appointments because of work schedules, so we spoke on the phone briefly. As previously mentioned in this chapter, I used a semi-structured interview with the two parents who participated. My purpose for interviewing the parents was to obtain their perspectives on the progress of their children, and to compare these perspectives with statements made by the children themselves. The following excerpt from an interview with a parent provides an example of my interviewing approach with parents. I asked leading questions and then decided what the next question would be according to the parents' responses. This approach gave me an opportunity to see what was of significance to the parents and as they perceived their children. This parent seemed preoccupied with her daughter's friendship patterns and social experiences at school.

Excerpt 13:

Olga: Does Abby have a lot of friends?
Laura: Yeah, she's got a lot of friends, uh; she's got a lot of friends at school. She says she tends to stick around mainly with the same people a lot. You know, like in her class, you know she's in a split class, huh?
Olga: Yes, I do.
Laura: And, uh, there's only 8 kids in that class that are from grade four.
Olga: Does she get along with them all?
Laura: She gets along with them all. They have, you know, little fights, girl fights, that we've all gone through that I've learned, I tend to ignore because you know, the day after it's finished... In skating she has a few friends, not as many as I thought she would have. (Excerpt from interview with Abby's mother, Laura: June 14, 2002)

The following excerpt was taken from an interview transcript and illustrates how Abby perceived her academic performance and social development.

Excerpt 14:

Olga: How are you doing in reading?
Abby: I'm doing better than the other years.
Olga: Were you having trouble with reading the other years?
Abby: Yeah. But now I read at my house, so it's not bad any more ....

Olga: How do you feel about being the youngest in your class?
Abby: Good. Sometimes people say, like, "I'm older than you so you have to listen to me."
Olga: And how does that feel when they say that to you?
Abby: Um ... not really nice. (First interview with Abby, April 2002).

In the next sections, I describe the procedures that I used for the interviews. I conducted individual audio taped interviews with all the participants. I had the audiotapes transcribed into text and then categorized the data by identifying information that was relevant to the acknowledged themes. These 'chunks' of information varied in length from single words to entire paragraphs *(See Appendix L for memoing of themes).* The following passages from Judy's interview illustrate examples of information that were pertinent to the themes of social-emotional development and self-esteem.

Olga: Are you involved in any sports or anything like that?
Judy: No. I just mostly, like, talk. I mostly stay home when I come back from school, because like, I have no people near my house.

Judy: I'm nervous a little.
Olga: What are you nervous about?
Judy: Like, uh. It's gonna be harder. Uh, teachers are gonna give more homework, and it's gonna be hard to learn. (Interview with Judy, May25th, 2002)

As the data was collected, the categories were revised and the understanding and interpretation of the data evolved. During the process of data collection, I was able to focus more on the categories and concepts at play. From this, I developed preliminary themes based on the categories. In this case-oriented analysis, I highlighted the themes and patterns that recurred with every student. I reviewed my concepts as I selected new units of meaning, compared them to other identified units, and then grouped them together. If there were no similar patterns or connections, then a new category was formed. Initial categories were changed, merged, or even omitted. When new categories

were created, new relationships were formed. Once the grouping was defined, I organized the data and synthesized into emerging patterns.

The two general foci in this study were academic performance and social-emotional development. Positive and negative issues of self-esteem and friendship patterns emerged within these categories.

Figure 1:

Topics emerging from the data

- Academic performance of derogated students
  - Academic results affect self-esteem
- Social-emotional development of derogated students
  - Socialization issues affect self-esteem
- Friendship patterns

Number of friends

- In school
  - Best friends
  - Sharing interests
- Outside of school
  - Other involvements

Peer acceptance

- Affected by the relationships with friends
- Issue of being the youngest in class

Dynamics of friendship groups

- Power struggles
- Bullying

Parental involvement

Observations as Data

Observations were a second form of data. In the next sections I describe the three school settings and review the methods used for observing Abby, Jenny and Judy in their

respective schools. I conducted on-site observations of the three students in their classrooms or outside in the schoolyard during recess time. The three students attended three different schools. All of the schools were part of the same English language school board, in the metropolitan area of the city of Montreal. In the following description of the schools, pseudonyms are provided.

Description of Schools

Abby's school

Abby attended a new school that had only been operating as Gateview Elementary School since September 2000. This school previously functioned as an adult vocational centre and now re-opened its doors as an elementary school, in order to service the growing number of elementary students in the community. This school accommodated approximately 250 children and offered a French immersion programme where students received 50 percent of their instruction in English and 50 percent in French. During the time that I was visiting this school, the construction of a new gymnasium was in progress.

Jenny's school

Jenny attended Brantford School, which was situated in a quiet neighbourhood in the east end of Montreal. The philosophy of this school was to promote respect for the multilingual nature of the community, and to advocate mutual respect for authority and respect among students. In this way, students learned to appreciate the traditions and contributions of its many cultures. The heritage programme (PELO) was part of the school curriculum and students had the opportunity to learn Italian as another subject. Jenny, who was of Polish background, had taken Italian class for several years and she was able to carry on a conversation in Italian as well.

The PELO was created to improve students' knowledge of their heritage language and to give greater depth to a pupil's understanding of human experience by fostering an appreciation of the culture. By promoting the heritage language and culture within a formal programme, schools recognized alternative ways of expression and the value of their cultures. Moreover, in the future, knowledge of another language could give students a competitive advantage in the workplace by opening up additional opportunities.

Judy's school

Judy attended Dillon's School. This school had been open for several decades and was located in an older east end community. Dillon's School was housed in a large two-storey building and approximately 450 students attended this school. The school offered a bilingual English and French program from kindergarten to grade 6 and included up to 50 percent French instruction.

Documents as Data

Document analysis was a third tool of qualitative research used in this study. These documents included written texts that were prepared for personal use, journal entries, memos, letters, and field notes. There was data available on the three student participants from the first time I had seen them in private practice, five to seven years before. Since I was the psychologist who had formerly done the derogation assessments, the original files were available to me.

The analysis of data started during the period of data collection and continued through several phases before it was completed. While interviewing the participants, I kept notes in a separate research journal. I used this journal to integrate my thoughts and impressions of the data collected. After every interview, meeting or telephone call with

an individual who was part of my study, I wrote out notes and impressions in this reflective journal. These notes included my interpretation of interviews, the inferences made from observations, the description of theoretical concepts, and the review of relevant literature topics. This enabled me to keep a dated account of all the activities that occurred, and in sequence. My reflections of conversations gave me an opportunity to review what was said and interpret the conversation according to the cues and details that were noted in my writing.

Analysis of the Data

I looked for patterns and themes that emerged from the data by comparing the passages from the text and examining statements that the participants made about academic performance and social-emotional development. I proceeded to read through the passages closely and identified statements as academic or social-emotional. Within these two areas I noted the presence of positive and negative comments that appeared as word units, phrases or sentences. After further examination of the text, I created categories of positive and negative statements. These unit clusters were arranged into categories according to individual participants. Examples of the positive comments made by each participant are illustrated in Table 7. Examples of negative comments follow in Table 8.

The positive comments suggested that all three students were doing well as far as academic performance and general social skills. The types of comments made were not exclusive to a younger group of students. The negative comments were more specific and they could be used to highlight certain features common to this group of students who were younger. Even in the academic area where these students were successful, there was a sense of uncertainty in their performance or expectations of their work.

Comments from the social and emotional domain suggested a lack of self-confidence among the three participating students.

Table 7: Examples of positive comments made by the participants

Participant	*Academic performance*	*Social-emotional issues*
Abby	I'm doing better	I feel good because I'm younger
Abby's mother Laura	She is an excellent reader	She's got a lot of friends
Jenny	My marks are very high	I have a title for being youngest
Jenny's mother Cathy	She's very focused	She stands up for the underdog
Judy	Everything's fine	I have two best friends
Judy's teacher Maggie	As they get older maturity levels out	She has 3 or 4 good friends
Melissa a teacher	(none)	(none)
Pamela a teacher	They seem able to tackle the program	Some are socially accepted

Table 8: Examples of negative comments made by the participants:

Participant	*Academic performance*	*Social-emotional issues*
Abby	Reading. …	In school I have no one to talk to
Abby's mother Laura	Homework …she likes to waste time	She's bossy and nervous
Jenny	None	Sometimes we don't have the same interests
Jenny's mother Cathy	At first she wanted straight A's; she got a ' B' and that was traumatic	None
Judy	I'm nervous a little	My parents don't have time to drive me
Judy's teacher Maggie	She always asks if things are all right	She has a low self-esteem
Melissa, a teacher	They have difficulty sitting in their seats a long time	They may not be interested in the same things
Pamela, a teacher	Some of them are insecure	Never sure of themselves

I was originally interested in exploring the impact of derogation on the students who were part of the study. As they described experiences to me during the interviews, I recognized the significance of socialization issues in their fulfillment of academic and social accomplishments. The interviews provided insight into their feelings of self-esteem and friendship patterns, and interviews with parents and teachers supported these patterns. The topics of self-esteem and friendship recurred over the course of the interviews. I proceeded to group the data according to these two basic themes of self-esteem and friendship and in terms of academic performance and socialization issues. I created matrices to highlight the main themes for each participant, and according to positive and negative comments. The following matrix has examples of the comments that Abby made for each identified theme. It highlights Abby's positive and negative comments on these four themes.

Table 9: Example of a matrix with basic themes

Student's name	THEME	THEME	THEME	THEME
Abby	Academic performance	Social Emotional Development	Self-Esteem	Friendship Patterns
Positive Concepts	She's doing better because she studied more	She gets along with her best friends	She's doing well because her mother says so	She is always with the same best friends at school
Negative Concepts	Reading has given her difficulty	In school she has no one to talk to	She doesn't feel good about being the youngest in her group	Her best friends are older and tell her what to do.

In this matrix, concepts were drawn from the interviews with Abby. The four themes included: 1) academic performance, 2) social-emotional development, 3) self-esteem, and 4) friendship patterns. In the area of academic performance, Abby explained how she was doing better in school because she had been studying more. She mentioned how reading had given her difficulty in the past, and how she had needed help from a tutor. Abby did not present a very positive depiction of her academic accomplishments in school. However, Abby said that her mother believed her academic performance had improved. *"I was good at the beginning, but got much better at it ... that's what my mother says".* When I asked how her performance was, compared to that of others in the class, Abby said that it was *"in the middle".* In terms of friendship patterns, Abby described how she disliked being *"bossed"* around because she was the youngest in her group of friends. She wanted to play with other children, but her best friends did not approve. I sensed that Abby was frustrated with some of the relationships that she had with peers.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter I described the methods used for collecting data. The data consisted of *interviews* that were conducted with the students, the teachers, and parents; *observations* of the students in their school settings, and the analysis of *documents* such as field notes and journal entries. The purpose for my interviews was to understand the effects of accelerated entrance into kindergarten from the perspective of the students, regarding their academic and social development. The interviews were designed to investigate derogated students' feelings about being the youngest in the class, as well as the perceptions of teachers and parents. The questions asked to these students focused on their relationships with peers and their performance in school. The observations of the

students were made in the schools and any documents relevant to the participants were included as data. These two sources of data, observations and documents, were added to the interview data in order to create 'triangulation', where information was verified through three separate sources.

CHAPTER 4

EMERGING PATTERNS AND INTERPRETATION

Overview

In the previous chapter, I presented the ways that I investigated the phenomenon of derogation in the province of Quebec. In this chapter, I identify the descriptive categories that I used to interpret the three data sets: interviews with students, parents, and teachers, observations of students in the schools, and field notes from my research journal. I analyze the interviews within a socio-cultural interpretive framework.

Two Teachers Discuss the Phenomenon of Derogation

As part of the data collection process, three homeroom teachers of the three student participants were each asked to participate in an interview. As described in chapter three, the teachers were not allowed to take part in any activity outside of their classroom teaching because of the work-to-rule policy in effect at that time (see Appendix L). As a result, only one of the three homeroom teachers volunteered. However, of the nine students that did not participate in the study, two of their teachers had given their consent to participate. I decided to conduct the interviews with these two teachers, Pamela and Melissa, even if their own students were not in the study. I felt that including their general comments on derogation would be helpful in understanding teachers' perspectives on the application of the derogation option with pre-schoolers. The two teachers agreed to discuss the phenomenon of derogation and its possible effects on students. Each of these teachers had at least one derogated student in their classrooms at the time of the interview. In addition, they had previously taught younger derogated students in their classes and observed the academic and social implications for them in school.

Interview with a Teacher of Derogated Students, Pamela

Pamela was the first of these two teachers interviewed and had been teaching for 17 years in the elementary school system. Pamela was eager to describe her experiences in working with students who had been derogated. In her opening remarks, Pamela stated that most students who were derogated were not very successful on the academic and social levels of development. She had seen several of these younger students struggling with their learning over the years.

> *I'd feel very comfortable saying that probably the majority of the cases that are derogated ... they're probably just average students. Maybe some of them may even be struggling, at both levels, academically and socially. (Pamela, a teacher, May 9, 2002)*

Pamela chose to speak about the derogated child in her class this year and the one in last year's class as well. These two children were very different from each other in terms of strengths and needs, and their performance in academic and social domains. In the previous year, Pamela had a derogated boy in her class who was able to deal with academic demands, but he never seemed sure of his performance. He would re-do assignments in class, go over his work several times, and was always the last one to hand in his projects. This same child had difficulties getting along with his peers and was also insecure about his social skills. He was not part of the *"in crowd"* and was picked on by others. This child stood out from the rest of his peers because of his insecurities and related behaviours. When Pamela looked at this child's performance more closely she realized that he was younger than his peers. She was not concerned about his younger age, but rather, the lack of confidence that he displayed. In addition, she found it significant that he showed such insecurities even if he received support and encouragement from school and home. The parents were able to provide the structured environment that he

required at home and this was complimented by the organization in school. Pamela felt that without this structure he would not have succeeded as he did.

> *Pamela: I would have looked into it because he came across very insecure that boy ... But his work was well done, but he had a supportive background ... one of the parents was a teacher, so he was in a structured environment ... I think that plays a big part in their success. (Pamela, a teacher, May 9, 2002).*

In contrast to the child that Pamela described from last year's class, she explained that the child who had been derogated in this year's class was an exception to her general observations of derogated students. The student in her present class was very capable academically, perhaps even more than students that were older than she. In addition, this child behaved in a self-assured manner and was socially accepted by her peers.

Interview with a Teacher of Derogated Students, Melissa

Melissa was the second teacher who agreed to participate in the interviews independent of her student. We spoke briefly on the phone to set up a meeting and decided to meet during her school day when she had a free period. Melissa was an attractive young woman, perhaps in her late twenties, who had been teaching for six years. Melissa was articulate, confident and friendly. I met Melissa in her grade six classroom. The classroom was decorated with bright and colourful drawings, posters, and pictures on the walls. The desks were arranged in groups of four, with two pairs of desks facing each other.

During the interview, Melissa had specific comments to make about derogation and its effects on children in school. Melissa explained that when she was teaching grades two and three, the younger students in these classes were more talkative and had more difficulty sitting still in their seats for long periods of time. Melissa found that these younger students had more disagreements with others and did not work as well in groups with older peers. According to this teacher, children who were derogated were at a disadvantage and did not perform as well as they could.

> *Generally speaking, the feel is that children who are derogation cases are, uh, less mature, and the question always comes up, you know, why should we be pushing these children, uh, into a grade level that they may not be prepared for when they can be, uh, when they can remain at, you know, the lower grade level, and be, let's say, the top of their class in terms of maturity. (Melissa, a teacher, May 2002).*

Socially, Melissa found that derogated children were immature. Their interests were not the same as their peers and issues of puberty came into play, especially in grades five and six. This could result in alienation because they were not part of the *"in group"*. Melissa found that there was a difference within a year of school when she saw these students develop along with their peers in the classroom. However, Melissa believed that the immaturity factor levelled out as the children got older, and other students in the class did not make any distinction from them for their age. Melissa mentioned that the derogated child in her class at the time of the interview was an exception to her general observations of derogated students. This child was coping well and getting along with her peers. Generally, Melissa felt that children *"are better off when they are older and more mature because learning comes easier to them and they seem to excel" (Melissa, a teacher, May 2002).*

Getting to Know the Students

In this section I introduce the three student participants of the study: Abby, Judy and Jenny. I describe each of the students in turn, and discuss the patterns that emerged from my interviews with them.

Abby

The following is an excerpt from the psychological report that I had written about Abby at age 4 ½, when she first came to see me for a derogation assessment in 1997. Her parents were interested in advancing her into kindergarten, even if she would only complete 5 years after the deadline for admittance to kindergarten that year.

> *Abby will be five years of age two weeks following the deadline for admission to kindergarten this fall. Abby's parents feel that she is ready to start kindergarten classes in the upcoming school year, and have requested a psycho-educational assessment for their child, in order to submit a derogation for early admission. (Excerpt from Abby's psychological report, April 1997)*

In reflecting back on this excerpt, I remembered how eager Abby's mother, Laura, was to tell me about her daughter, and how she believed that Abby was ready to start school in the fall. Laura accompanied Abby for the testing at both morning sessions, had taken time off from work but still seemed to be rushed on both days. Abby's father was not able to take time from work and not present for the sessions.

First interview with Abby

It is now five years later, May 2002, and Abby is 9 ½ years of age and in grade four. I arrived at Abby's school at 9:30 and my interview with her was scheduled for 9:45. I presented myself to the secretary at the front office and then went over to the principal's office to greet her as well. The principal welcomed me to the school and we chatted for a while. A few minutes later, the principal called Abby down to the office to meet me.

Meeting Abby once again.

> *I recognized Abby when she walked into the room. Abby is an attractive child with light-brown hair and blue eyes. She smiled when she came towards me and said hello. The principal escorted us to the room where the interview would take place. It was a grade two classroom on the second floor, and the students in this class were out for physical education at that time. As we entered the room and the principal left, Abby and I looked around at the rows of students' desks. I spotted a small table by the window in back of the classroom, and suggested to Abby that we sit there. I removed the five books that were on the table, and placed them on a desk nearby. I pulled up two chairs from the next row, and we sat down at the table. Abby was quiet and watched closely as I set up the tape recorder. I explained to her that I would be taping our conversation and asked her if she was comfortable with that. She smiled and nodded her head. I asked her if she remembered having seen me years ago, and she said that she did but just a little. (Field notes of first interview with Abby, May 2002)*

At first Abby appeared shy, but seemed to be more comfortable once the

interview got under way. She was well mannered and soft-spoken. She contemplated her responses, spoke slowly, and took time to put her thoughts together. Abby's pensive style was also evident in her downward gaze. I observed that Abby made minimal eye contact with me and did not volunteer much information unless I asked for more detail. The following excerpt is an example of Abby's tendency to respond briefly to questions asked. She elaborated when she was asked to explain further.

Olga: How are you doing with your schoolwork?
Abby: Good.
Olga: Are you getting good grades?
Abby: Yeah.
Olga: How did you do on your last report card?
Abby: I got more AE's than EC's.
Olga: What does that mean?
Abby: EC means you are in the middle of bad and good. AE means that you're good. And AH means you need more help.
Olga: Did you get any AH's?
Abby: No (Abby, April 9, 2002)

Abby discussed her grade results and she provided details about the grading procedures at her school. She explained how important it was for her not to have any 'AH' grades on her report card because this would mean that she needed more help in doing her work. I asked that she explain to me the codes in the grading system because these codes varied from one school to another. In Abby's school, the teachers did not give numerical evaluations of students' performance, but they provided letter codes that were accompanied by a qualitative appraisal of the child's work.

Most of Abby's comments in the first interview were made in reference to social issues such as attitudes and behaviours of her social group. She talked about her friends in school, her interactions with them, how she felt about them, and the events that occurred. Abby gave more detail when she spoke about her three close friends and described how they treated her and other students. She was not pleased that her friends did not play with

other children. *"It makes me sad because... (we are)... not playing with anyone else ... I want to play with everyone" (Abby, April 9, 2002).*

I asked Abby to describe how things were going in school. She said very little about her academic performance. The information that she gave me was lacking detail. When I asked her to elaborate, she gave positive comments about the subjects of math, gym, and music. She said that things were *"good"* but then followed up by saying that she was doing *"better"* because she had *"studied more"*. If she was now doing better, this might suggest that previously she was not doing as well. Abby made few comments about her academic performance, except for reading that was giving her some difficulty. The following excerpt illustrates how she described her reading skills.

> *Olga: So, you told me you enjoy math. How are you doing in reading?*
> *Abby: I'm doing better than the other years.*
> *Olga: Were you having any trouble with reading the other years?*
> *Abby: Yeah, but now I read at my house, so it's not bad any more.*
> *Olga: What is it about reading that gives you difficulty, the reading itself or understanding what you're reading?*
> *Abby: The reading.*
> *Olga: Like reading out loud?*
> *Abby: Yeah.*
> *Olga: So now you said you're reading more at home?*
> *Abby: Yeah, and I get better at it at school ... I have a chapter book ... I forgot what it's called ... (Abby, April 9, 2002)*

Abby's attitude toward reading was not a positive one, and perhaps this belief was related to that of her mother's comments about Abby when she stated: *"The only thing I see a little bit is, like, she's not gonna be a journalist when she grows up"* (Interview with Abby's mother Laura, June 14, 2002).

Second interview with Abby

At our second meeting, Abby arrived quickly to meet me when she was called down to the office and greeted me with a smile. The second interview was conducted in the school library. The library was a very large room located in the central area of the

second floor. The books were placed on bookshelves along the four walls of the room, and also in rows in one half of the central space. In the other half of that space there were tables and chairs. Other tables in the corner areas were sectioned off with panels all around, and this created working areas like the one that we selected for the interview.

Abby waited for me to turn on the tape recorder and we started to talk once it was on. Abby's conversations seemed to focus more on social activities than on her academic performance. She talked about her friends and recounted how one particular friend, Darla, had not been nice to her that week. In the following passage, Abby described Darla's offensive behaviour towards her and other students.

> *She's tough and she makes fun of you, and she could hurt you or something, 'cause her mom, I met her mom, and I think that's why she's so tough, like people won't be her friend ...and now she has no one to play with, and I asked her to play with me, and after she's like, no, play with someone else .... (Abby, April 23, 2002)*

Bullying behaviour of older peers

Darla's aggressive behaviour toward Abby could be characterized as bullying. Recent literature on the topic of bullying presented interesting findings. An increase of bullying behaviour in school was observed with an increase in a student's feelings of alienation (Natvig & al, 2001). However, perceived levels of support from the teacher and peers lowered the odds of bullying behaviour. Bullies had a tendency to display a higher-level self-esteem (Rigby& Slee, 1993). Another finding was that bullies were often victimized themselves (Craig, 1998). Craig reported how children who were involved in bullying and victimization, either as the bully or the victim, experienced feelings of anxiety by using indirect and verbal aggression.

These findings could be related to Darla's behaviour towards Abby, and they suggested that Darla was often feeling left out of her peer group and behaved in this way to deal with her feelings of rejection and alienation. Darla may have perceived a higher

level of self-esteem in comparison to Abby who may have been insecure about her place amongst peers and classmates, as the youngest in her grade. Lastly, Abby mentioned that she had met Darla's mother and noticed similarities in the behaviour of mother and daughter. Perhaps Darla herself had been bullied and acted this way towards others.

Abby described how Darla was unhappy about something that did not involve Abby, yet she was not being nice to her. We discussed how it was unfair that Darla was treating Abby in this way, but she wanted to maintain contact with her because she considered Darla to be one of her closest friends. Abby was concerned about Darla because she felt sorry that others did not want to play with her. Abby's behaviour toward her companion demonstrated her ability to express feelings of empathy with her. Emotions play an important role in the development of prosocial values, motives, and behaviours, and empathy is a relevant emotion in social development and human communication. Empathy refers to an affective response that stems from the apprehension and comprehension of another's emotional state. This response may be similar to what the other person is feeling. Abby was very sensitive to the predicament that Darla was in, even though Darla herself was not treating Abby well. However, Abby seemed to value this friend and expressed interest in maintaining the friendship between them. Abby made efforts to improve things between her and her friend. She tried to invite Darla to play when other children were avoiding her. *"I feel bad for her because people were running away from her" (Abby, April 23, 2002).*

Friendship patterns

Children's experiences with peers can be understood with reference to several points of social complexity within individuals, during interactions with others, in personal relationships, and within groups (Hinde, 1987). Events and processes that occur in each of these areas will affect the other levels. Children bring a repertoire of social orientations,

temperaments, and social skills to social exchanges. The features of the social situation, such as personal characteristics, overtures and responses, influence these interactions.

The initial selection of friendship groups is generally based on similarity, proximity, and reciprocity (Leenders, 1996). Children who are 14 years old and younger choose many activities and preferences that are gender dependent. Generally, children do not choose friends that are similar on a gender-based basis, but they do make 'best friend' choices from their same gender companions. In Abby's situation, her three best friends were also the only girls in her split class who were in grade four. Another factor mentioned by Leenders (1996) is that *proximity* determines the choice of best friends. The more that individuals are physically closer to each other, the more likely that they will meet and interact. In Abby's situation, her three best friends were physically close to her because they were in her class and they met and interacted on a daily basis. *Reciprocity* is another element that affects choice of friends. Adolescents choose friendships that are reciprocated because reciprocity between friends suggests the presence of mutual affection and trust.

Younger children base their relationships on proximity and sharing of materials. As they grow older, children develop more understanding of their own needs in relation to others and their needs. As their awareness of others grows (social cognition) so does their perception of friendships and what it takes to be a friend. Choices of friendship are largely due to subjective experiences of interactions with others. As they grow into adolescents, children discover that acceptance, loyalty, commitment, genuineness, common interests, and intimacy become defining characteristics of friendship. Loyalty and commitment are essential qualities in being a best friend. In the case of best friends, the friendship is marked by greater emotional intensity, closer interactions, increased tolerance for conflict,

and added stability. This could account for Abby's loyalty to her close friend Darla, and the tolerance that she displayed toward her friend's negative attitude.

Experiences with peers constitute an important development context for children. Within this context children acquire a wide variety of skills, attitudes, experiences, and mediators that affect their lives. Peers are powerful socialization 'agents' and they greatly influence children's social, emotional and cognitive well-being, and adjustment beyond the influence of family, school, and neighbourhood. Children who are accepted by their peers and who have good social skills seem to do better in school and have more positive motivation for academic achievement. There could be an underlying intellectual and temperamental form of motivation that facilitates the acquisition of academic and social competence among these children who are successful in school. Also associated with peer acceptance is a high sense of social responsibility, a moral commitment to success, and good self-regulatory skills. A sense of social responsibility was evident in the way that Abby felt concerned about her friend when others were keeping away. Social skills are defined as discrete behaviours that lead children to solve social tasks, achieve social success and social goals, and to have effective relationships. One of the possible skills includes the ability to understand the emotional thoughts and intentions of others.

Third interview with Abby

In the last of three interviews, Abby was more talkative and at ease. She came down to meet me at the secretary's office and then walked with me up to the library. We sat at the same place as we had the week before. In this interview, Abby continued to talk about her friends and what happened with them that week. Little or no reference was made to academics. When Abby was asked directly about her performance in school, she described herself as *"in the middle"* when compared to others. I understood this comment to mean that her performance was neither the best nor the worst. It suggested to me that

her academic performance was average or acceptable. Abby did not describe herself as particularly strong in certain subjects more than others. She talked about doing better in school now than she had in the past. She made a slight reference to her reading skills and how this had improved. When asked why, Abby attributed this improvement to having *"read more books"*, or *"I was doing better because I studied more" (Abby, April 29, 2002).* Abby's comment about her improvement in reading suggested that she was doing better because of the added amount of effort she made to improve her performance.

Unlike the previous two interviews, Abby now mentioned that she did not enjoy being the youngest in her class and that she did not feel good about it. *"I don't feel good because everyone's older than me" (Abby, April 29, 2002).* Abby was more candid and talkative in the third interview. She explained that others were often mean to her and *"bossy"*. She mentioned how she disliked it when people told her to listen to them because she was younger in age. When others were bossy towards her, Abby described them as *"being mean"*. In addition, she seemed to resent the fact that she needed to apologize before others did when something went wrong. Perhaps the children who were being bossy were those who felt a stronger sense of self-reliance and self-esteem compared to Abby.

Rigby & Slee (1993) found that bullying tendencies are not more common in children who have a low self-esteem, and neither are they prevalent in children with positive feelings about themselves. Rigby and Slee have suggested that bullying behaviour is seen in children who are unhappy or dislike school. Bullies will have more conflicts with school authorities and view school negatively as a result. In addition, if children are bullied at home or elsewhere, this will lower their self-worth. For some children, bullying others will restore or raise their self-esteem.

There were contradictions in some of Abby's statements. On one hand, she described her friends as being bossy, yet on the other hand she said that her friends were really nice to her. Perhaps, these children were good friends but they had to deal with the fact that one or more in the group tended to be bossy. The different behaviours amongst the girls suggested that they did not always agree. At times one or more of them were bossy, and this behaviour seemed to define the dynamics of the group. It was interesting to speculate that there could be a connection between this decision-making ability or power and the fact that she was younger, and even the youngest. How well did Abby deal with this behaviour that seemed to recur amongst her friends? As illustrated in this excerpt from the third interview, Abby spoke of the way that others really treated her because she was the youngest and how she did not like it.

> *Abby: I think, I'm not sure, but I think they do that to younger people, because like, if they do it to people their age it won't bother them ... so they do it to younger people.*
> *Olga: Does that bother you?*
> *(Abby nods affirmatively).*
> *Olga: Do you think it shows that it bothers you?*
> *Abby: No, I usually just keep it with me ... (Abby, April 29, 2002)*

Abby's negative comments in the third interview were different from the first two conversations that I had with her. At that time, she had spoken about how she felt about being the youngest in the class in a positive way. Perhaps she was more comfortable the third time that she saw me, and thus spoke more openly about her feelings. The words and phrases that she used were: *"they're not really nice, it makes me feel sad, I have no one to talk to, they are bossy, she pushes me, she's tough, I feel sad,* and *I feel bad"*. These comments suggested that Abby experienced bullying behaviour from her peers.

Aggression refers to a person committing an act intended to hurt another. There are two forms of aggression commonly seen among children. Instrumental aggression is directed in order to obtain something from another and hostile aggression or *bullying* is

more specific and aimed as hurting another person as a way to establish dominance and gain the advantage in the long run. Studies have shown that bullies act this way in order to control others and get what they want. These children often have the social information and social processing skills, but differ from the accepted children because they use their skills in an anti-social manner. So, some bullies are frequently among the more popular children. Olweus (1993) supported the view that bullies tended to be as popular as other students in school. In addition, studies of peer acceptance have not consistently shown that students accept bullies to a lesser degree. Olweus also looked at bullying from the perspective of the victim and defined it as *"a student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more students"* (Olweus 1993, p. 9).

Field (1999) provided the following list of positive characteristics that were often found in the targets selected by bullies: being popular with people, having high moral standards, being honest and having integrity, being giving and selfless, being successful, being sensitive, and having a strong forgiving streak. On the other hand, Field also included characteristics on his list that suggested a lower level of self-esteem amongst victims of bullying: low assertiveness, a tendency to self-deprecation, indecisiveness and approval seeking, a need to feel valued, an inability to value oneself, and a high level of dependency.

Abby appeared to display characteristics from the list of positive items such as, being successful and sensitive, and having a strong forgiving streak. Darla may have identified these characteristics in Abby as a target. However, Abby also demonstrated a need to seek approval from others and a need to be valued, so she tended to tolerate Darla's bullying behaviour in order to maintain a bond of friendship between them.

Some researchers have categorized bullying as a form of aggression where the aggressors are somehow more powerful than the individuals they attack (Morita et al, 1999). The notion of imbalance of power has been incorporated into the definition of bullying. Smith and Thompson (1991) stated "... the bully is stronger than the victim or perceived to be stronger ..." Power can be defined as the production of an intended effect. The following example illustrates the effect of power between individuals. The power of one student over a second student is a function of how much the first one can actually influence the second one to think in a certain manner, especially when the second student did not initially favour this action or thought.

Abby presented the disadvantages of being the youngest in her class by describing the negative attitudes of some friends toward her. These negative attitudes included bullying and bossy behaviour. Abby mentioned how she was often told what to do by her friends and having to apologize before others when something went wrong. *"Sometimes people say ... I'm older than you so you have to listen to me"(Abby, April 29, 2002).* Thus, her belief that being the youngest in the class was something valued and respected was actually challenged. The following excerpt illustrates another example of the way another friend behaved toward Abby. In this excerpt, Abby talked about Sara and how she displayed a bossy behaviour.

> *Abby: Sometimes my friend Sara's bossy because she's like, 'If you don't play with me then I'm not gonna be your best friend anymore'.... Whenever I fight with my friend Sara, like, when she made the fight, like all the time I always have to say sorry before she says sorry. Or else, we're never gonna be friends again*
> *Olga: So, you're the one who has to say sorry.*
> *Abby: And I didn't do anything. And she wants me to help her see who she's gonna play with, me and my friends or her other friends.*
> *Olga: She has other friends that you don't have?*
> *Abby: Well, they're my friends. But usually they're mean to me. (Abby, April 29, 2002)*

I asked Abby if she felt that others behaved this way toward her because she was the youngest and she confirmed this in her response.

> *Olga: Do you think that she (Sara) does that because you're younger?*
> *Abby: (Nods yes).*
> *Olga: How do you know that?*
> *Abby: Cause she says it, like, when we don't fight and stuff, she says it.*
> *Olga: What does she say?*
> *Abby: She says that: "Well, I'm always doing those things because you're younger than me". (Abby, April 29th, 2002)*

Sara was older than Abby. In this form of bullying where age difference could be a reason for the bullying behaviour, it appeared that Sara used the difference in their ages as an imbalance of power, in her favour.

In the last interview, Abby also demonstrated her competitive side, which was evident in the way she described her performance in swimming. She associated her stronger performance in swimming with being younger than her peers. This remark reflected Abby's belief that being the youngest in her group was something esteemed by others. In the case of swimming, Abby said that she felt good about being younger than her peers because she practiced more and was faster.

> *Olga: What are the good things about being the youngest?*
> *Abby: Well, you have more energy ...*
> *Olga: You have more energy. Okay.*
> *Abby: I'm a lot faster than my friends.*
> *Olga: You are? In what things?*
> *Abby: Well, in running I run faster than them.. Or in work I do faster than them. In swimming I go faster than them. (Abby, April 29, 2002)*

Abby attributed her stronger performance in swimming and running to the fact that she was younger than the other students. However, Abby did participate in several sports, and she may have been more agile in physical ability.

Summary of interviews with Abby

The concepts that recurred in the interviews with Abby were related to her concerns over friendship patterns and others' behaviours toward her and other peers. Abby was insecure about peer acceptance and sensitive to the bullying that she experienced as the youngest in her grade level. Although her mother encouraged her and praised her work in school, Abby had some concerns about her reading ability and described her performance in class as *"in the middle"*. However, Abby was pleased about her athletic activities outside of school. The behaviours and attitudes that I observed in my interviews with Abby and with her mother suggested that it was important for her to be successful in many activities, and to be better than the others as well. The mother set high standards for Abby with a variety of activities planned outside of school. I was concerned that this was too much for Abby to handle and to enjoy.

When Abby was 4 ½ years of age, her mother requested a derogation assessment for her because she felt that Abby would be bored staying home one other year. It seemed that this attitude and perspective was still evident now that Abby was in grade four. There was still a concern about Abby possibly being bored, so it was important to keep active at all times. There did not seem to be much free time in this family's weekly schedule nor the weekend. To re-cap, the topics that emerged in my interviews with Abby were: success in academic, social and sport activities, peer acceptance, and bullying.

Observation of Abby in the Schoolyard

As previously discussed in chapter three, another form of data collection in this study was the observation of the three student participants. The students were observed in their classroom setting or the schoolyard during recess time.

Abby was a fourth grader in a split level 3 and 4 classroom. Her teacher did not agree to participate in the study so I did not feel it was appropriate to enter the classroom to observe Abby. However, I did have an opportunity to observe Abby in the schoolyard during recess time. The schoolyard is frequently a place where students can be observed. In Abby's school, the schoolyard was along the side of the school and next to a park. The yard was enclosed with a fence on three sides, and it had an asphalt ground. There were no games or play facilities in this schoolyard. Occasional groups of children were playing dodge ball in seemingly designated areas of the schoolyard grounds.

The following excerpts are from the notes that I wrote after making arrangements to observe Abby at her school and the actual observation

> *The principal was very cooperative and supportive and suggested I go to the staff room for the observation. She told me that it would be easier to see Abby from the staff room without being noticed, and that it would be best on a sunny day because of the way the windows were covered from the outside. (Notes taken after a meeting with the school principal, April 29th 2002)*

The principal of the school was very cooperative and accommodating. She was always present when I went to meet Abby and seemed involved with the students and activities in the school.

> *It's recess time. I went to the teachers' room to observe Abby from the windows there. Abby is sitting on a ledge, close to the wall of the school with another child. She is eating cookies and going over a sheet of paper with her friend. The two girls get up and run over to see two other girls. Abby is smiling. The four of them huddle together in a group, and then Abby and her friend return to sit down. Abby appeared to be the same height as the other three children, perhaps thinner. (Journal notes taken from observing Abby, outside during recess time, May 27, 2002)*

In this excerpt, I observed that Abby spent recess time with three friends. The four girls hugged each other and walked along arm in arm, and Abby seemed content to be a part of this small group.

Interview with Abby's Mother, Laura

I originally met Abby in my private practice when she was 4 years of age. I also met her mother Laura during the initial interview of the derogation assessment. The following excerpt is from the original psychological report that I prepared for Abby, and includes my impressions of Laura's comments.

> *When Abby's mother was asked why she felt that her daughter should be admitted to kindergarten in the fall, she mentioned that Abby gets along well with older children, is very observant and quick to learn, and looks forward to being in school. (Excerpt from initial psychological report on Abby's derogation, April 1997)*

At that time, Laura seemed eager to tell me about her daughter and how precocious she was as a pre-schooler. She explained that Abby would be very bored if not in school. As a result of the assessment, her daughter was advanced into kindergarten.

Now, five years later, I asked Laura to participate in another interview, as part of my study. I was interested in knowing about her impressions of Abby's progress since she had initially been advanced. When she was contacted by phone, Laura agreed to participate with enthusiasm. She was talkative in our telephone conversation and wanted to know more about the study. Because of the family's busy after-school schedule with sport activities, we agreed to a meeting on a Friday evening. The next excerpt is taken from my journal notes following the interview with Laura.

> *I arrived at the home five minutes early. Abby's father Tony answered the door and told me that his wife and daughter were on their way home from skating practice and would be a little late for the interview. I waited outside on the porch and chatted with Tony until their return. Mother and daughter arrived half an hour later. I found it unusual that she would be late for the interview. I sensed that she had not made this a priority. When she arrived with the car and parked in the driveway she stepped out of the car talking about how busy she was. I sensed that she wanted to impress me with the number of activities that she had going on, and that our interview was simply one of many activities on her list. We greeted each other and proceeded to enter their home. Abby greeted me shyly. Laura escorted me to the kitchen and suggested to Abby that she go down to play in the*

> *basement. Laura explained to me that Abby was expecting a friend from her skating team to stay over for the night.*
>
> *There were many boxes piled up in the hallway. They were moving to a bigger house the month after. We chatted briefly about their new house and then the interview began. (Journal excerpt, June14, 2002)*

In her interview, Laura described great expectations of her daughter's performance in school, in sports, and social activities. However, in discussing her daughter's progress, she also revealed her personal views. Laura stated:

> *Language arts is probably, well, let's go through different things ... creativity takes a little while for that ... she's a logical person versus a creative person, but we all, me and my husband, are logical people, so I guess I'm not surprised. (Laura, Abby's mother, June 2002)*

In this excerpt, Laura was projecting her own skills and interests onto those of her child. Laura stressed her beliefs and values regarding academic success and had a way to explain or justify Abby's weaker performance in language arts subjects. She highlighted math and the sciences instead. Laura emphasized the importance of "logical" thought, as it was found in mathematics. Language arts were not an area of strength for the mother.

Laura and I discussed her daughter's academic performance and her social and emotional development since the time of the derogation, five years ago. Within the academic domain, Laura described how Abby excelled in school: Abby had a good memory, was an excellent reader, she did lots of reading, was able to work alone, and worked quickly. At times, Laura may have overstated her comments, as in the following excerpt where she describes Abby's performance in school: *"She's doing better than the whole class ... and likes to be number one" (Interview with Abby's mother; June 14th, 2002).* I found the expressions that Laura used to be interesting, as she projected a personal feeling of competition on her child.

Laura expressed disappointment when she mentioned that Abby did not have more friends. Her disenchantment suggested that she also had expectations about the number of

friends that her daughter should have: *"... not as many friends as I thought she would have."* In the same conversation, Laura said that Abby had many friends at school and got along well with her classmates. "*She's got a lot of friends, uh, she's got a lot of friends at school ..." (Interview with Laura, June 14, 2004).* When describing her behaviour at home, Laura said that Abby was "*excited and rowdy*", as compared to her other daughter who was 6 years older. Further descriptions of Abby included words like *"competitive"* and *"logical"*. Laura pointed out that these characteristics described her and her husband as well. In addition, Laura suggested that things worked out with their busy schedules because Abby was quick and could work on her own. I wondered if this was another of Laura's expectations. I questioned if this child was able to maintain her busy schedule because her mother expected her to. I also questioned if this was sufficient motivation for her to succeed academically and socially.

Laura spoke quickly and nervously, and she spoke a lot. In this family, sports and associated social activities were as important as academic performance. Laura boasted about her daughter in the different contexts and said that Abby was *"doing better than the whole class"*. Yet, Abby described herself as being *"in the middle"* of the class for academic achievement. Laura said that her daughter always wanted to be *"number one"*, something that Abby never mentioned, so I couldn't help but feel that this was actually more about her than her child. Abby mentioned at one point that "*my mother said I'm doing better"*, as to validate her performance and seek approval. In fact, Abby appeared to be more insecure than her mother described. She did not discuss any areas of strength in her academic performance and did not speak much about her school activities. Perhaps she did not feel as accomplished in her academic performance, and so she said less to describe it.

I found contradictions in what Laura said throughout the interview. Laura described her daughter as quick and able to work on her own, then followed this statement with a negative comment about the way that Abby doesn't get things done quickly enough. "*... you have to fit in the homework because it does take time ... but since she's quick, it works out well ...* " then the following was said within moments "*... she likes to waste time, she gets up ... I wish she would do her homework quickly, you know, instead of getting up...* "(Laura, Abby's mother, June 2002).

Summary of interview with Laura, Abby's mother

Abby's mother was interested and involved in her daughter's progress in school and her social development. She encouraged Abby to participate in several sports activities and dedicated her time to these events as well. Laura had high expectations for Abby in terms of her school and sports achievements. Abby was a bright and capable child who was glad to please her parents with her many achievements. I had concerns about the large number of activities Abby had taken on, and the mother's comment about Abby desire to be "number one". It seemed to me that the mother was projecting her aspirations on her daughter instead.

Judy

In the next section I discuss my interviews with Judy, the second student participant in the study.

> *Judy will be five years of age, four days following the deadline for admission to kindergarten this fall ... Judy's parents feel that she is ready to start kindergarten classes and have requested a psycho-educational assessment. (Excerpt from psychological report on Judy, February 1995)*

This excerpt was taken from the psychological report that I wrote for Judy after meeting her in private practice seven years ago. Judy's father Ted had called to take the appointment for a derogation assessment and accompanied her to the sessions. In

Judy's background information form, Ted described Judy's development and behaviour in comparison to her three older siblings. He explained that Judy was a very bright child who was interested in learning. Judy's first language was Polish and Ted mentioned that she could also speak English fluently. She was able to count numbers greater than ten and recite the alphabet. He felt that Judy was ready to start school even if she was not yet five years of age. Judy had finished a successful year in pre-kindergarten and he did not wish her to repeat this year.

First Interview with Judy

It is now seven years later and Judy is in grade 6. Since kindergarten, Judy has attended two different schools and has been in her present school since grade one. Judy was now in St. Dillon's School that was situated in an older multi-ethnic community in the east end of Montreal. This school offered a 50 percent bilingual programme to its students and housed over 400 pupils in its two-floor building.

My arrival at the school

My appointment at Judy's school was at 10:00 and I arrived ten minutes earlier. The following is an excerpt from my field notes.

> *I rang the school doorbell, entered the school and proceeded towards the front office. The school secretary was seated at her desk and I introduced myself and my reason for being there. She greeted me briefly and showed me to the principal's office next to hers. Mr. Fisher seemed busy, seated behind a desk piled with stacks of papers and books. He was talking on the phone, looked up to acknowledge my presence then finished his call. I extended my hand to greet him. Mr. Fisher welcomed me quickly and barely made eye contact with me. After this short exchange, he asked if I would like to go up to Judy's class. Before waiting for me to respond, he called the student monitor who was seated outside his office and asked him to escort me there.*
>
> *Judy's class was on the second floor. I knocked at the door and stepped into the classroom. The teacher smiled at me warmly. I greeted the class and explained that I was there to see Judy. The teacher called out her name and*

Judy got up quickly from her desk and walked toward me at the door. (Journal notes, May 2002)

I found that the principal's response to my arrival was indifferent and dismissive, but Judy's teacher was warm and receptive, and I was glad to see that she was Judy's teacher.

Meeting Judy once again

I did not recognize Judy from the last time I'd seen her at four years of age. She was now tall and slender, with light brown hair and wore glasses. She was dressed in the school uniform colours. Judy seemed eager to see me, smiled a lot, but looked a little shy. I introduced myself, and asked if she could accompany me to the library where we would sit down and talk for a while. She started walking ahead of me hastily, and showed me the way there. We chatted briefly about the size of the school and I told her that I had worked there many years ago. We entered the library and there were people seated around a table on the right side of the room. I looked towards the left and spotted a table with chairs located in a corner area, and it was sealed off with panels on three sides. I asked if she'd like to sit there, and Judy quickly moved over, selected a chair, and sat down. Judy seemed a little uneasy, so I took a few minutes to chat with her before getting started. She watched with interest as I set up the tape recorder. I turned on the tape recorder and started the interview with Judy. (Judy, May 2002)

Judy's responses to my questions were generally brief, but she participated with enthusiasm and appeared to enjoy the attention. In this first interview, we talked about Judy's academic performance and her friendships in school. She generally described everything as *"fine"*. Judy enjoyed math and gym and she liked her teacher. Judy mentioned that she had two best friends in her class and stayed with them most of the time at school. When I asked Judy what she liked about her friends, she said that they enjoyed the same things and they talked on the phone.

Judy spoke about her upcoming year in high school and used the word *"nervous"* with regards to her feelings about the change. Judy believed that things would be harder and that she would have more work to do in high school. Her present year in grade six was *"fine"* and she said that things were *"Ok ... I guess"*, with an

uncertain tone of voice. *"Yeah, I'm fine. Like, sometimes, like, I'll get an average, like, a lower mark and sometimes I'll get like, an A" (Judy, May 23, 2002).*

Judy expressed concern about starting high school the following year. The period of adolescence, especially its early stages, presents special challenges to students. There is a decline in some students' general attitudes toward school during the elementary years and this decline accelerates between grades 6 and 8. Some of these changes are due to the nature of schools and students' classroom experiences. As students move from elementary school to junior high, they experience an increase in the size of the school and student body, ability grouping, competitive grading, teacher control, and whole class instruction (Eggen & Kauchak, 1994). With a greater amount of students in secondary or high school, students are placed together on the basis of ability and attempts to match instruction according to the different needs of the group. At the same time, these students experience a decrease in personalized contact with teachers, autonomy and self-control. There is a transition from a safe and nurturing classroom environment to a larger, more competitive and less personalized one. Many students get lost in the shuffle, and this often results in lowered self-concept and reduced motivation.

Judy mentioned that she occasionally obtained low grades in school. I could tell from Judy's verbal expression and body language that she was generally concerned about her academic performance. She was restless and fidgety, and appeared to be hesitant and insecure. At several points during the interview, she was wringing her hands and moving about in her seat.

I asked Judy to tell me about her family. She told me that she was the youngest of four children in a family where Polish was the first language spoken. She had two sisters

and one brother, and they were often busy with school and work. Her parents were both employed, so Judy spent much time alone while they were away. Judy played video games and liked to stay home. She spent time with her brother and less time with her sisters. I asked why she spent less time with her sisters and she told me that they were always busy with school and part-time jobs. One sister was finishing high school and the other was in college. However, Judy did have more in common with her brother because she enjoyed playing video games and he did as well. He was the eldest of the four siblings, so proximity in age was not a reason for their closeness.

Judy did not spend much time with friends outside of the school setting and often stayed home on her own. *"I mostly stay home ... because, like, I have no people near my house" (Judy, May 23, 2002).* Judy did not participate in sport activities and said that her parents did not have time to accompany her there. However, her two best friends were involved with sports activities and Judy did express an interest in playing soccer. The following is an excerpt from our conversation.

> *Olga: What would you like to do?*
> *Judy: Uh, play soccer.*
> *Olga: You would like to play soccer?*
> *Judy: My two friends play soccer. (Judy, May 28, 2002)*

In the following interview we talked again about her interest in this sport and I provide a commentary.

Second Interview with Judy

The second time that we met for an interview Judy was smiling and seemed eager to begin the session. We had difficulty finding a quiet place in the school to conduct the interview. Finally, we settled for the lunchroom because it was empty at the time. We chose to sit at a lunch table near the window at the far left end of the room. Judy was fidgeting in her seat as I set up the tape recorder. We talked a little before turning on the

recorder and I started to record our conversation after a few minutes. The interview lasted twenty minutes. Judy answered some questions quickly; others she reflected on before she spoke. She did not elaborate much unless she was asked to do so. An example of her conversation follows. In this excerpt Judy was talking about her mother's work. Judy's mother was employed as a cleaning woman in a private home and worked long hours every day.

Olga: Does your mom work?
Judy: Uh, yeah, she works.
Olga: Every day?
Judy: Uh, not on the week, you know Saturdays and Sundays.
Olga: She works on Saturdays and Sundays?
Judy: No, she doesn't. (Judy, May 28, 2002)

Judy talked about her performance in school and she described herself as an *"average"* student, doing *"ok now"*. Judy told me that when she was in grade two, school was hard for her, especially reading. In fact, she needed help with this subject, and was pulled out of class for remedial help during school hours. Judy was not fond of reading and explained that she still had difficulty finishing a book, especially when it was not of interest to her. I thought of reasons why Judy would have difficulty with reading and considered a lack of importance placed on reading as a possible explanation. Perhaps reading was a socio-cultural process that was not encouraged in her home. However, another explanation could be her lack of self-esteem in a subject that had given her more difficulty in the past. Research during the last several decades showed a decrease in self-esteem for girls as they move out of childhood and into adolescence (Orenstein, 1994; Sadker, 1994).

In the second interview, Judy seemed more animated when she spoke of her interest in playing video games. But when she was asked about sports and other activities, she seemed less at ease. Given the possibility, she said would like to play soccer.

However, she said that her parents had no time to accompany her to practices and games.

"I don't have, like, time to go ... my parents don't have time to drive me."(May 28th, 2002)

This relates back to my previous comment where I suggested that little effort was made to give Judy opportunities to socialize with other children her age. Judy stated that her parents did not have the time to drive her to the activities, and this could have explained why Judy spent much of her time playing video games on her own. I also wondered if Judy was feeling a little neglected as the youngest of the four children in her family. Everyone was busy with their own work and interests, and Judy seemed timid and shy about expressing her feelings and needs.

The following excerpt was taken from the notes of my reflective journal. In this passage, I wrote about my impressions of Judy and the comments that she made in her second interview with me.

> ... Judy seemed to fidget in her chair and focused her attention on the tape recorder as I inserted the tape to begin the interview ... Judy answered some questions quickly, others she reflected on, saying very little. Generally she did not elaborate unless she was probed and encouraged ...She seemed more comfortable talking about her interest in video games. When asked about sports and other activities, she seemed less at ease and began to fidget again ... Judy looked frail today, a little tired in her facial expressions. (Journal notes regarding interview with Judy, May 28, 2002)

Third Interview with Judy

The third time that we had an interview, I wanted to talk more about the feelings that Judy had about school and friends and how she was responding to the things going on around her. Her answers were brief, as they had been in the previous interviews, and descriptions were sparse. When asked directly to describe how she felt about certain topics, she responded by recounting events and facts rather than by describing emotions or reactions. The following passage illustrated her reaction to my question about her upcoming year in high school.

Olga: In September you will start at a new school.
Judy: Yeah.
Olga: How do you feel about that?
Judy: It's bigger. More people are there. There are more classes. (Judy, May 28, 2002)

Judy explained how difficult it had been for her to make new friends when she changed schools in grade one. She told me that she was very shy at that time, but things would be easier now because she was older and less shy when speaking with others.

Generally, Judy stated that everything was fine. She made no personal comments, positive or negative about school. She was accepting of her friends and she believed that they were accepting of her, even if she was the youngest in their group and in the classroom. Judy mentioned that at school the students often worked together in groups. I asked her how the groups were usually put together. She described how the students were allowed to select who they wanted to be with in their groups, and that she was usually in a group with one or both of her two best friends. At the end of the interview, Judy asked to hear her voice on tape, so we took a few minutes to rewind the tape and she listened with interest. She laughed out loud to hear the sound of her voice and seemed pleased.

Summary of interviews with Judy

The concepts that recurred in the interviews with Judy related to her insecurities about academic performance and social skills. Although she appeared to succeed in school, Judy was unsure of her performance and sought the approval of her teacher and classmates. She expressed apprehension about starting high school the following year. She was concerned about the amount of schoolwork that she would have and the inconvenience of travelling there by public transit. The apprehension that Judy expressed in her conversations was also reflected in the teacher's perceptions of her in school. Judy was academically capable to succeed, yet the teacher found her to

be insecure about her academic performance. The teacher considered Judy to have very low self-esteem because she seemed to be lacking confidence in her skills. The concepts that emerged were: performance, peers, insecurity, and success.

Observation of Judy in the classroom

Judy was in a grade six class of approximately 30 students. The classroom was situated at the end of a hallway on the second floor and had many windows. The room was bright but sparsely decorated. The students were seated in neat single rows facing a blackboard and the teacher's desk was situated in the front right-hand corner of the room. The entrance to the class was in back of the class, on the left side of the room. I observed Judy in class and the following notes taken from my observation journal, briefly describe her behaviour there.

> *I walked into the classroom during a math lesson and sat at an empty desk in the back of the room. Judy was seated on the other side, close to the teacher's desk and near the front of the class. The teacher was reviewing an assignment, asking for students to give answers from their written work. Judy seemed to be fidgeting in her chair but attentive, and occasionally chatted with the boy seated in front of her. She whispered as she spoke to him, and seemed to look away from the boy when the teacher spoke. When the lesson ended it was recess time and everyone headed for the locker area. Judy appeared to be as tall as the others; some students seemed more physically matured. She smiled shyly at me as she went by and ran to join another girl outside in the hall. (Observational notes from Judy's classroom, May 23rd 2002)*

Judy was the same height as her peers, perhaps a little thin compared to the other girls. She chatted with the boy seated in front of her, but was concerned that the teacher would notice her talking, so she looked in the other direction when her classmate turned to speak with her. This brief glimpse into Judy's classroom life suggested that she liked being in her class and wanted to perform well, so she probably was concerned about behaving properly. Judy enjoyed talking to her classmate, but did not want to call attention to her behaviour when she was speaking to him.

Interview with Judy's Teacher, Maggie

Maggie was Judy's homeroom teacher. Maggie had been a teacher for six years and was not aware of the term 'derogation', as it was used in the province of Quebec. I took some time to discuss the derogation procedure with Maggie and how it was applied to students advanced into school at the kindergarten level. In my interview with Maggie, I asked her to describe Judy's performance in school.

Meeting Judy's Teacher

> *I went up to the class to see Maggie, Judy's teacher. It was almost recess time. The door was opened and I could hear the teacher's voice above the loud talking and excitement of the students. I stepped into the classroom and greeted the teacher and students. The teacher smiled at me and said she'd be with me in 5 minutes, when the recess bell would ring. ... Maggie is a young woman, perhaps 25- 30 years of age. She was not aware of the derogation process in Quebec, so we took a few minutes to talk about this before the interview began ... Maggie knew that Judy was the youngest student in her class. Maggie described Judy as doing very well in school, above average. But she found Judy to be "insecure". When asked to explain, Maggie said that Judy always sought approval from her and her peers. She wondered why, since Judy was a very good student. When the interview was over, we walked down together to meet her class coming in from recess. She told me of her concerns about Judy and her shyness. She offered to speak to the gym teacher because Judy did not participate in any sports activities Maggie found Judy to have a very low self-image. (Journal notes, June 6, 2002)*

In her description, Maggie depicted Judy as a bright and capable child whose performance was generally above the class average. In fact, she considered Judy to stand out academically. "... *she does well. She succeeds in everything ...she's above, above class average...* " *(Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002).* However, Judy was also described as a student who constantly required self-assurance about her work in class by asking if things were done well or if they were acceptable. Judy also seemed to seek this reassurance from her peers, and tended to cling to her closest friends more "...*she needs*

that reassurance ...from myself and I see it also as well from her peers, and asking them if things are all right and with myself as well."(Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002).

Maggie noticed that Judy had three or four best friends in her class and outside during recess time. Judy mentioned having two close friends. Maggie provided Judy with positive feedback and reinforcement because of her evident lack of self-confidence. This did not seem sufficient since Judy still returned for further support and encouragement regularly. Maggie expressed a concern over Judy's low self-concept and wondered why she did not feel better about herself, given her high functioning ability. *"... but I don't understand why it would be low when, you know, when she sees, you know, everything she's doing so well." (Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002)*

As previously noted in this chapter, the concepts that recurred in the interviews with Judy were ones that described her insecurities about academic performance and social skills. Although she appeared to succeed in school, Judy sought the approval of her teacher and classmates. The apprehension that Judy expressed in her conversations during the interviews was also reflected in the teacher's perceptions of her in school. The teacher considered Judy to have very low self-esteem because she always seemed to be lacking confidence in her skills. This finding is supported in the literature where it was found that academically capable adolescents often have vulnerability in areas that included social and global self-concept, perfectionism, and depression (Robinson & Noble, 1991).

In 2001, Goodyer ran a longitudinal study where he looked at certain personality factors and how these were associated with depression. The personality items included shyness and liking to be alone, as well as concern over self-adequacy, increased vulnerability, anxiety and a tendency to ruminate. Judy presented a number

of these personality characteristics. In addition, Goodyer reported that higher IQ scores at the time of a preschool assessment were related to a greater chance of later depression in girls, while lower IQ was associated with later depression in boys. His findings also suggested that problems with accomplishment and hostility in boys when they are young can result in depressive symptoms later on, however, self-esteem issues seem to be more crucial in girls. Depression in boys is also associated with external behaviours patterns of antagonism, lack of restraint, discontent with self. In girls, depression was associated with increased rumination, introspection and sense of inadequacy.

These findings suggest considerable support for a developmental model of susceptibility to depression. These findings also suggest that experiences or more importantly, how children interpret these experiences, depend in great part on the attachment process that provides the child with internalized models of the self and the world around them. The way that children use mediating strategies at an early age can be critical to the way that they interact with the environment later on and develop coping skills and cognitive styles.

Summary of interview with Judy's teacher, Maggie

Judy's teacher, Maggie, considered her academic performance to be above that of the other children in the class. Despite her ability to succeed, Maggie mentioned that Judy was insecure and sought the constant approval of her teacher and peers. On a social level, Judy had a few friends that she was close to and shared time with them during class and recess time. Maggie expressed concern about this child's poor self-image and questioned why it was so, given her actual ability to excel.

In the following section I introduce Jenny, the third student participant in this study.

Jenny

> *Jenny ... was cooperative and motivated throughout the testing. Jenny's speech and vocabulary were well developed. She was talkative, curious, and insightful. She had a large fund of general information for her young age, including personal facts such as her home address and telephone number. Jenny readily volunteered information and was able to carry on a conversation ... (Excerpt from psychological report on Jenny, March 1995)*

I had seen Jenny for a derogation assessment when she was 4 ½ years of age, and the previous passage was taken from the psychological report that I wrote at that time. It is now April 2002 and Jenny is 11 ½ years old and in the sixth grade.

First Interview with Jenny

> *I arrived at Jenny's school a few minutes earlier for the interview, rang the buzzer at the door of the main entrance, and walked towards the front office area. The secretary of the school smiled and greeted me as I entered her room. She recognized my name from several telephone conversations that we had had over the past couple of days. She told me that the principal was expecting me, and escorted me to his office across the hall. He was on the phone at the time, looked up, smiled, and gestured for me to come in and sit down. When the telephone conversation was over, he stood up from his desk, greeted me warmly, and shook my hand. Mr. Thomas was of average height, with white hair and wore glasses. We chatted informally about the school, the students, and the study. I had worked at that school as school psychologist several years ago, so the building was familiar to me. (Jenny, April 3, 2002)*

I talked to Mr. Thomas, the school principal, about my study and he took a few minutes to explain why Jenny's teacher was not participating in the interviews as requested. A 'work- to- rule' policy was in effect at that time, and participating in my study was considered to be a task outside of the teacher's working schedule. I told him that I was aware of the situation, and that it was fine. Mr. Thomas offered to help in any other way, then asked if I was ready to meet Jenny. Jenny was called down over the intercom system. Meanwhile, he contemplated possible locations in the school for me to conduct the

interviews. There was some difficulty finding an available area, so the principal offered me his office for that day.

Meeting Jenny once again

> *Jenny arrived at the principal's office, and he explained to her that she and I would be meeting there. She stood at the door and seemed excited as she fidgeted nervously with her hands. I remembered Jenny from when she had last come to see me for the derogation assessment, seven years ago. She was now tall and thin, wearing braces. She had a big smile, and seemed a little shy. The principal left the room and closed the door behind him. After we talked for a few minutes, Jenny became visibly more comfortable as she settled down in the first of two chairs facing the principal's desk. She was wearing the school colours and kept her long hair in a ponytail. I set up the tape recorder on the table, placed another chair along the side of the desk, and explained to Jenny how the conversation would be recorded. She seemed excited about the prospect and moved about in her chair, as if in anticipation for the interview to begin. (Jenny, April 3, 2002)*

The interview started and we talked about her performance in school. Jenny was the youngest student in the sixth grade level of a split grade 5 and 6 class. As we spoke, Jenny did point out that, technically, she was not the youngest one in the classroom because of the fifth graders that were there as well. Jenny was quick to describe how things were going very well in school and her marks were good. She specified math, gym, and writing as her academic strengths, and was also proud of her artwork. In addition, she described herself as someone that enjoyed challenges and always participated in class. *Things are going well...my marks are staying high, yeah; they're going really well (Jenny, April 3, 2002).* Jenny used words like *"high, enriched, proud"*, and *"very good"*, and this suggested that she had a positive feeling about her academic performance in school. Jenny was always ready to help her friends with schoolwork, and said that they often turned to her for this help. Jenny also evaluated her social interactions in a positive manner. According to the social-emotional domain, Jenny mentioned having a lot of friends and three best friends in her class. Outside of class she also had three close friends. Jenny enjoyed being the youngest in the class because it gave her a special title "*...it just felt*

good being the youngest. Because, I don't know. I like saying I'm the youngest in the class ... I have a special title, you know" (Jenny, April 3, 2002).

Jenny said that the other students did not treat her differently because she was younger. They knew that she was younger but this made no difference to them, and did not affect the way that they related to her. When asked what she liked to do with her friends, Jenny mentioned how they walked in the schoolyard and talked about different topics, and worked as partners during class projects. When they were at home, these friends liked to talk on the phone with her and chat on the Internet as well. Jenny often helped her friends with their homework, after school on the phone. Jenny appeared to be very well adjusted, both academically and socially. She was involved in several activities in school, including her job as monitor for the kindergarten children and tutor for grade three. Her positive comments throughout the interview indicated that Jenny was very pleased with her academic performance and her social interactions in school. Jenny also spoke about her upcoming year in junior high school. She had written an entrance exam for the school of her choice and was accepted. She was registered for the enriched programme and seemed excited about starting school there in the fall.

Second Interview with Jenny

The second interview with Jenny also took place in the school, but this time the French language room was selected as the location. I arrived at the school, announced my arrival to the school secretary, and Jenny was called down to see me. Jenny escorted me to the French language room that was situated at the other end of the school, and we went in. There were several working tables in this large room and I asked Jenny to select one. She chose a table located in the middle of the room and we sat down in the chairs placed around the table.

In this interview Jenny spoke a lot about her friends and what they did together.

In addition to her three close friends, Jenny spoke of another classmate that she spent time with at school. This student had special needs and Jenny often looked out for her and helped her with her work. They also spoke on the phone after school hours. Jenny spoke again about her responsibility as monitor and tutor for the lower grades in her school. When asked how she liked doing these tasks, she said: *"It makes me feel good"(Jenny, April 3, 2002).*

I asked Jenny if she had the same interests as her classmates and she told me that she did share interests with her close friends. When asked if her age difference mattered to them, she said it did not. However, when asked about sharing interests with classmates outside of this closer group, Jenny mentioned that their interests differed. Nonetheless, Jenny often acted as though she was interested in these different things and was accepted by all of her peers. *"They like rap, I don't. Sometimes I pretend that I like that music. It's just to keep up the conversation ... but not always" (Jenny, April 10, 2002).*

In addition to having friends in her class, Jenny was also sociable with students in the other grade six class. She made reference to two students in that class that she spent time with at lunch hour and occasionally out in the schoolyard. But recently these two girls were playing basketball during recess, and Jenny did not like how they were playing, so she chose to walk and talk with her classmate friends instead. When asked what she did not like about the way that they played, Jenny said that they acted differently because boys were in the game.

> *Well, they're always, like, cause there's boys that, so it's like "Hee, hee, hee", and I don't like that ... if you give them the ball, they're like, they're trying to think that they're everything. (Jenny, April10, 2002)*

Jenny mentioned that these students were 'tougher' when they were with all their friends. They also changed their behaviour around boys, and Jenny didn't like that, so she spent less time with them. Generally, it appeared that Jenny had several groups of friends to

choose from, even the fifth graders in her class. For the rest of the interview, Jenny described her dance activity outside of school and told me about her friends there. There were no best friends at the dance classes, but they were all friendly with her, even if the language of conversation was French. She did her best to speak in French with these girls, and was making friendship bracelets for them.

It generally appeared that Jenny had a number of friends in and out of school. What was evident from this conversation was the way that Jenny was able to gravitate smoothly from one group of students to another, and how she fit in with different types of people. However, she always maintained her close group of friends at school and outside of school.

As part of my data collection, I also collected data from documents such as report cards. Jenny provided me with copies of her report cards from the last three years. In these report cards, I saw how Jenny had maintained good grades throughout elementary school. Her teacher had written the following comments about her in the last term report card from the year before, in grade five. These comments were indicative of Jenny's strong academic performance and personal development. *"Jenny's enthusiasm is evident in everything she undertakes. She is alert and observant and likes to participate in all class activities. She has an excellent attitude towards school" (Grade five teacher's comments from Jenny's report card, June 2001).*

Third Interview with Jenny

One week later I arrived at the school during recess time, in order to observe Jenny outside with her friends. But Jenny was not outside with her classmates, so I entered the school building when recess was over. Jenny was helping out as a math tutor in the grade

three class. I proceeded toward the front office, and asked to see Jenny for the third interview. The third interview was held in the nurse's office, located down a corridor off the main entrance area. It was a small room with a cot, table, and washroom on the side. We sat at the table facing each other and I started the tape for the interview. Jenny talked about the school board math test that was scheduled for that day. She was not aware of the time that the test would be given. Jenny was very excited about writing this test and expressed this when she was asked how she felt that day. Jenny was very interested in the competitive aspect of the test, and seemed to enjoy the subject itself. "*I'm excited because I'm also doing one next week. On the preparatory test I got the highest in the class" (Jenny, April 17, 2002).* As we were talking, there was a knock at the door. The teacher's aide stepped in and told Jenny that it was time for her to take the math test. We ended the interview there and I told her that I would return the following week. Jenny stood up quickly, said goodbye, and left the room.

One week later, I returned to the school to resume the third interview with Jenny. We met again in the nurse's room, and Jenny recounted her experience of writing the math test the week before, and seemed confident about having done well. Her comments regarding academic performance were all positive. In addition, Jenny described positive experiences when she spoke of the things that she liked to do at school and outside of school.

Jenny was popular with her classmates, and was often asked to join others as a partner. The down side of this was her difficulty in choosing one friend over another. She showed maturity in the way that she handled the situation.

> *It felt good. But I didn't like it because I couldn't decide who, because they're all my good friends ... well, I told some people, well this time, then next time maybe for another subject then. (Jenny, April 24, 2002)*

I asked Jenny how she thought that her classmates perceived her. She told me that others identified her as the student with the highest grades in the class. She liked being identified in that way, but she didn't like it when others expected her to obtain the highest grades all the time. "... *it makes me a bit like, tingly, because sometimes it's not me. So it's, like, I don't like it when they say that. Sometimes it's not me, so ...*" *(Jenny, April 24, 2002).*

Summary of interviews with Jenny

Jenny was the youngest student in her class but demonstrated considerable maturity for her age. She helped others out, as with tutoring and homework, and was especially caring and supportive of one classmate with special needs. Jenny was self-confident and worked well and independently on her tasks. Jenny had many friends in and out of school and was an excellent student. Jenny had positive experiences in school since the time that she was initially advanced into kindergarten. She was doing very well academically and was developing social and emotional skills as part of her class and peer group.

Observation of Jenny in the classroom

Jenny was in grade 6 of a split 5/6 classroom. I had an opportunity to observe Jenny in her classroom and observed her during a French lesson. The next excerpt is from the journal notes that I wrote following my observation of Jenny in this class.

> *The room was filled to capacity with students. It was a morning class, and the children were engaged in activity as they moved around to work on their projects. The desks were arranged in groups of four with two pairs of students facing each other, suggesting a collaborative and dialogic working environment. The classroom was brightly decorated with colourful pictures, posters, charts, and writing on the blackboards. It seemed like a very busy room.*
>
> *Jenny's French instructor was standing in front of his desk that was situated in the right-hand corner of the room and facing the door. He was asking who had brought in the money to pay for a book – The Hobbit. A female student teacher was walking around the classroom, looking at students' work.*

> *Jenny was seated in her group, seeming animated and involved in the lesson. She was waving her hand to respond to the teacher's request about the money. She went up to the teacher with her money then returned to her desk, then walked around her group and started talking to another student. Jenny appeared to be tall in comparison to the others in general, even if she was the youngest in the grade six group. (Observational notes of Jenny in class, April 24, 2002)*

Jenny was active and talkative in the classroom; involved with whatever was happening at the time.

> *Jenny seemed eager to perform in class, as she does during the interview sessions. She was sitting in a group of four students, two pairs of desks facing each other. She was waving her hand up most of the time that I was there, and reminded the teacher about collecting money for a book. Jenny seemed tall, as compared to her peers. (Journal notes taken from observation of Jenny in her classroom, April 24, 2002).*

My immediate reaction observing Jenny in class was how she did stand out from the rest of the group. Jenny was enthusiastically involved in the French class. She was busy working with three other students, and seemed to be leading the group in this activity. Jenny was seated and the others were standing around her as she glued pictures onto a poster board and consulted with them as she proceeded to write down the captions. Research has shown that positive experiences of friendship and peer relations contribute to the cognitive, social, moral, and psychological adjustment and socio-emotional health of adolescents.

This next excerpt from my journal describes an encounter with Jenny's teacher in the hall.

> *I finished with my classroom observation of Jenny in her French class and was headed toward the exit of the school, when I met up with Jenny's homeroom teacher in the hallway. We greeted each other, and chatted briefly. Jenny's teacher was friendly and talkative, and she quickly started to explain how she was not allowed to participate in my study because of the work-to-rule policy put forth by the teachers' union. However, she was interested in the topic of my work, and was willing to speak to me 'off the record' about Jenny. She mentioned how Jenny was doing exceptionally well in school, and described the parents and family as a "package deal". She said that Jenny was always eager to participate in class, and*

that she looked forward to seeing me for the interviews in school. (Field notes on meeting Jenny's teacher, April 24th, 2002)

Interview with Jenny's Mother, Cathy

In the following section I discuss my meeting with Jenny's mother, Cathy. Cathy and I agreed to meet at her workplace. I arrived ten minutes earlier at the door to the main office area. Cathy was employed at a well-established consulting firm, and she was responsible to oversee a sales department in this company. She showed me around the workplace before the interview began and seemed proud of her work. We looked around for a room to have the interview. Cathy selected a small conference room that had a large table in the centre with chairs around it, and a window-sided wall leading into the hallway. The other side of the room had a large window, overlooking the city from a top floor of the building.

Cathy was very talkative and said that she felt nervous about being audiotaped, so we chatted briefly and I reassured her. After a few minutes I turned on the tape recorder and the interview began. Cathy explained that she was very pleased with her daughter's performance in school, and very satisfied about having advanced her into kindergarten seven years ago. "*I feel that if we had kept her back, it would have been very – a disaster. She'd be bored ...*"*(Cathy, Jenny's mother, September 17, 2002).*

At the time of the interview, Jenny had just started junior high school, so her mother first spoke to me of the way that she had easily adapted to the new school, teachers, and friends. Cathy described Jenny's academic progress as very good, and all comments regarding her progress over the years were positive ones. Cathy portrayed her daughter as a well-rounded and competent student who was advancing steadily in both the academic and social domains. Jenny was a child who was enthusiastic and focused on her tasks, independent, and curious about learning. She was considered to

have leadership qualities and a natural ability to take charge. In addition, Jenny always seemed willing to help others and eager to participate in new activities, in and out of the classroom. Cathy explained how she found her daughter to be mature for her age, and having been advanced one year of school with the derogation, Jenny was learning with peers who were developing at the same pace as she. Cathy believed that Jenny would have been bored had she not been derogated, but she also believed that Jenny would have succeeded just as well. Cathy showed an immense amount of confidence in her daughter's abilities, no matter what the circumstances would be.

Summary of interview with Jenny's mother, Cathy

The comments that Cathy made about her daughter Jenny were positive and supportive. She was very pleased with the progress that Jenny had made and the maturity that she continued to display over the years. Now in junior high, Jenny was adapting well to her new setting by making new friends and maintaining good grades.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I examined the interviews of the teachers, the student participants, and their parents. I studied the observations and the document data in order to establish consistency with the themes that emerged from the interviews. I studied the content of the interviews by keeping in mind the focal questions of the study. As previously mentioned in chapter one, the focal questions were as follows: 1) what is the impact of derogation on the children who were selected and volunteered to participate in this study? 2) how do these children describe their school experiences and accomplishments? 3) how do the parents and teachers of these children view them as learners and socializers?

Since kindergarten, Abby, Judy and Jenny continued to excel in school. Regardless of their younger age, these three students were able to maintain academic performance that

was as good or better than that of their older classmates. Their educational success suggested that their early entrance to school had positive outcomes.

The three students generally described their school experiences and accomplishments as good ones. They were content with their choices of friends and activities in and outside of school. Jenny presented the profile of a well-rounded intelligent and socially capable young adolescent. Her confidence and positive attitude were reflected in her successful school life and large circle of friends. Jenny was involved in several extra-curricular activities and spent time with her parents in doing other things such as cycling and travelling. Abby was also involved in activities outside of school, but she appeared to be very occupied with these activities, with little time for anything else. Her parents encouraged Abby to participate in sports and accompanied her to every activity. This interest and involvement with their child was similar to that of Jenny and her parents, but Abby seemed overwhelmed by the number of activities that she had. Judy's parents were not as involved with their daughter in school and out-of-school activities. Judy displayed significant insecurity in her performance at school, and her teacher was concerned about her low self-esteem. Even if she was capable of succeeding, she did not seem convinced of her abilities and constantly sought the approval and re-assurance of others around her.

The parents talked about their children in the interviews. Cathy, Jenny's mother, was proud of her daughter's accomplishments in and out of school. She was encouraging and supportive of Jenny's choices of friends and activities, such as the tutoring of younger students in the school and helping a classmate who had special needs. Cathy was pleased about her decision to advance Jenny into kindergarten, but also mentioned how she believed that her daughter would have been fine in any other

setting as well. Abby's parents were supportive of her progress in school, but seemed to have set especially high standards for her with the number of activities she was involved with at the time. There were six activities going on after school and on weekends and this did not leave her much free time. There was little information from Judy's parents, except that they had long working hours and often worked on weekends as well. Her teacher described Judy as a very capable student who was insecure and sought the approval of others in school. Judy preferred solitary activities such as video games and spent much time alone when at home.

In the following chapter I will discuss the findings of this study by reviewing the emerging themes and relating these findings to the participants of this study and Vygotskian theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Overview

In this study, I explored the effects of advancing children into kindergarten as a result of derogation. I used a Vygotskian theoretical framework to understand how these younger children perceive and learn within the space that is known as the zone of proximal development, or the Zoped. As previously mentioned in chapter two, the Zoped refers to 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. 73).

I used a descriptive case study qualitative approach. The use of a qualitative methodology enabled me to understand more clearly the effects of derogation assessment on three selected students. This approach allowed me to ask questions and obtain the perspectives of the participants themselves. The theoretical framework of this study on derogation was based on Vygotsky's view of cultural construction in developmental psychology. Vygotsky acknowledged a natural or biological basis to cognitive development; he also emphasized that this development was only made possible with the mediation and the internalization of *cultural signs*. These signs referred to human cognitive operations such as language. *Mediation* refers to the process that drives children toward higher cognitive growth. Mediation involves the presence of a significant adult, teacher, or more capable peer as children are learning to master social experiences.

I selected Vygotsky's concept of Zoped because I considered that the social interaction occurring in the classroom with older classmates and the guidance of the teacher served as cultural tools that could organize their developing minds. The early entry of these young children into school enabled them to experience many social and cognitive opportunities in the kindergarten classroom. Their advancement into school provided them with the 'cultural tools' that could enable them to learn academic and social skills that they otherwise would not be exposed to. As active participants, these children were learning in a classroom with classmates who were older in chronological age and a teacher who took on the role of adult mediator. I was interested in learning about the way that they perceived themselves as younger members of the class.

Most research on peer interaction from a Vygotskian perspective focuses on the influence and guidance of people who have achieved a level of expertise beyond that of the child. Vygotsky placed greater emphasis on the role of asymmetrical relationships such as relationships between adults and children. When Vygotsky did examine peer interactions, he looked at the way that a different understanding of the same issue could affect the learning that occurred. In these interactions, can we assume that asymmetrical relationships will enhance or encourage learning for these younger students? How will these asymmetrical relationships affect the development of their academic and social skills?

It is generally believed that children who are accelerated in school will do well. The underlying assumption is that these children are bright and will experience success. I was interested in exploring this belief. The rationale for this study was a desire to explore the perspectives and thoughts of different people on the matter of derogation and

advancing younger children into kindergarten; the student, the teacher and parent. I questioned the use of derogation as an accelerative model in the province of Quebec. I accomplished this by asking three students who had experienced derogation as preschoolers, how they felt about themselves and their achievements several years later.

Self Reflexivity of the Researcher

In the province of Quebec, the age requirement for admission to kindergarten is five years of age and six years of age for grade one. With the derogation exemption, children who are not yet five or six years old by September 30th are considered to be of younger age. These younger children are only permitted to start school if they possess the basic requirements stipulated by the Quebec Ministry of Education.

Derogation assessment is based on the appraisal of cognitive abilities, language development, perceptual-motor skills, and social-emotional development of pre-schoolers in order to determine whether or not they are ready to start kindergarten classes. The derogation policy is based on the belief that acceleration is justified if the child shows above average ability in these areas. As previously described in chapter one, standardized tests are used to conduct an evaluation for derogation. However, ability is not static and can change over time. The social-emotional status of a pre-schooler does not necessarily warrant its long-term effects on socialization skills. This concern about predicting social and emotional growth was one of my reasons for conducting this study. I believed that most of these children would experience academic success over the years, but I was not certain of their ability to fulfil their roles as social 'learners' or social agents. I wanted to test my beliefs. Hence, I asked each participant to discuss academic performance and social-emotional issues with me.

As part of this study, I investigated the research literature in the areas of early school entry and the effects of age differences on the learning process. In addition, I looked for studies where the assessment of cognitive ability and performance was conducted with children of pre-school age. I was interested in exploring the soundness and usefulness of evaluating pre-schoolers before entering school. Subsequently, I was interested in looking at the long-term consequences of advancing young children into school, and particularly, for children who had been derogated in the province of Quebec. The literature presents conflicting information on the issue of advancing children into school, but studies generally indicate that the evaluation of children's abilities can help in deciding if they should be accelerated. I questioned the long-term effects of this procedure of testing and advancing younger children into kindergarten.

As previously mentioned in chapter 4, the focal questions in this study were: 1. What is the impact of derogation on the children who were selected and volunteered to participate in this study? 2. How do these children describe their school experiences and accomplishments? 3. How do parents and teachers view them as learners and socializers? 4. Does the accelerated or enriched environment provided by kindergarten advance the cognitive, academic and social development of these younger children who were granted early school entrance? When I asked these questions, four specific themes emerged from the data that I collected.

Discussion of Themes

Themes that emerged from the data

The themes that emerged from the data were: 1) *achievement* in academic performance, 2) the development of *social skills,* 3) students' feelings of *self-esteem,*

and, 4) the *support* of parents, teachers, and peers. *Appendix M* includes the lists of emerging themes and *Appendix N* has an example of a concept map that is based on these themes. These themes are discussed below, with reference to the theoretical framework.

Theme 1: Academic Achievement

Achievement in academic performance referred to the students' performance in school. This achievement was discussed when I asked the three students how they were doing with their schoolwork. The academic performance of the participants was exceptionally good. Common to all three students was their ability to succeed in school. This finding was confirmed in the interviews that were carried out with the students, as well as with their teachers and parents.

Teachers' Comments about Academic Achievement

Academic performance was the first theme that emerged from the interview data and it was a topic that all participants discussed; teachers, students, and parents. The three teachers suggested that younger students who had experienced the derogation process were generally able to keep up with the academic standards of their older peers. In Maggie's description of her student Judy, who had been derogated, the first teacher described her as a bright and capable child whose performance was generally above the class average. In fact, she considered Judy to stand out academically "... *she does well. She succeeds in everything ...she's above, above class average...* " *(Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6th, 2002).*

The second teacher, Pamela, stated that students who were derogated were not all successful on the academic and social levels of development. She had seen several of these younger students struggling with their learning over the years.

> *I'd feel very comfortable saying that probably the majority of the cases that are derogated ... they're probably just average students. Maybe some of them may even*

> *be struggling, at both levels, academically and socially... (Pamela, a teacher, May 9, 2002).*

Often, Pamela found that these students were capable students but seemed unsure of their performance. In one instance, Pamela discussed the performance of one child who received support and encouragement from school and home. The parents were able to provide the structured environment that he required at home and this was complimented by the organization set in school. Pamela felt that without this structure he would not have succeeded as well as he did.

> *... he came across very insecure, that boy ... But his work was well done, but he had a supportive background ... one of the parents was a teacher, so he was in a structured environment ... I think that plays a big part in their success. (Pamela, a teacher, May 9, 2002)*

However, Pamela also discussed the performance of a student who, she believed, was the exception to her general observations of derogated students. This student was very capable academically, perhaps even more than students older than she. Even on a social level, this child was accepted by her classmates and very self-assured.

The third teacher, Melissa, had specific comments about derogation and its effects on children in school. Melissa explained that when she was teaching grades two and three, the younger students in the classes were chattier and had more difficulty sitting still in their seats for long periods of time. Melissa found that these younger students had more disagreements with others and did not work as well in groups with older peers. She generally found that children who were derogated were at a disadvantage and didn't do as well as they could.

> *Generally speaking, the feeling is that children who are derogation cases are, uh, less mature, and the question always comes up, you know, why should we be pushing these children, uh, into a grade level that they may not be prepared for when they can be, uh, when they can remain at, you know, the lower grade level, and be, let's say, the top of their class in terms of maturity (Melissa, a teacher, May 2002).*

Parents' and Children's Comments about Academic Achievement

The students valued a strong academic performance in school. Abby was very concerned about her results and placed importance on achieving good grades. She described the grading system in detail and made positive remarks about the subjects of math, gym, and music.

> *Olga: How are you doing in science?*
> *Abby: Um, I got – I was good at the beginning, but I got much better at it.*
> *Olga: So, better than good?*
> *Abby: That's what my mother said. (Abby, April 9, 2002)*

The positive descriptors such as *"good"* and *"better"* suggested that Abby was evaluating her performance and that she had perceived the progress in her work. Abby made reference to her mother's positive comment about her performance in science, and this indicated that it was important for Abby that her mother was pleased.

In my interview with Abby's mother, Laura, she described how Abby excelled in school: Abby had a good memory, was an *excellent* reader, did lots of reading, was able to work alone, and worked quickly. At times Laura seemed to exaggerate in the way that she talked about her daughter, as for example, in her use of words and descriptors: *"She's doing better than the whole class ... and likes to be number one"(Laura, Abby's mother, June 14, 2002).* In her conversations, Laura seemed to project personal feelings of competition on her child. I sensed that there were great expectations placed on Abby's performance in school because she placed emphasis on certain areas of study more than others, and her attempt to associate Abby with these areas. Laura revealed her personal values and views in comments such as the following:

> *Language arts is probably, well, let's go through different things ... creativity takes a little while for that ... she's a logical person versus a creative person, but we all, me and my husband, are logical people, so I guess I'm not surprised.*
> *(Laura, Abby's mother, June 2002)*

In this excerpt, it was apparent that Laura was projecting her own skills and interests onto those of her child. Laura stressed her beliefs and values regarding academic success and had a way to explain or justify Abby's 'weaker' performance in language arts subjects. I sensed that the subject of language arts was not an area of strength for her mother. When we spoke about this school subject, Laura started to speak quickly and move about in her chair nervously. She started to talk about math and the sciences instead. Laura emphasized the importance of "logical" thought, as was found in mathematics.

> *The easiest thing for her is math ... she's a logical person versus a creative person, but we all, me and my husband, are logical people, so I guess ... not to be surprised. (Laura, Abby's mother, June 14, 2002)*

> ***She (Abby) is doing very well, very well ... she has a very good memory and basically she's very good in math. And she likes to be number one. (Laura, Abby's mother, June 14, 2002)***

The students were pleased with their academic results, as seen in the following excerpts from their interviews.

> *My marks are staying high ... they're going really well. (Jenny, April 3, 2002)*
> *I always got an 'A' though. So I can't get better than that. (Abby, April 9, 2002)*
> *Fine, yeah ... it's like math, like, I find I'm good. (Judy, May 23, 2002)*

Judy's teacher commented about her strong academic performance in school. "*Academically she's (Judy) above her peers. She does well. She succeeds in everything. She's above class average"(Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002).*

There were some features that were not consistent among all three students. They all were successful in school, but had differing strengths and weaknesses as learners. Judy and Abby had difficulty with reading in their first years of elementary school, but had now improved.

> *Judy: In grade two then, I think reading was really hard or something ... only in grade two ... I went to this help or something. But now reading is easy ... I don't read much books ... I'm not crazy about reading. (Judy, May 28, 2002)*

> *Olga: How are you doing in reading?*
> *Abby: I'm doing better than the other years ... Now I'm reading at my house so it's not bad anymore.*
> *Olga: Which part of reading is giving you difficulty? Is it the reading or understanding what you read?*
> *Abby: The reading. (Abby, April 9, 2002)*

Jenny did not have difficulty with reading and excelled in this area. Jenny was also a leader in her classroom and evidenced confidence in her participation in groups and in other school activities. These activities included her tutoring of students in the lower grades and writing articles for the school paper.

> *Jenny: I'm very good in writing. My marks are staying high .... We just published a newspaper in our class ... I wrote a story on how the story of St. Patrick became, and I was, um, you know when they write stuff like Dear Mickey, I always do that. (Interview with Jenny, April 10, 2002)*

The academic success of these three participants was a positive finding in this study. Over the years, these students were able to transfer their highly developed cognitive abilities into successful academic results. This finding was consistent with the initial outcomes of the testing that was done when these students were seen in a derogation assessment before starting kindergarten classes. It also suggested that the initial evaluation of their abilities as young children was accurate in its appraisal of potential academic skills. This finding also supported the literature suggesting how initial screening of preschoolers is done to identify their individual abilities and learning potential. Freberg (1991) suggested that younger children be screened to determine whether or not they are developmentally ready to start school, but the chronologically older children need not be screened.

At the time of their derogation assessment, the participants in this study were of pre-school age. All three children were found to be bright and ready to start kindergarten class. The results from the screening procedures implied that these students would experience academic success in school. Their continuing academic success corroborated with the predictive ability of the initial derogation assessments. As indicated in the literature on acceleration, Proctor, Black, and Feldhusen (1986) found that early entrance to kindergarten was a favourable practice that had no negative impact if the proper screening procedures were used in selecting the children. Braymen and Piersel (1987) examined the advantages and disadvantages of screening children for entrance into kindergarten at an earlier age. They reviewed the screening procedures that were used to identify the children more likely to succeed and suggested that screening for early entrance increased chances for success. In this study, the screening of students led to positive academic outcomes.

Vygotsky and the Theme of Academic Achievement

Vygotsky believed that *"the only good learning is that which is in advance of development"* (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89), because he viewed the processes of learning and development as distinct. However, he believed that the process of learning puts the process of development in motion. In this way, advancing children into school makes it possible for learning to precede development. In this study, all three children academically excelled over the years.

Abby's mother, Laura, was pleased with her decision about having advanced her child into kindergarten.

Olga: Have you felt over the years that this (derogation) was a good decision?

> *Laura: Uh, well, myself personally, I felt it was a good decision because I think she would have been bored, honestly. (Laura, Abby's mother, June 14, 2002)*

Jenny's mother, Cathy, also believed this was true for her child.

> *Olga: Are you pleased with your decision to advance your daughter into kindergarten?*
> *Cathy: Oh, my God, yes. Very please, very pleased. I feel that if we had kept her back a year that would have been a very, very bad decision. (Cathy, Jenny's mother, September 2002)*

Implications of academic achievement for derogation and Vygotsky

The students from this study are performing well academically as they advance through grade school. They are often the youngest members of the class, but they are able to learn and progress with their classmates. Through their interactions with others, these students are challenged and encouraged to learn with their peers. According to Vygotskian theory, children's learning precedes their development. Vygotsky's Activity Theory is concerned with children practicing and doing. This concept of activity involves significant others that enable learning within the zone of proximal development. In Vygotsky's developmental theory and *Zoped,* the teacher uses activity theory by organizing activities that stimulate children to learn at their levels of learning potential. Accordingly, these children learn to their levels of potential because they are in the presence of *'adult guidance or more capable peers'* (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 81).

Theme 2: The Development of Social Skills

Socializing with peers was a topic that surfaced in all the conversations with the students in this study. As a recurring theme, the main category of social-emotional development included the sub-categories of *friends*, *activities*, and *peer acceptance*s were commonly discussed.

Teachers' Comments about Social Skills

When children are learning within a classroom with older peers, there can be some difficulties in the development of their social skills. As one teacher, Pamela, mentioned in her interview

> *... on average these children that are derogated ... somewhere somehow they suffered ... on a social level or academically. And sometimes it was more on a social level. (Pamela, teacher, April 20, 2002)*

Melissa was another teacher who was interviewed in this study. Melissa found that derogated children were socially immature. Their interests were not the same as their peers and issues of puberty came into play, especially in grades five and six. This could result in alienation because they were not part of the 'in group'. She found that there was a difference within a year of school when she saw these students develop along with their peers in the classroom. However, Melissa believed that the immaturity factor levelled out as the children got older and that other students in the class did not make any distinction from them because of their age. Melissa mentioned that the derogated child in her class at the time of the interview was an exception to her general observations of derogated students. This child was coping well and getting along with her peers. Generally, Melissa felt that children "*are better off*" when they are older and more mature because learning comes easier to them and they seem to excel.

Children's and Parents' Comments about Social Skills

All three students talked about having friends and how important their friends were for them. Jenny and Abby mentioned that they had close friends in school and also other friends outside of school. Jenny was popular in her class and also got along well with students in other classes. It was interesting to hear about how she was able to

associate with diverse groups of students, even when she did not necessarily share their interests. It appears that Jenny's use of language and vocabulary is quite sophisticated for her age. In addition, the idea that Jenny pretended to like something in order to fit in with other groups of peers suggested that she was insightful and possessed refined cognitive and social skills. This was evident in the following excerpt from an interview with Jenny.

> *Jenny: Sometimes I pretend.*
> *Olga: What do you mean?*
> *Jenny: Sometimes I pretend that, "Oh yeah. I like that music". It's just to keep up the conversation ... but not always. Sometimes I tell them my opinions, sometimes just to keep up the conversation. (Jenny, April 10, 2002)*

The age difference between her and her peers did not pose difficulty for Jenny, and she recounted advantages to being the youngest in her group. One of these advantages was that she enjoyed being different from the others.

> *Jenny: I like having a title, like, not in the middle, sometimes. Just having the name, the youngest ...sometimes it's good not to be in the middle, like, have a title or something. When it comes to birthdays, my friends are always one year older than me and it's better. (Jenny, April 10, 2002)*

Jenny was involved in many activities in the school and had several friends in and out of her class. Abby also had close friends in her classroom and spent most of her time with these three girls outside of the classroom as well.

> *Abby: We all like each other and if you pick one then other people are going to feel sad. So, we're all best friends.*
> *Olga: All four of you?*
> *Abby: Yeah*
> *Olga: Do you have friends outside of school?*
> *Abby: Yeah, at skating, soccer, and swimming. (Abby, April 9, 2002)*

Abby was not as involved as Jenny in school events, but she did take part in several sports activities outside of the school.

> *Abby: Skating is usually on Mondays, Tuesdays. Swimming for me is on Friday. Soccer I don't know yet. Piano is on Thursday ... and I even have catechism on Saturday. (Abby, April 9th, 2002)*

Abby's mother, Laura, had high expectations for her daughter. She described how important it was for her to be involved in many social activities and to have a wide circle of friends. The following excerpt from my journal notes describes my impressions of meeting with this parent.

> *I find that Abby's mother, Laura, is very driven and competitive in the way that she speaks and what she speaks about ... I had the sense that Laura was pushing the daughter into activities a little too much. The child was active in swimming, skating, synchronized skating, soccer, piano, and ceramic arts. (Journal notes, October 12, 2002)*

In the following excerpt from Laura's interview, she explains that Abby has many friends, but she could have had more in her sports activities.

> *Laura: In skating she has a few friends – not as many as I thought she would have. I thought there would be more friends and ...she didn't ... not like they hate each other. They talk to each other, but she doesn't 'click'. She clicked with this girl that's eleven years old. (Interview with Laura, June 14th, 2002)*

Judy, the third student in the study, had two best friends in school, but did not seem to have other friends outside of the school setting. Judy lacked confidence in her academic performance and her relationship with peers. The literature on acceleration addresses the socio-emotional development of children who are granted early entrance into school and are younger than most of their peers. (McCluskey & Walker, 1986; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2002). Students who are accelerated are often academically qualified but socially immature. This may sometimes be evident in younger students' lack of social skills. The next excerpt from an interview with Judy is an example of her limited social skills and experience with many friends. This child has friends at school but not outside of the school setting.

> *Jenny: I have two best friends – do I say their names?*
> *Olga: If you'd like.*

Jenny: Okay, T and A.
Olga: They're in your class?
Jenny: Yeah
Olga: What kinds of things do you like to do with your best friends?
Jenny: Uh, talk on the phone, go on the computer.
Olga: Do you have other friends outside of school or around your house?
Jenny: Uh, no not really. Just, uh, one. But her grandmother lives here, so I only see her, like, in the summer.

Vygotsky and the Theme of Social Skills

For Vygotsky, the role of the social partner is critical within the zone of proximal development. This suggests that the social interactions that children experience could lead to development that is delayed or accelerated, normal or abnormal. Tudge and Rogoff (1989) suggest that partners in a zone of proximal development should not be at the same instructional and skill levels. It is the more advanced partner or adult that will stimulate the cognitive development in the less advanced individual. In the case of Abby, her mother Laura described how this nine-year-old was getting along well with an older member of the skating team "... *she clicked with this girl that's eleven years old" (Interview with mother, Laura, June14, 2002).*

Vygotsky mentioned another requirement between partners in their social interactions. This was their need to understand the task at hand, to some degree. It was not sufficient that one partner dominate a situation. Rather, it was important for them to co-construct solutions and share in the process of decision-making.

Implications of the Theme of Social Skills for Derogation and Vygotsky

Vygotsky's theory of socio-cultural development emphasized the importance of the social milieu and social activity. *"Individual development cannot be understood without reference to the social milieu ...in which the child is embedded" (Tudge & Rogoff, 1989).* As the result of the derogation process, children are advanced into school

school at a younger age. Once in the classroom, these children are socializing and learning with older peers. Thus, according to Vygotskian theory, this process of advancing children should have a positive impact on their cognitive development because he believed that social interactions precede learning. Because they are learning with older and possibly more advanced students, the derogation enables these younger children to learn within their zone of proximal development.

Theme 3: Self-Esteem

The social status of students among their peers and their perceptions of others are factors linked to the development of self-concept. The development of a positive self-concept is greatly determined by the experiences that students have in and out of school. School is not solely a place to learn, but also a place for students to grow on an affective level. Generally speaking, a combination of experiences at school and in the home helps to develop the self-concept of students.

Self-concept refers to a person's confidence and feelings of self-worth. Self-esteem refers to the positive or negative judgments that students make about themselves, and it is a way to measure the level of self-concept. Students with a high level of self-esteem have positive feelings about themselves and demonstrate independence and a willingness to take risks. Students with a lower level of self-esteem demonstrate negative attitudes about themselves, lack of independence, and reluctance to try new things. Self-concept is a key factor in the growth and development of social and emotional behaviours of students and it is also a value judgment based on self-knowledge. "Because much self-knowledge concerns the person's relations with others, it is not surprising that self-esteem is heavily influenced by interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Twenge,

2003, p. 332). When students describe themselves it is usually in comparison to their peers because they learn who they are from relating with others. In the same way, they develop identities as members of social groups. The students' sense of self was a notable theme in this study.

Teachers' Comments about Self-Esteem

In the interviews, the teachers mentioned that the children who were advanced into school and who were younger than their classmates often displayed a poor self-image. These students also evidenced some insecurity in their work habits and seemed to require the re-assurance of their teachers and peers in order to complete their tasks.

"...she needs that reassurance ...from myself and I see it also as well from her peers, and asking them if things are all right and with myself as well.". (Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002)

Children and Parents' Comments about Self-Esteem

In my interviews with the three students, they described how they felt about themselves in their academic progress and social skills as compared to their peers. Jenny and Abby generally expressed positive feelings about their academic performance, but Judy seemed unsure of her performance and sought the approval of her teacher and classmates most of the time. Jenny and Abby gave confident and positive responses, but Judy showed uncertainty in the way that she replied to the questions. The following excerpts illustrate how the students felt about their performance in school. The comments of Jenny and Abby are positive ones.

> *Olga: How are things going this year in school?*
> *Jenny: They're going very well. Um, my marks are staying high. Um, well yeah, they're going really well. (Jenny, April 2002)*
> *Olga: How are things going in school?*
> *Abby: Good.*

Olga: Can you tell me a little about school ...
Abby: I like doing math and gym more, most of everything. I also like music. (Abby, June 2002)

However, Judy expressed uncertainty in the way that she responded and her choice of words. She was a capable and successful student, yet she was not sure how to describe her performance in school.

Olga: How are you doing in school?
Judy: I'm okay, I guess.
Olga: Just okay?
Judy: Yeah, I'm fine. Like sometimes I'll get, like an average ... like a lower mark, and sometimes I'll get, like, an 'A'. (Judy, June 2002)

Judy had the support of her teacher in the classroom, but still appeared to be lacking confidence in her work. The teacher, Maggie, expressed concern over Judy's low self-image and the following excerpt is an example of her comments.

She seems to be always consistent and it's very rare that she produces something that is below, that is not her, you know? It's very rare ... and she knows this. I would assume she does. And I tell her, you know? So, I don't know ... why she has this low image of herself. (Maggie, Judy's teacher, June 6, 2002)

Vygotsky and the Theme of Self-Esteem

Vygotsky was interested in the development of individuals, but more interested in the ways in which individual growth and development were related to a wider social and cultural context. Vygotsky did not address issues of self-esteem. Other theorists have explored the concept of self-esteem and these include William James, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers.

William James looked at a person's total self-concept and how it consisted of the spiritual, material, social, and bodily self. In this derogation study, the social self is related to the way that children see themselves in terms of others who are important to

them in their lives. Parents, siblings, and peers offer support, recognition, role definition, and reinforcement, and the way that the derogated students see themselves is important to their social and academic development. Abraham Maslow introduced the concept of a 'hierarchy of needs', which described how humans are incited by basic needs. Once the basic needs are met, 'higher order' needs are brought in play. The search for higher order needs leads to Maslow's concept of 'self-actualization', where individuals are driven by the need to bring about or 'actualize' their potential. Self-esteem is part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and is defined according to two levels of esteem needs -- self-esteem and reputation. Self-esteem is a person's own feelings of worth and confidence, whereas reputation is based on recognition and prestige that is reflective of other people's opinion. Most people desire to be confident in their own eyes rather than in others'. Carl Rogers noted that people who have a high self-esteem, are more accepting of themselves and are more likely to accept others. However, people with a low self-esteem may tend to feel disconnected from their feelings and needs, thus limiting their ability to make healthy choices. Some children with poor self-esteem may suffer from a chronic fear of abandonment and others may become overachievers or perfectionists, believing that they deserve to be loved only for what they accomplish, and not simply for who they are.

Implications of the theme of self-esteem for derogation and Vygotsky

According to the previously described theories of self-esteem, when a child interacts with others and feels accepted by his peers, he will feel better about himself. In this study, if a derogated child feels better about himself, this will increase his sense of self-worth or self-esteem and he will be a more successful as a socializer and a learner.

Theme 4: Parental Support

Research demonstrates that parental involvement has a direct impact on student achievement (Marcon, 1993). Such research is driven by the assumption that children's developmental outcomes are determined by the parents' actions, which are influenced by their beliefs. In their study on parental involvement, Halle et al (1997) expected to find a stronger relationship between parents' behaviours and child outcomes than parents' beliefs and child outcomes. What they found was that the key to the *resiliency* success of disadvantaged students in school lies in the ability of parents to combine their high expectations for their students with actions that promote that success. The maintenance of positive attitudes about academic abilities and skills may be one of the most important family characteristics associated with students' future success. The more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. This holds true for all types of parent involvement in children's learning and for students of all ages. What counts is that parents have a positive attitude about the importance of a good education and that they express confidence that their children will succeed. Major benefits of parent involvement include higher grades and test scores, positive attitudes, and behaviours.

In the book entitled *Learning Denied* (1991) Taylor described how the parents resisted the school's attempts to test and label him their son, Patrick. The parents saw the contrast between the school's impressions of Patrick, as based on test scores, and what they knew of their son's actual abilities. The parents observed abilities that contradicted the test results and challenged these results by advocating for Patrick's right to be educated without labels and rigid teaching methods.

One area of research has explored the effects of adolescents' perceptions of parental involvement on academic achievement. The study by Brown et al (2003) examined the importance of parental involvement and how it could maximize the impact of students' educational experiences and benefit their lives. Parental involvement was also associated with students' positive attitudes towards their parents. Specifically, students who perceived that their parents were more involved appreciated them more and reported that they got along better. Parental involvement, and especially having a positive relationship with them, was associated with positive attitudes towards school and learning. In particular, students who reported enjoying spending time with their parents and perceiving that their parents were more involved admired their teachers more and liked what is taught in school. Students who liked their teachers also had other positive attitudes. These students expected that information learned at school would be useful throughout their lives. These students felt it was important to keep learning new things. Involved parents often had children who were interested in many things. Students who perceived that their parents were involved also tended to report having many interests.

Teachers' Comments about Parental Support

The teachers were generally aware of the amount of parental involvement there was for each derogated student in this study. In the following excerpt, a teacher describes a derogated child in her classroom, and the refers to the influence of his parents of his performance.

> *Pamela: His work was well done, but he also had a supportive background. You know, he had his parents. One of his parents was a teacher, so he was in a structured environment .... I know what I see in the classroom, but I'm sure that these children are also affected by their environment outside of school, like the home. (Pamela, a teacher, May 7, 2002)*

Children and Parents' Comments about Parental Support

In this study, two students (Jenny and Abby) enjoyed the ongoing support and active involvement of their parents in academic and social activities. In these excerpts from interviews, the parents described their children in contexts outside of school.

> *Cathy: Jenny ... getting along with people, no problem ...she's so enthusiastic, she's got a lot of sense of humour ... stands up for the underdog. There's this girl in her class that's handicapped. So other children at the beginning would pick on her. Jenny, no way ... she was always looking out for her.*
>
> *Jenny spends time with her grandmother, she helps her out and stuff ... that maybe made her mature as well. She's learned a lot at a young age as well.*
>
> *We mostly do family things. We go bicycling every week. Usually Saturday. (Interview with Cathy, Jenny's mother, September 16, 2002)*

These comments illustrate Cathy's perceptions of Jenny's many interests and interpersonal skills, as well as the depth of her involvement. Cathy mentioned that her daughter had the ability to see what others need and to be helpful towards them.

For the second student (Abby), both parents are actively involved and take part in accompanying their daughter to her sports events and practices.

> *Laura: She (Abby) skates at 6:30 am on Saturday morning ... and that was one of the reasons I didn't want to put her in. Then my husband said, 'No, no, don't worry. I'll bring her at 6:00. (Interview with Laura, Abby's mother, June 14, 2002)*

On the other hand, the third student (Judy) expressed how her parents were very busy with their work schedules and did not have the time to accompany her to sports activities.

> *Judy: My parents don't have like, time to go, you know.*
> *Olga: They don't have time after school?*
> *Judy: Like, my parents don't have time to drive me.*

Judy's siblings were occupied with school and part-time jobs and not always around for her either. She often spent time at home by herself, playing video games and watching television.

Vygotsky and the Theme of Parental Support

In Vygotskian theory, parental support is similar to the support that is given by more capable peers or adults. The zone of proximal development refers to the difference between what the child already knows and what he is ready to understand with the proper intervention. The parent or educator intervenes by 'scaffolding' the learning. This metaphor sees the child as a building that is under active construction. The parent provides a scaffold or a framework that assists the child in mastering new abilities. In order to promote development, the parent varies the amount of assistance to fit the child's changing level of development. The parents accomplish this by asking questions and setting appropriate and challenging tasks for the child.

Implications of theTheme of Parental Support for Derogation and Vygotsky

Initially, parents assist their children who are being derogated by accompanying them for the testing and encouraging them through the process. The results from this study suggest that children learn and socialize best with the continued support of their parents. One implication of this theme is that parents continue to provide the support or scaffolding as to fit the children's changing level of performance as they learn within the zone of proximal development.

Patterns and Understandings

I connected the Vygotskian concept of Zoped (or Zone of Proximal Development) to the derogation assessment and early entry of children into school. Zoped is often

defined as 'an individual range of learning potential' (Zuckerman, 2003). When learning is facilitated by someone with greater expertise, this potential ability exceeds the actual ability of the individual. When they advance into kindergarten, accelerated children are exposed to activities that are more complex. I questioned if this advancement actually encourages the development of their cognitive approach to problem solving and learning.

In this discussion, I looked at the themes that were common for all three children and compared these themes. I examined what was similar and diverse in all three cases and the patterns that evolved. The following patterns and understandings emerged. 1) The continuing support from the parents of students who are derogated and advanced into kindergarten is essential to their success as academic and social learners. 2) Peer acceptance is important to success in the social relationships of these students. 3) The self-esteem of these younger students is shaped by the way that they see themselves as compared to their peers and their success in academic performance and social skills.

To summarize, all three students had two features in common; an intellectual ability that was above average and academic success. Initially, all three had the parental support for academic achievement, and his may have helped them obtain academic success. This pattern changed when two of the students had parents who continued to show their support for social development, but the other did not. The two students who had the support developed positive self-concepts, but the one who did not experienced feelings of insecurity and poor self-image in the academic and social domains.

Parental Support

The three participants in this study all advanced into kindergarten after their assessment for derogation exemption at pre-school age. Now in their senior elementary years, these students continued to demonstrate academic success. Their strong academic performance suggested that the initial decision to advance them into school had positive consequences. However, the information that I gathered in this study indicated that the students were less successful on a social and emotional level when the parents were less involved and supportive in their academic and social lives. With these case studies, the pattern that I observed was as follows. The students were all successful on an academic level. Nevertheless, the one student who did not receive the parental support was not as successful on an emotional level and in her social and interpersonal skills.

> *Education can be connected to parental investment ... parents who invest a great deal in each child tend to increase the probability that their children will be academically successful and develop careers. This works via direct effects of parental stimulation on intellectual development, and it operates more subtly by increasing the child's ambition and need for achievement. (Barber, 2000, p. 88)*

Good relationships with parents are found to be significant for positive self-esteem (Blyth and Traeger, 1983) social competence, and general well being (Cauce, 1986). Young people who experience a lack of social support in relations with their parents are less able to build supportive relationships with friends. Thus, they may not be able to compensate in peer friendships for the lack of support in their relationships with the parents. There are indications of the importance of supportive relationships with peers too, mainly same-sex friendships (Hirsch and DuBois, 1992).

Peer Acceptance

All three students had friends in school and talked about their friends during the interview sessions. Friendships were important to them and they felt the need to be accepted by their peers. There was some apprehension about the way that older peers may have responded to them or acted toward them during social and academic activities. One student expressed how close friends could often seem rude or 'bossy' and how she believed that her younger age was a reason for this bossy behaviour. Abby seemed to be very sensitive to the comments and behaviours of the students in her class and described being a victim of bullying behaviour several times during the interviews. Judy and Jenny did not mention being bullied or treated unequally by the older students in their classes, but Judy was described as insecure and timid at school and may have been feeling some form of pressure to conform in some way. Perhaps she may have felt that others had more power because of their older age or their ability to express themselves more confidently. Generally, Judy and Jenny explained that their classmates were accepting of them and their younger age status.

I could not relate Abby's bullying experiences with that of the other two girls. I did however find a similarity between Abby's perspective on peer relationships and the perspective of her mother. Laura was preoccupied with the number of friends that Abby had and the number of social activities she was involved in. Perhaps Abby had learned from her mother to place her attention on such details of socializing with peers. It was important to Laura that Abby was with her friends and that she kept busy at all times. The more activities that Abby was involved with, the better it was for her. *Example here?*

Carl Ratner (2000) describes the social position of adolescence as a distinctive transition period from the social roles of childhood to adulthood in a society of highly individualized activities. An adolescent will have a deeper understanding of being an adolescent if he comprehends the social position of adolescence than if he merely reflects on the individual actions of himself and his parents. An individual will have a far greater awareness of his cultural experience if he understands its social position than if he understands the personal identities and actions of the participants and self-concepts. If adolescents want to understand their personal inclinations then they need to understand their individual parents. If they want to understand why they dislike certain activities such as swimming for instance, they need to understand the pressure their parents put on them. These details may not significantly affect the overall experience of adolescence, but they are minor variations in the general pattern that is similar for teenagers who like to swim and those who don't.

Self-Esteem

What I found of significance in this study was the way that these three younger children appraised their self-concept. Self-esteem refers to the evaluation of self-concept, and I was interested in knowing how they felt about themselves as learners and socializers. I realized that many aspects of their perceptions of themselves were consistent with the way that their parents perceived them. In effect, their beliefs were shaped by their parents' beliefs. In Vygotskian theory, *agency* is a social phenomenon that depends on social relations to be realized. Agency is a cultural concept because its quality is a function of the quality of the social relations in which the individual takes part. In this way, a child deprived of social stimulation and support would not develop

agency. Personal meanings spring from particular experiences with specific people and situations. For instance, adolescents have distinctive experiences with parents and certain friends, however their experiences are nevertheless extremely similar. A vast majority of adolescents engage in similar behaviours, which the vast majority of parents attest to with shared patterns of discomfort and despair.

General Findings

Parents who made the decision to have their children derogated for advancement into kindergarten believed that their children had the ability to perform well in a kindergarten class of peers who were older in age. When these parents sought to advance their children into kindergarten one year before, they had certain expectations about their performance and success in school. They believed that their children were bright and able to succeed in school in spite of their younger age. When I originally conducted the derogation assessments of the pre-school children, I was often concerned about the underlying familial issues that existed when parents made a request to advance a child into school. I also questioned their reasons for the decision to advance a child. It concerned me when parents asked to have younger children advanced into school for reasons that were not primarily for the good of the children themselves. Some parents cited certain advantages in advancing younger children into kindergarten. One advantage was earlier entry into the job market in the future. Other parents suggested that getting into school one year early was a sign of success in itself and this created an underlying competition for parents who believed that their children were more capable than others.

My interest in the topic of derogation in the province of Quebec concerned the long-term progress of these children and beyond the kindergarten level. The findings

from this study suggested that the younger children who felt positive about themselves were actually more successful in school in academic and social areas. One child was very involved in academic and social activities in and outside of school, and doing well in both. The second child was very involved in activities outside of school and also doing well. The third child was not involved in activities in or outside of school and very insecure about herself and her work. It was my impression that the last child needed and desired to be more involved with her friends and to do other things aside from playing video games at home, and being on her own. Her parents may have promoted a sense of uncertainty in Judy because they did not encourage her to explore new interests such as playing soccer with her friends on an organized team, or being with friends on weekends instead of staying home alone most of the time.

Conclusions

This exploratory study on the phenomenon of derogation in the province of Quebec suggests that younger students who are advanced into kindergarten continue to be successful if and when they receive the proper support and guidance in school and in the home. The three students in this study were granted early entrance into kindergarten and were able to learn and develop within their zone of proximal development. Over the years, they have continued to maintain a strong academic performance in school. However, from this study I understood that these students often dealt with a number of emotional and social issues that were related to their younger age. Peer acceptance was of primary importance in their academic and social lives. These findings suggest that teachers and parents could be more informed and involved in the academic and social growth of the derogated students. In the school, this could imply that teachers be

informed of students in their class who were derogated as preschoolers for early entrance. In this way, teachers can make adjustments as required for these younger students. In turn, parents should also be aware of the implications of advancing a younger child into kindergarten.

This study indicates that parents in the province of Quebec, who are considering advancing their children into school, need to be more informed about the process of derogation and its academic and social implications. In addition, elementary school teachers should be aware of this process and how it affects the students in their classrooms. The three students who took part in my study often dealt with issues of peer pressure, feelings of insecurity, and the need to perform at higher standards. The expectations of their performance were high and I was concerned about the effects that these pressures would have on the students. If parents and teachers are more aware of the process and probable implications, then they can be more effective in supporting the developmental and learning process of the children involved.

Another implication concerns the derogation assessment itself, and how it should place greater emphasis on the social and cultural aspects of children's development. As part of the assessment procedure, observations of a child should tap into the family structures and the reasons for requesting that the child be advanced into school. When possible, observations of children could be made outside of the testing milieu, as in a daycare or pre-school setting where they are interacting with other children. It is important to recall that every child is different from every other child. The key is to observe and listen to what every child is saying.

Limitations of the Study

1. The three participants in this study were girls, so issues of gender could not be examined. Future research could include both girls and boys in the selected group of participants.

2. In this study, information from teachers and parents for every child was not readily available. Another study on this topic could include a parent interview and teacher interview for every student who is participating. This would provide the perspective from three different sources for every participant.

3. In this study, the influence of peers and friendship patterns emerged as an important issue in the academic and social development of students who were younger and granted early school entry. A future study of derogation practices in Quebec could include the input from their friends and classmates. Additional interviews with peers would provide more information about the social interactions of these students in the context of school and outside of school.

4. In this qualitative investigation I have identified four themes that are relevant to the study of derogation, in the province of Quebec. Implications for the future of this research include further analysis of these themes and a quantitative interpretation of the data.

Future Directions of Derogation in Quebec

I have addressed the topic of derogation and how this affects the long-term performance of three students accepted for early school entry. The results suggest that parental involvement, self-esteem, the influence of peers, and friendship patterns are

important to the achievements of these three youngsters. In the following sections I discuss the implications for future research on this topic.

1. Future research could examine the progress of the three students of this study at the secondary level. It would be interesting to look at their academic and social performance as high school students, and to re-examine the four important themes that emerged from this study; academic performance, social-emotional development, self-esteem, and parental support.

2. The derogation assessment procedure in the province of Quebec requires a psychological evaluation prepared by a licensed psychologist and there is a cost for this service. However, some families cannot afford this expense for a derogation procedure, and this may bias the selection of children who are considered for early entrance. In this way, the Ministry of Education of Quebec could consider a cost exception for the derogation assessment of children who come from low-income families.

3. Over the years, I found that parents and teachers needed more information in order to make proper decisions regarding derogation and the acceleration of students. One implication of this study will be the development of a pamphlet with information for parents, teachers, and psychologists, on the issue of derogation in the province of Quebec. In this pamphlet I will include information that is important to parents, teachers, psychologists, and other professionals involved with students who undergo the derogation procedure in Quebec.

For parents, I will explain what the derogation procedure entails and implications of advancing younger children into school. I will also emphasize the importance of parents continuing to show support for their children's academic and social-emotional

development. For teachers, I will include the same information and also specify what to look for in a younger child who seems to be lagging behind his classmates and peers. For psychologists, this same information could also include guidelines regarding the testing of social skills of a pre-schooler, with further suggestions about the screening procedure itself. This will include my proposal to observe the child in another setting outside of the office where testing occurs. For instance, the children could be observed in daycare to see how they interact with other children.

Contributions to the Field

The Quebec phenomenon of derogation and advancing younger children into school is unique to this province. There is literature in the area of acceleration, but it is not specific to derogation. In this study I reviewed the effects of early school entrance on derogated students and explored their social-emotional development. The findings of this study provided a platform to educate parents and teachers about the outcomes of advancing children into school, and to inform officials at the school boards and the Quebec Ministry of Education. In addition, the outcomes of this study provided guidelines to compliment the derogation process and highlight the importance of assessing the social skills of preschool children. Lastly, this study emphasized how important it was for parents to continue providing support to their children who had gone through a derogation procedure and were granted early school entrance. Parental support is essential to the long-term success of derogated students in their academic growth and social-emotional development.

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APPENDIX A

Regulation respecting exceptional cases for admission to preschool and elementary education (Translation of document written in French) Education Act (R.S.Q., c. I-13-3, s. 457.1; 1992, c.23, s. 16)

Appendix A

Part 2 GAZETTE OFFICIELLE DU QUÉBEC, February 3, 1993, Vol. 125, No. 5 571

Regulation respecting exceptional cases for admission to preschool and elementary school education

Education Act
(R.S.Q., c. I-13.3, s. 457.1; 1992, c. 23, s. 16)

1. A school board may, in accordance with paragraph 1 of section 241.1 of the Education Act (R.S.Q., c. I-13.3), admit a child to school who has not attained the age of admission in the case of:

(1) a child whose early admission is required to ensure that he will be with a group of students in the school in which he is to be enrolled for elementary school education, in a case where the school board does not expect to be able to form a preschool class the following year;

(2) a child who is domiciled outside Québec but temporarily resides in Québec because his parents have been assigned thereto for a maximum period of 3 years and whose early admission would enable him to attain an equivalent level in the official education system in the place of his domicile;

(3) a child who, while domiciled outside Québec, began or completed his preschool or elementary school education in an official education system outside Québec;

(4) a child who is experiencing a family or social situation which, owing to special circumstances or events, justifies his early admission to school;

(5) a child who has a brother or a sister born within 12 months following his birth and is eligible to begin school the same year;

(6) a 4-year-old child with a serious mental or physical handicap or with marked social or emotional disturbances whose school board is not included on the list of school boards established under section 33 of the Basic school regulations for preschool and elementary school education;

(7) a child who is ready to begin preschool or elementary school owing to his advanced intellectual, social, emotional and psychomotor skills.

2. Applications for admission referred to in section 1 shall be submitted in writing by the child's parents. Applications must be accompanied by the child's birth certificate or by an authenticated copy thereof or, where it is impossible to obtain such documents, by a sworn or solemnly affirmed declaration by one of his parents indicating the child's date and place of birth.

Furthermore:

(1) the application referred to in paragraph 2 of section 1 must be accompanied by proof of the child's parents' temporary assignment to Québec and by a declaration from the parents' employer certifying their employment status in Québec;

(2) the application referred to in paragraph 3 of section 1 must be accompanied by proof of the child's schooling in an official education system outside Québec;

(3) the application referred to in paragraph 4 of section 1 must be supported by the opinions of specialists in the field of health and social services or youth protection services;

(4) the application referred to in paragraph 5 of section 1 must be accompanied by the brother's or the sister's birth certificate or by an authenticated copy thereof or, where it is impossible to obtain such documents, by a sworn or solemnly affirmed declaration by one of the parents indicating the child's date and place of birth;

(5) the application referred to in paragraph 6 of section 1 must be supported by a report prepared by school board specialists or, as the case may be, by a medical report prepared by professionals working in a specialized centre;

(6) the application referred to in paragraph 7 of section 1 must be supported by an assessment prepared by a specialist, such as a psychologist or psychoeducator. The assessment must include pertinent data and observations, particularly with respect to the child's intellectual capacity, social and emotional maturity and psychomotor development. The assessment must also indicate clearly the nature of any harmful effects apprehended.

3. A school board may, in accordance with paragraph 2 of section 241.1 of the Education Act (R.S.Q., c. I-13.3), admit to elementary school education a child who has attained 5 years of age and who has been admitted to preschool education if the child is developmentally advanced and has the required skills.

4. The applications for admission referred to in section 3 shall be coordinated by the administration of the school attended by the child. The applications shall be subject to the following rules:

APPENDIX B

Sample of questions from the Verbal and Performance scales of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised (WPPSI-R)

APPENDIX B

Sample of questions from the Performance and Verbal scales of the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised (WPPSI-R)

WPPSI-R / Performance Scale Subtests:

- Objects Assembly
  - Child is asked to assemble a series of cardboard puzzles of increasing difficulty.
- Geometric Design
  - Child is asked to reproduce geometric design patterns of increasing difficulty.
- Block Design
  - Child is asked to copy block design patterns of increasing difficulty.
- Mazes
  - Child is asked to solve pencil and paper mazes tasks.
- Picture Completion
  - Child is asked to identify missing element in a series of pictures.
- Animal Pegs
  - Visual-motor timed task where child matches pegs to color pattern on a wooden board.

WPPSI-R / Verbal Scale Subtests:

- Information
  - Examples of questions:
    1. Show me your nose. Touch it.
    2. How many ears do you have?
    3. (Examiner holds up a thumb). What do you call this finger?
    4. What do you cut paper with?
    5. What color is grass?
    6. What comes in a bottle?

- Arithmetic
  - Examples of questions:
    1. (Place nine blocks about ½ inch apart in a row in front of the child) Count these blocks with your finger.
    2. Sue has 3 apples. She eats 2 of them. How many does she have left?

WPPSI-R / Performance Scale Subtests:

- Objects Assembly
  - Child is asked to assemble a series of cardboard puzzles of increasing difficulty.
- Geometric Design
  - Child is asked to reproduce geometric design patterns of increasing difficulty.
- Block Design
  - Child is asked to copy block design patterns of increasing difficulty.
- Mazes
  - Child is asked to solve pencil and paper mazes tasks.
- Picture Completion
  - Child is asked to identify missing element in a series of pictures.
- Animal Pegs
  - Visual-motor timed task where child matches pegs to color pattern on a wooden board.

WPPSI-R / Verbal Scale Subtests:

- Information
  - Examples of questions:
    1. Show me your nose. Touch it.
    2. How many ears do you have?
    3. (Examiner holds up a thumb). What do you call this finger?
    4. What do you cut paper with?
    5. What color is grass?
    6. What comes in a bottle?

- Comprehension
  - Examples of questions:
    1. What could happen if you touch a hot stove?
    2. Why does a plant need water?
    3. Why do you need to wash your face and hands?
    4. Why do we need clocks?

- Arithmetic
  - Examples of questions:
    1. (Place nine blocks about ½ inch apart in a row in front of the child) Count these blocks with your finger.
    2. Sue has 3 apples. She eats 2 of them. How many does she have left?
    3. How many are 2 books and 3 books?

- Vocabulary
  - Examples of questions:
    1. What is a knife?
    2. What is a shoe?
    3. What is a bicycle?
    4. What is a hat?

- Similarities
  - Examples of questions:
    1. (Now I'm going to tell you something that is not finished. I want you to finish what I say. You wear shoes and you also wear ____.
    2. You ride in a train and you also ride in a _____.
    3. In what way are a spoon and a fork alike?
    4. In what way are a newspaper and a magazine alike?

- Sentences
  - Examples of questions:
    Listen, say what I say …
    1. Fish swim
    2. Bill is happy.
    3. Cows are big.
    4. Mommy works hard
    5. Susie has two dolls and a brown teddy bear.

APPENDIX C

Sample of a psychological report

APPENDIX C

Sample of a psychological report

Name of Child: Sara
Date of Birth: October 1
Age: 4 years, 6 months
Name of parents:
Address:
Telephone:
Dates of Testing: March 19th, April 8th
Date of Report: April 21

Reason for testing:

Sara will complete five years of age only one day following the deadline for admission to kindergarten this fall, September 30th 2002. Sara's parents feel that she is ready to start kindergarten classes in the upcoming school year. They have requested a psychological assessment for their child, in order to submit a derogation for her early admission. In this assessment, emphasis is placed on Sara's general cognitive potential, language development, visual-motor skills, and social maturity.

Tests Administered:

Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test
Beery-Buktenica Test of Visual-Motor Integration
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Form L
Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Revised (WPPSI-R)
Vineland Mental Maturity Scale
Observations

Background Information:

Sara is the second of two children in a family where English, Italian, and French are the languages spoken in the home. Her sister is 8 years of age and presently attending grade 3 at North End Elementary. Sara attends pre-kindergarten classes at North End Elementary, in the morning sessions. According to her teacher's written and verbal reports, Sara is showing excellent progress. Sara shows a good attitude in her work, is very sociable with her peers and adults, and she is able to work independently on tasks.

During the initial interview, Sara's mother was asked why Sara should be admitted to kindergarten next fall, and she explained that her daughter seems mature for her age, enjoys socializing with other children, and is eager to learn.

At home, Sara enjoys drawing and colouring pictures, playing with her Barbie dolls, and spending time with her sister. She likes listening to stories that are read to her, playing games on the computer, and working on jigsaw puzzles. Sara has recently started taking swimming lessons. In describing her daughter's activities in the home, her mother mentioned that Sara also shows interest in doing household chores such as washing dishes, setting the table, and folding laundry.

Sara's health has generally been good since birth and her developmental milestones werenormal. Mother recalled that Sara said her first words at 9 months of age, took her first steps at 10 months, and was talking in complete sentences by the age of 2 years. During her first two years of life, Sara's general behaviour was described as easy.

Observations:

Sara is an attractive and good-natured child who was seen over a period of two afternoon sessions. She separated easily from her mother when it was time for the evaluation to begin, adapted instantly to the examiner and the testing situation, and demonstrated interest and initiative in her approach to all of the tasks presented. She evidenced self-assurance in her mannerisms and conversations, and moved along smoothly from one activity to another. A wide range of activities was presented and there was a change of pace throughout the assessment, yet Sara maintained her level of concentration. She learned tasks quickly, followed instructions well, and was able to apply her new skills.

Sara was well coordinated on all fine and gross-motor tasks. These tasks included the handling of a pencil or a crayon in order to draw pictures and write, the stringing of beads of various sizes, cutting out shapes with scissors, using buttons to fasten, and throwing and catching a ball. Sara evidenced right hand dominance, and was able to transfer items from one hand to another, when carrying out these tasks.

Test Results:

Cognitive Development:

Sara was administered the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-Third Edition (WPPSI-R), where she demonstrated a high-average level of cognitive capabilities, in favour of performance skills over verbal skills. According to her results from the performance domain of the WPPSI-R, Sara demonstrated exceptional skill in her ability to synthesize puzzle pieces into a logical whole, and her ability to identify missing elements in a series of pictures suggests the presence of a strong visual memory. Her visual-motor proficiency was further evidenced in her ability to manipulate items

with speed and accuracy on a timed colour-sorting pegboard task. Sara copied geometric designs with considerable attention to detail, and reproduced block patterns well.

In the verbal areas of the Wechsler scales, Sara's results indicated that her vocabulary development, comprehension of language, and level of general knowledge fall within the high average range for her age Sara also demonstrated good social reasoning skills and evidenced a good grasp of basic arithmetic concepts for her age.

Language:

Sara was given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, which was chosen as a measure to evaluate her listening vocabulary. According to the Peabody Test, Sara's receptive vocabulary was rated within the normative range for her age. This result was positively correlated with the strong result that she obtained on the vocabulary subtest of the Wechsler test, where she provided detailed and accurate definitions for a series of words.

Appropriate grammar and fluency characterize Sara's expressive language. According to the quality of Sara's conversations throughout the assessment, she was able to carry on a dialogue with the appropriate usage of vocabulary, sentence structure, and content.

Perceptual-Motor Skills:

On the Beery-Buktenica Test of Visual-Motor Integration, Sara's result is rated at the 57th percentile, and this is equivalent to that of a child of 4 years, 9 months. The Beery Test is used to evaluate the ability of children to coordinate perceptual-motor skills, as they are asked to reproduce a series of design patterns. Sara's result on this test is considered to be high average for her age, and it is positively correlated to her strong results on the non-verbal scale of the Wechsler.

Sara was also asked to draw a picture, and she eagerly drew an image of herself in an amusement park area. Sara's human figure drawing was characterized by attention to detail, and it was rated at the 77th percentile, according to the criteria of the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test.

Socio-Affective Maturity:

Based on her performance throughout the assessment, Sara showed much self-confidence, motivation to learn, and the ability to apply new skills. She demonstrated the ability to work on her own, initiate tasks and make choices.

Sara's social maturity level was evaluated according to the Vineland Social Maturity Scale, where her development in this area was rated at the age equivalent of 5 years, 6 months. Impressions and Recommendations:

The results from this assessment indicate that Sara possesses a cognitive potential that is rated at the higher end of the high-average range. Sara demonstrates excellent language

skills, well-developed perceptual-motor abilities, and maturity in the social-emotional domain, for a child her age.

Sara is an endearing child who shows self-confidence, initiative, and motivation to learn. She is presently completing a successful year in pre-kindergarten, and it would be unjust for Sara to wait one extra year before starting kindergarten classes this fall. Sara has qualified for a derogation, and successfully meets the criteria for early admission to kindergarten.

The results of this evaluation demonstrate that Sara is ready to enter kindergarten in the upcoming school year, for the fall of 2002.

Olga Pazzia-Guiducci
Psychologist
OPQ # 04065-85

APPENDIX D

Translation of excerpt from derogation guidebook
(Order of Psychologists, 1998, pg. 25)

APPENDIX D

Translation of excerpt from derogation guidebook, pg. 25

Excerpt # 1: Evaluation of socio-affective maturity

A review of scientific literature on the subject of early school entrance indicates that the most controversial aspect is socio-affective development. This aspect should be evaluated with much precision and have at least as much value in the recommendation for derogation as the results of intellectual testing.

Components to evaluate:

The particular social skills to be evaluated are:

- Facility to be integrated into peer groups (ability to make friends, to take one's place, to grasp the attention of adults, to cooperate and negotiate, etc.);
- Facility to enter interpersonal relationships (with peers, with adults, new individuals, the ability to solve interpersonal conflicts, etc.)
- Respect of the property and rules of living according to different social groups and experiences (daycare, social activities, sports, music, etc.);

and on the affective level, the following components:

- The level of affective independence (self-confidence, security, reaction to separating from parents, reaction to novelty, etc.)
- Frustration tolerance
- Attitude toward tasks (attention, concentration, interest, perseverance, reaction when confronting difficulty, etc.).

APPENDIX E

Sample of questions from Vineland Maturity Scale

APPENDIX E

Sample of questions from Vineland Maturity Scale

Questions for ages 4 to 5 years:

51. Cares for self at toilet

52. Washes face unassisted

53. Goes about neighbourhood unattended

54. Dresses self except tying

55. Uses pencil or crayon for drawing

56. Plays competitive exercise games

Questions for ages 5 to 6 years:

57. Uses skates, sled, wagon

59. Plays simple word games

60. Is trusted with money

61. Goes to school unattended

APPENDIX F

Examples of test protocols

WPPSI RECORD FORM

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence

REFERRED BY_____

NOTES.

	Year	Month	Day
Date Tested	95	02	07
Date of Birth	90	10	04
Age	4	3	27

	Raw Score	Scaled Score
VERBAL TESTS		
Information	12	13
Vocabulary	(10)	(10)
Arithmetic	11	15
Similarities	17	16
Comprehension	18	16
(Sentences)		
Verbal Score		73
PERFORMANCE TESTS		
Animal House	22	11
Picture Completion	8	11
Mazes	6	11
Geometric Design	11	17
Block Design	12	15
(Animal House Retest)		
Performance Score		65

	Scaled Score	IQ
Verbal Score	73 *	129
Performance Score	65 *	120
Full Scale Score	138	127

*Prorated if necessary

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The Psychological Corporation, 304 East 45th Street, New York N.Y. 10017

WPPSI

RECORD FORM

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence

NAME

ADDRESS

PARENT'S NAME

SCHOOL GRADE

PLACE OF TESTING TESTED BY APG

REFERRED BY

) T E S

	Year	Month	Day
Date Tested	95	03	22
Date of Birth	90	11	04
Age	4	4	18

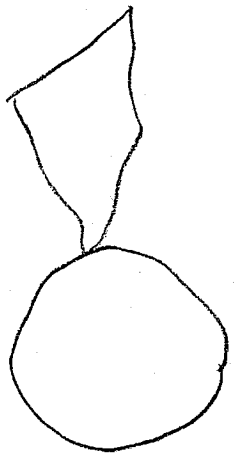
	Raw Score	Scaled Score
VERBAL TESTS		
Information	17	18
Vocabulary	21	14
Arithmetic	8	11
Similarities	14	15
Comprehension	21	17
(Sentences)	20	15
Verbal Score		75
PERFORMANCE TESTS		
Animal House	48	14
Picture Completion	16	16
Mazes	17	16
Geometric Design	10	15
Block Design	9	12
(Animal House Retest)		
Performance Score		73

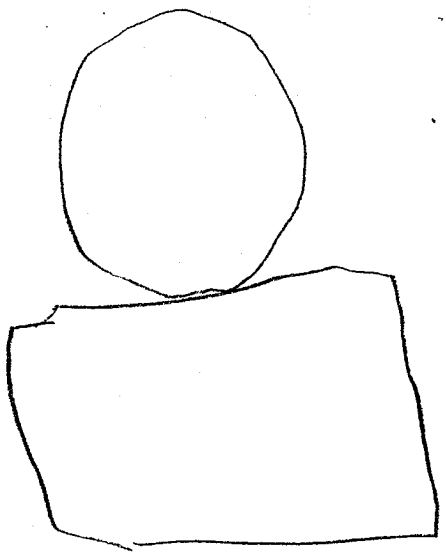
	Scaled Score	IQ
Verbal Score	75*	134
Performance Score	73*	131
Full Scale Score	148	134

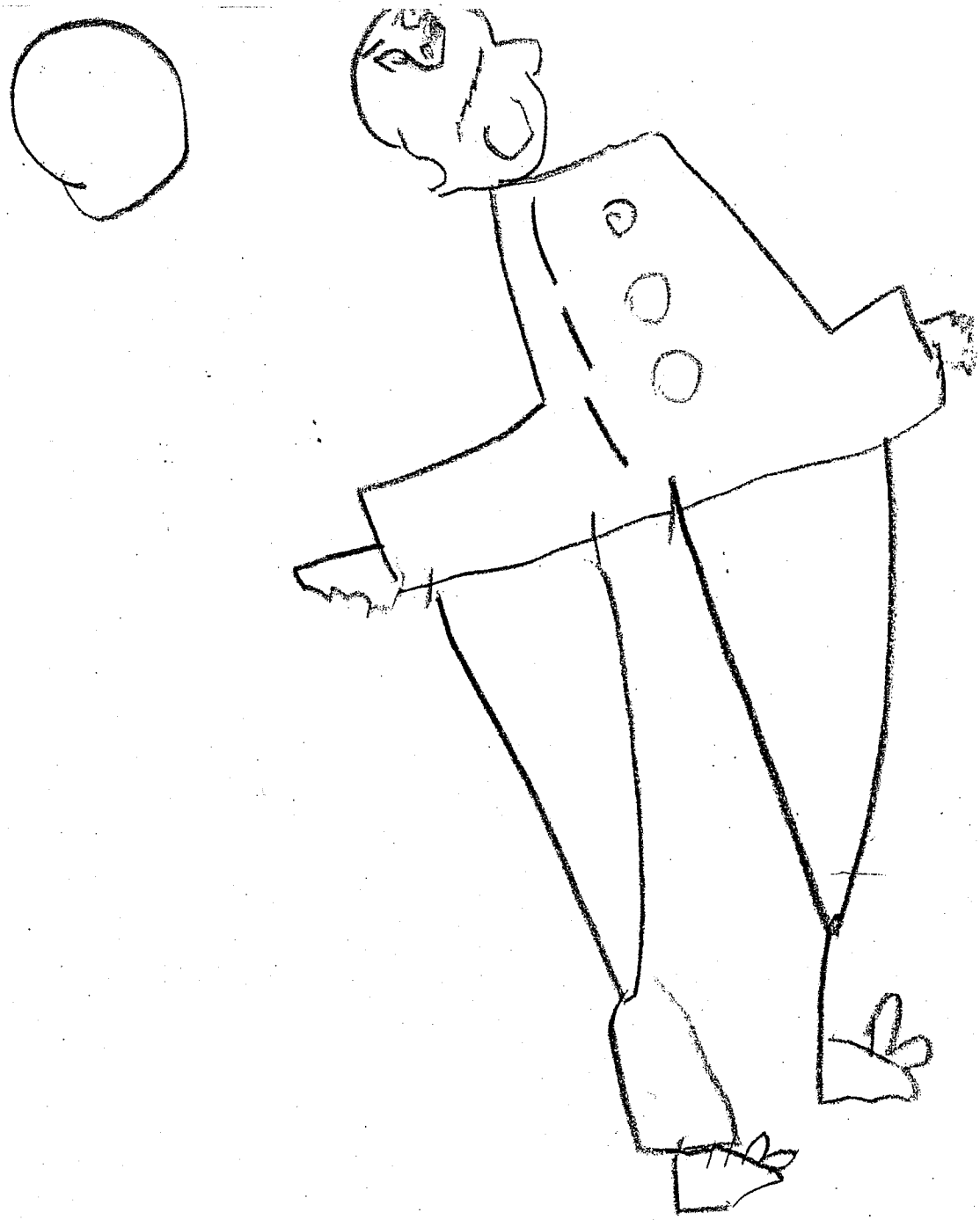
*Prorated if necessary

APPENDIX G

Examples of drawing samples







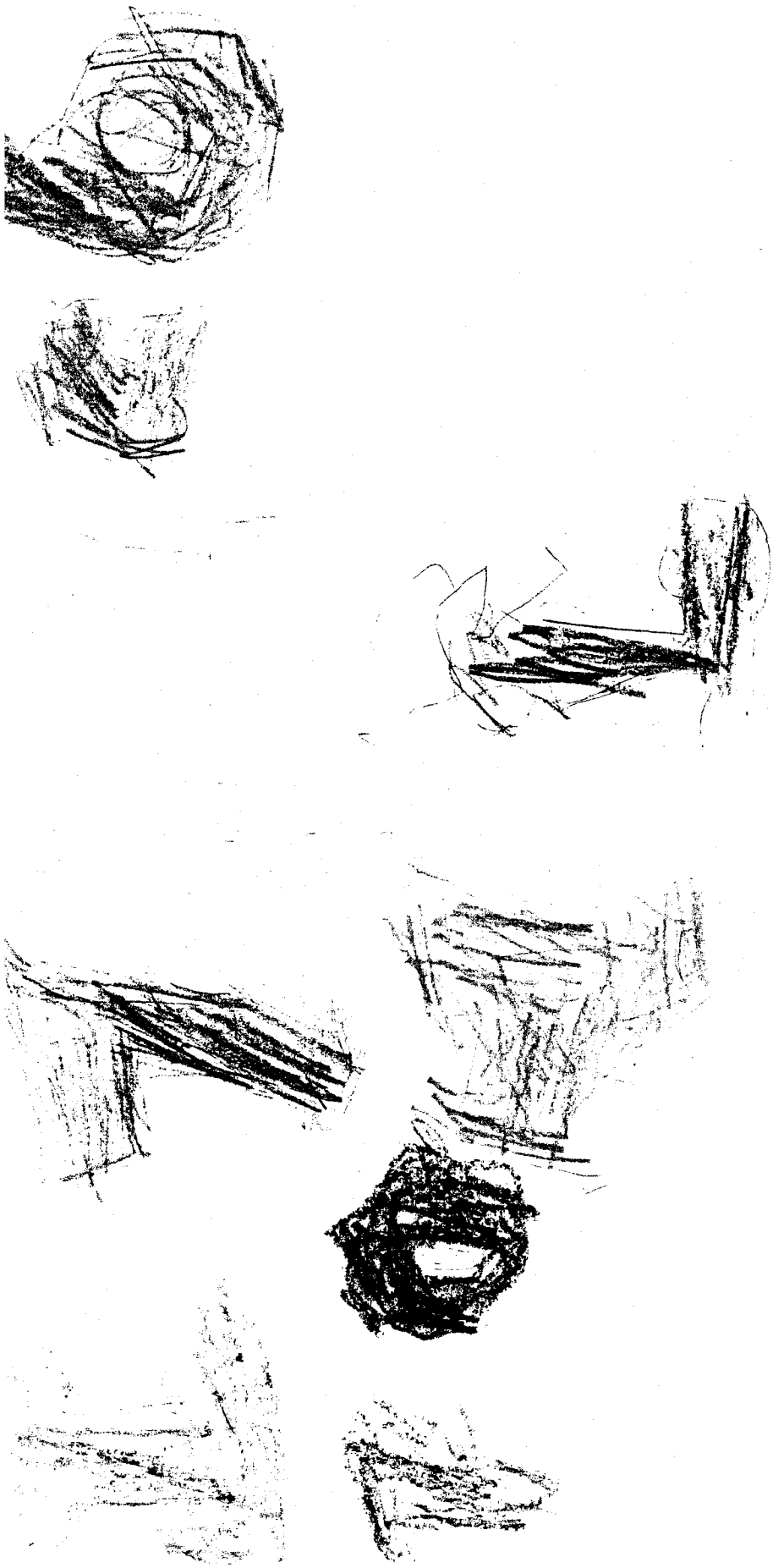
1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 22, 2
24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 39, 40,
42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48,
49, 50, 55, 56, 62.

84: RS
99+

March 95

APPENDIX H

Example of a writing sample



APPENDIX I

Letter sent to parents describing the study

APPENDIX J

Letter from the Montreal Teachers Association

APPENDIX K

Memoing of themes

Appendix K: Memoing of themes

Jenny

Jenny's social-emotional concepts - positive

I have lots of friends now
I liked it (being the youngest)
I wasn't in the middle
It just felt good
I have a special title
No one treats me differently
My friends, they're really nice
They're very generous
They don't even notice (that I'm younger)
At birthdays friends are always one year older than me
I like to dance
I like to do drama
I like everything I do
Everybody, they were asking me to be their partner

Jenny's social-emotional concepts - negative

They're into style, like the clothing - I don't really like
Sometimes we don't have the same interests
Sometimes I pretend … to keep up the conversation
(Other friends) they act differently (playing basketball)
There's boys that play, I don't like the way they play
I'm shy at first

Jenny's mother

Academics have been very good
Teachers always cite her as having a lot of enthusiasm
Being the leader of the class
Always willing to help out
Always having ideas
She's very much 'take charge'
She puts a spirit
She's got a lot of sense of humour
She's serious about her work
She's very focused
She's deep
She questions a lot
She's not scared to ask questions

Jenny's academic concepts -positive

Things are going really well

Abby

Abby's social-emotional concepts - positive

They're nice (her friends)
We always get along well
We always play nice
I always play with the same people
Now I'm meeting more people
I'm playing with more people now
I get to know more people now
We go to each other's houses
We all like each other
I'm always her friend
She's nice sometimes
She does jokes
She plays nice
They all play soccer and I see them a lot
They're really nice to me
They're really nice to me
Swimming, it's going good
I feel good because I'm younger
I have more energy (because I'm younger)
I'm a lot faster than them
I run faster than them
In swimming I go faster than them
I practice more and I'm at a higher level

Abby's mother

She's doing very well
She likes to be number one
She has a very good memory
She's an excellent reader
She writes a lot
She's doing better than the whole class
She's quick with homework
She can work autonomously
She can work alone in class (split class)
Creativity, it takes her a little work for that
Homework, she likes to waste time
I wish that she would do her homework quickly
She's got better work habits at school than here
She's advancing too fast in swimming
They get along well (two sisters)
They usually like each other (sisters)
She's got a lot of friends

Judy

Judy's social-emotional concepts-positive

I have two best friends
I stay with them a lot
We like the same things
We're really the same
I have more friends
I talk a lot with my friends on the bus
They're nice
I'm not as shy as I was before

Judy's social-emotional concepts - negative

I have no people near my house
I don't play sports
I don't, like, have time to go
My parents don't have time to drive me
I just stay home and sleep
I mostly stay in
I was, like, nervous
I was shy

Judy's academic concepts - positive

I like math
I like when we have gym
I like my teacher and everything
It's okay (school)
It's fine (school)
Everything's fine
I'm doing well

Judy's academic concepts - negative

I'm nervous a little
It's gonna be harder
Teachers are gonna give more homework
I'm ok, I guess
Sometimes I'll get a lower mark
In grade two I think reading was hard
I went to get help (for reading)
We used to leave the class for reading
I'm not crazy about reading

Judy's teacher

I'm enriched in everything
I'm very good in writing
My marks are very good
I like challenges
I can run around a lot (gym)
I am proud of my artwork
My hand's almost always up
I understand a lot
Friends, they ask me for homework
I try to help them a lot
My marks are staying high

Comments from Pamela (teacher) regarding derogation

Children seemed able to tackle the academic program
(He) was always the last one to hand in the work
He would do things over and over and re-check
He was never sure
Socially the child (another) was really accepted
She's very self-assured
On a social level, they were behind
Difficulty with their peers
Last year a boy … was extremely insecure
He was not part of the 'in-crowd'
He would be picked on by the other kids
Somewhere, somehow, they suffered more social level

Comments from Melissa (a teacher)

Grades 2, 3 they have difficulty sitting in their seats for long
More chatty
Get into disagreements
It's more difficult for them in a group that's more mature
Putting them at a disadvantage (with derogation)
Children pushed forward don't fare well
As they get older, immaturity levels out
Other children do not make the distinction (younger)
Socially immature
Children who are younger are less interested
They may not be interested in the same things
It can alienate you if you don't feel part of the group
8-9 months, there is a distinction for teacher

She gets along with all of them (classmates)
In skating she has a few friends
She clicked with this girl that's 11 years old
Abby's learning a lot from her (older friend)
She knows the whole thing (schedule for sports)
She likes to laugh and have fun
She's more competitive
She's excited and rowdy
She's not as calm as my first one
She doesn't have as many friends as I thought
I thought she had more friends her age skating
They talk to each other but she doesn't click
I'm a mother hen
You don't want her to be stressed out
She's bossy and nervous
Abby was pushing her friend around

Abby's academic concepts - positive

I like playing outside
I like doing math and gym
I also like music
Everything else I got better
I'm in the middle (compared to others)
Good
I was doing better because I studied more
I read more books now (in Italian)
Reading (giving me difficulty)
I got a bit low in Italian

Abby's's academic concepts - negative

Reading - (giving you difficulty)
I got a bit low in Italian

Abby's social-emotional concepts - negative

People say, I'm older, so you have to do what I say
(How do you feel?) Not really nice
Sometimes when Iwant to play with other people, my friends say no, no, no.
I want to play with everyone.
Then we come all in a big fight
They don't like the other people
It makes me feel sad, you're not playing with anyone else
If you pick one, the others are going to feel sad.
In school I usually have no one to talk to.
Sometimes my friends are bossy
Darla pushes us around
She's tougher

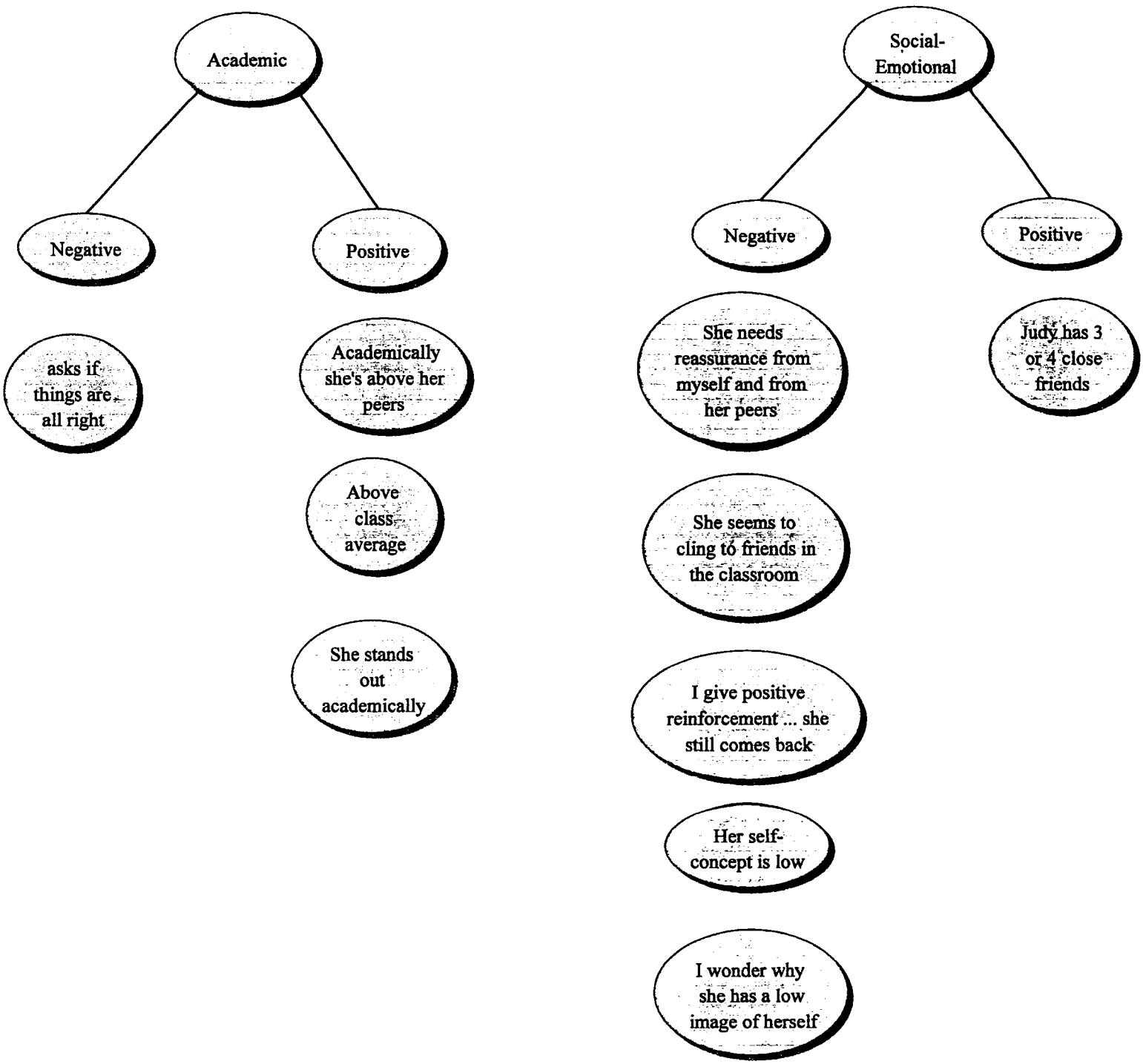
Academically, she's above her peers
Above the class average
She does stand out academically
She asks if things are all right
She has 3 or 4 close friends
She needs re-assurance from me
…from her peers
She seems to cling to friends in the class
I'm always giving positive reinforcement, it seems that she still comes back
It's low (her self-esteem) and that's why she's always needing that
I've been wondering why she has a low self image of herself.

She makes fun of you
She could hurt you
She didn't talk to me
I feel sad because I don't think she realizes it
I felt bad because people were running away from her
I don't feel good because everyone's older than me
People say, If I'm older, than you should listen to me
I don't like it when people say that.
My friend Sara is bossy
She says she does these things because I'm younger
I feel, not that good.
Some people say that I'm bossy
They do that to younger people because it won't bother them
I always have to say sorry before she says sorry
Usually they're mean to me and my other friends

APPENDIX L

Concept map describing themes from interview with teacher

Memoing of ideas: A concept map of themes emerging from the interview with Judy's teacher



APPENDIX M

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability