

# **Disorder in schools**

*A case study based on the observations of  
one student with disruptive behavior in  
school*

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# Summary

## **Background:**

This thesis is part of the pilot project “Disorder in Schools”. Professor Liv Duesund leads the project. It is a case study, which aims to identify the characteristics of disruptive behavior of one student during class. The focus in this study is laid on what is ranged as the highest frequent disruptive behavior in schools today. I have found it relevant to elaborate on interactions between the Informant and other participants in his school environment. Based on my observations, it may be said that peer interactions and peer relationships, and therefore poor self-esteem of the student may be influencing the behavior.

## **Research problem:**

In accordance with a qualitative approach, I choose to have an exploring focus to the phenomena that was to be investigated. My research problem was formulated before my observations were made;

*How can schools contribute to strengthen self-esteem to young adults who struggle with behavioral problems.*

In order to answer my main research problem, I have developed three research questions that I consider to cover its components.

*-How does disruptive behavior occur at junior high school?*

*-How does disruptive behavior influence communication between peers?*

*-In what ways could social rejection and social incompetence interrelate with self-esteem?*

**Methodology:**

I have used a pre-structured design that was required by me to implement by the pilot project “Disorder in Schools”. Qualitative observations were conducted along with the use of a pre-structured observation form. Five observations of one target student were conducted in this study. I choose to include all five observations in my analysis. The findings were categorized to best analyze and interpret my results. The construction of the categories emanates from my observations.

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## **Results:**

My results show that what mostly characterized the disruptive behavior of my Informant was being physically restive on own chair, disrupting himself with non -subject related activities. My findings do also show that the Informant showed disrupting behavior as a method to approach his peers. The non -subject related activities were mostly gazing around in the classroom, or playing around with objects in the classroom to entertain the peers. I could find that the Informant`s behavior was a way to communicate with his peers, and that his behavior depended on which peers he was surrounded by. My results further show that the disruptive behavior of the Informant hindered him in peer relations and peer interactions. On -task behavior was represented to a lesser extent than off-task behavior, but the results show that on-task behavior occurred in settings where the Informant succeeded academically and socially.

The reactions the Informant received when showing antisocial behavior, mostly resulted in social rejection and non-acceptance from his peers. I could also find that the Informant achieved positive response to his disruptive behavior. Both reactions did not decrease the disruptive behavior. I could see a tendency to prosecution when the behavior was met with rejection and non-acceptance. It seemed as if the Informant used the disruptive behavior to attract attention and acceptance from his peers, even if these reactions were negative. The Informant showed highly social incompetence in relation to his peers and it hindered him in both academic and social settings.

Another key aspect in my study was how social rejection and social incompetence could influence the Informant`s self-esteem. It is difficult to measure self –esteem through the method of observation. I could however, observe, that the Informant showed behavior that I interpret as insecurity and inconvenience. One of his vice was to suck his thumb and being physically restive. This behavior mostly occurred when the Informant suffered social defeats.

I interpret that continuously social rejection from peers result in poor self-esteem of the Informant and might be factor for disruptive behavior. I could find poor attention from other participants of the school environment when it comes to guidance of building up peer relations or peer interaction.

# Acknowledgement

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I have furthermore to thank the research group of “Disorder in Schools”, for providing me with financial support through the master scholarship. I also would like to express my appreciation to the school, the students and teacher. Without their contribution this study would not have been possible.

I am deeply grateful to my fellow student, Magnar Ødegård. We have spent the last year in Berkeley together and he has guided and helped me through rough times and encouraged me to move on when I almost gave up. You have been the most important person for me through this process. You have become a good friend and I hope we will have several golden hours in future.

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# 1.Introduction

In this introductory chapter I will present the background and intention of the study along with my choice of focus and research problem.

## *1.1 Introduction and background information*

This thesis is part of the pilot project “Disorder in schools”, led by Professor Liv Duesund at the Department of Special Needs Education in Oslo, Norway. I was introduced to this project in early summer of 2010. It is a comparative study between Norway and USA of disorder in schools. I found this project extremely interesting, and I share the project’s interest of how and why disruptive behavior occurs in schools. After several conversations with my Professor Liv Duesund I decided to write my master thesis as a part of the project. I got the unique opportunity to spend two semesters in Berkeley which enabled me to get more familiarized with both culture and academic differences. The last semester, when I exceptionally wrote my thesis, there were five other master students involved in this project here in Berkeley.

When I started my studies in special education three years ago, I expeditiously found out what was in the light of my interests; problem behavior, and especially when this behavior occurs within the group of young adults. I had an internship during my studies at a high school in Oslo. This period I laid my heart on those students who showed problem behavior and through conversations with them I figured that their behavior was an activator for other aspects in their lives. Many of the students seemed very rough and confident on the outside, but when getting to know them more closely, I figured that most of them were highly insecure and vulnerable. I therefore hypothesize that problem behavior can be a cause of low self-esteem.

As I started the search for literature about the phenomena, I found that the issue of peer relations, self-esteem and behavior as been a concern of interest that goes back to the years of the late sixties and still is of interest in recent studies. During my observations and when I started the analysis I did, however, find out that peer relations and peer interactions were

important issues that affected my Informants behavior. This has become a major focus in my thesis.

However, I also wanted to investigate my allegation of an existing relationship between problem behavior and self-esteem. Throughout this study I could see that the Informant`s behavior was affected by his relations to his peers. This is the reason why it became a bigger part of this thesis than what I had expected it to be.

The pilot project “Disorder in schools” is primary about characterizing the disruptive behavior in school. My master thesis will emphasize on how disruptive behavior occurs in school and if there might be possible connections between the disruptive behavior and social interactions. Ogden (2007) states that behavioral problems in schools is behavior that violates school rules, norms and expectations. This behavior inhibits teaching and learning activities and thus student`s learning and development (ibid.) Ogden, (2007) stresses that behavioral problems are related to the school and that there is the possibility that not only students with behavioral problems have to face the consequences problem behavior brings along, but that also peers can be affected by one student`s problem behavior (ibid.).

I have chosen a systemic understanding of behavior problems, what means that I understand the behavior as a function of different conditions in the school environment. Throughout the process of analyzing I came across the challenge that the basic idea of my research problem had many concepts that were closely linked together, and that I had to classify the theory more specifically. I had to choose which terms were important to me and that would aim to clarify my research question. I ascertained that social competence was a further term I needed to examine closer. In one of my additional research questions I was able to integrate this term. I could then rely my research question on researchers inter alia Patterson (1992) and Webster Stratton & Hammon (1998) who state that social competence and antisocial behavior are connected to peer relations and the adjustment of youth (Patterson 1992, Webster Stratton & Hammon 1998).

This thesis is a case study which only has a limited selection of Informants; I therefore expect my results to have limited value concerning the aspect of generalization. In this study the focus is to make a description as thoroughly as possible of one student with disruptive behavior during class and playtime. Problem behavior is to be considered a highly frequent

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problem in today`s schools. I hope that the results of my study can contribute to a greater understanding and a deeper knowledge of the phenomena “disruptive behavior” in school.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Based on Ogden`s (2007) definition of problem behavior, that states that problem behavior is related to schools, I see the school to act a part when one wants to diminish problem behavior of students. My research problem is as following:

*How can schools contribute to strengthen self-esteem to young adults who struggle with behavioral problems?*

My intention is to identify how schools and their environment are influencing adolescents in their behavior and how adolescents are coping with social situations which occur in school related settings. I consider interactions between the student and other participants of the school environment as an important factor to diminish problem behavior. Further I consider that unfortunate interactions of the student with problem behavior results in a low feeling of self-esteem, caused by the Individual`s sense of not coping in social or academic settings. The aim of this study is to see how schools can contribute to strengthen a possible low feeling of self-esteem within students who show problem behavior. I will try to achieve this aim by using a descriptive approach in my observations and presentation of my results. Further, a discussion of aspects within the terms of social rejection and social competence as an influencing factor will be presented.

## 1.2.2 Research question

In order to approach my main research problem, I have developed three research questions that I consider to cover its components. The questions were formed on the basis of my data material. They guided me through the work of structuring and analyzing the data. The chapter where I present and discuss the data, is formed upon the following research questions;

*-How does disruptive behavior occur at junior high school?*

*-How does disruptive behavior influence communication between peers?*

*-To what extent could social rejection and social incompetence interrelate with self-esteem?*

The first research question aims at identifying and characterizing the disruptive behavior of one student in school. The second question has the intent to describe how the communication between the student and his peers is influenced by the disruptive behavior of the observed student. The third research question is a continuation of the second research question which assumes that disruptive behavior could be a result of social incompetence, which then again could result in social rejection and influence the individual's self-esteem.

## 1.3 Overview of the thesis

My thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the subject - matter, focus and purpose of the study. The main research problem, along with three research questions, is also presented in the first chapter. The second chapter is a review of the theory that emerged in light of my data collection. This chapter is divided into three sections which undertakes the main concerns of this thesis; adolescents and peers, problem behavior and self-esteem. I have tried to put them in context to each other in order to formulate my research problem. The three sections are closely related to each other. The third chapter will present the methodology that was used in my study. Further the aspects of validity, reliability and ethical considerations will be discussed in this chapter. My results and following discussions

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will be presented in chapter four. The basis structure of this chapter is formed by my research questions. This chapter will also include any additional discussions and reflections. Chapter four will also present a summary of the main results of the study. My final considerations are presented in chapter five.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### *2.1 Problem behavior*

In school, behavioral problems are reflected in many ways. There are students who are boisterous and students who drag the whole class with them and may have become the role as the entertainer of the class. Others can be rude, arrogant and have a clear need for additional attention. Some might be more introverted, but have given up on schoolwork. One might find students that have great difficulty in concentrating and who are giggling and teasing. Others again have enough with their own thoughts and concerns, especially in the phase of adolescence. This will be described more closely in the paragraph about adolescents. However, this gives an impression of how broad the spectrum is within the term of problem behavior (Ogden 2007).

As already mentioned, the focus in this study is disruptive behavior in school and if there might be a connection between the student's behavior and a possible low existing self-esteem. Given that it is difficult to measure self-esteem with the methodology used in this study, I need to use a different approach to respond to my research problem. I therefore implement theory about what might affect a student's self-esteem. This is being examined through the third research question of what social rejection and social incompetence could cause.

When I refer to problem behavior in this thesis, I do not include students with severe behavioral problems. I more deliberate about behavioral problems of a less fatal and profound kind. It is more the daily life in classroom that I focus on, where noise and disruptive behavior hinders effective learning situations and social interactions. I refer to quite ordinary discipline problems. Usually there are a few students whose disruptive behavior differs from the behavior of the other peers. Terms often used about students who show problem behavior, are disciplinary problems, motivational problems and learning inhibit behavior (Ogden 2007). The concept of behavioral problems is ambiguous and it needs further clarification. This chapter will display and discuss different perspectives on behavioral problems. The possible causes and perspectives on behavioral problems that form the basis of this study will also be presented in this chapter.



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In today's school, social and emotional difficulties are most often mentioned when one talk about students who show problem behavior. The term "emotional disorder" is used about Adolescents who in a variety of ways are anxious and insecure, upset or passive, or those who feel ostracized. Students who show "internalized behavior" can also fall into this category. Emotional disorder will not be discussed in detail, but it is necessary to have this in mind.

In addition to emotional disorder, there is what is called social difficulties. This expression is usually used for students who show disruptive behavior and are in conflict with their environment (Slåttøy 2002). This study will not focus on social problems that are diagnosed. I will rather discuss social problems of light degree with less intensity and scope as the diagnosed problem behaviors like "conduct disorder" and "oppositional defiant disorder". But it shows that there are different degrees of social difficulties (Haugen 2008).

The definition of the term problem behavior I use in this study is taken from Ogden (2007). It deals with behavior that violates accepted norms by the individual school or individual class. I have translated the definition into English with my own words:

Behavioral problems in school is behavior that violates school rules, norms and expectations. This behavior inhibits teaching and learning activities and thus the students' own learning and development, and it impedes positive interactions with others (Ogden 2007, p.15).

This definition is school related and it denotes what kind of problems a student with behavioral problems can encounter both socially and academically. It also offers the possibility that not only the student with social difficulties has to bear the consequences of inhibited teaching and learning activities, but peers are affected as well. The student with social disorders will somehow create a problem to himself and his peers as the quietness in class is disrupted (Haugen 2008). The definition used sees the problem primarily from a teacher and a teaching perspective. Hence, I find it necessary to refer to a broader definition that is based on both the student and the environment:

If the interaction between the student and other participants of the school environment doesn't function, problem behavior might occur. This problem behaviors is a result of the student not functioning in his role. It also deals with the schools' idea of teaching and upbringing. The responsibility for this interaction to work lies both with the student and with the school. If the school doesn't take this responsibility seriously, it can affect the student's behavior. Further does this definition display that both the student and the environment are challenged, and it

recommends that change can only take place through collaboration between both partners (Slåttøy 2002).

Problem behavior can be perceived as attributes of the student, but it is more correct to argue that it is a result of interaction with others (Ogden 2007).

It is a fact that “externalizing” behavior problems may also have biological causes. There are genetically vulnerable children who demonstrate disruptive behavior (Spurkland & Gjone 2002), but the behavior is maintained through interaction with the environment. Adolescent behavior is influenced through transactions with parents, peers and school (Ogden 2007).

In an academic perspective problem behavior is described as a deviation from the expected norms on how to behave in the environment of classrooms and school. Problem behavior and emerges in terms of too much noise, conflicts with teachers and peers, and poor cooperation in the learning environment. Self-assertion, rudeness, insulting and inconsiderate statements represent a violation of social norms, and such behavior can often be observed from students with social disorders. Middle school students are expected to have better developed anger control than they had at preschool. That means that behavior also has to be considered in relation to age (Ogden 2007).

Further do students with problem behavior have difficulties proportional to their academic and social skills. Poor academic functioning is often associated with social behavior problems. Other causes for problem behavior can imply the individual biological, physiological and cognitive conditions of the student, or can be about upbringing and environmental suppositions (Slåttøy 2002).

One can also discuss school created problem behavior. This is about whether the school and the teachers are able to bring good working conditions into action and if they can establish well-arranged classes and procure comfort and security. Once again one can see that behavior is constructed and maintained through interactions with others and based on environmental conditions. Since some of the causations underlie the student, one also has to take an individual perspective when looking at the behavior. To be able to understand problem behavior one thus has to gain a broader perspective and try to see the behavior from different angles (Slåttøy 2002).

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In my study I focus on young adults and problem behavior. According to Ogden (2007), one should consider that problem behavior also can emerge in certain situations or phases of life, and thereby can be defined as formation or situated problems. Adolescent years can be a phase that is signed by crises and that brings behavioral changes along. Before the crisis comes through, the student might have had a normal development and adjusted behavior. The situation may be serious enough, but such problems are often temporary. It requires that the parents and the school respond immediately and take the student seriously. Another type of problem behavior is one that hinders the student's learning. This behavior is often described in terms of discipline and approval problems. Such a behavior appears among many students and it makes it difficult to adhere a good learning environment. Especially in middle school it is not unusual that students don't thrive that well in periods. The consequence of that is a lot of noise and disquietness in the classroom. The students disturb both the teacher and their peers (ibid.)

## *2.2 Adolescence*

I have chosen to emphasize the group of adolescents. The Informant of this study is a boy who is in the middle of this changing phase of life.

Being young means developing one's capability to meet and master the future as an adult. Adolescence is challenging, but it has its own qualities, tensions and experiences. An important task of adolescence is to find one's own value, living conditions and an independent status. This is the time in life where one must learn to be autonomous, with the need to prepare for later establishment through education and qualification. Being young is a category that can be perceived from different understandings and criteria. This is a period in life where people undergo a thorough physiological and mental development. The body is changing and it is about puberty, sexual maturation and other changes. Furthermore, adolescence represents an incipient liberation from parents where young people form an individual and more stable personality. Adolescence forms an important basis for the later stages of life through the development of identity, and especially the development of self-esteem (Heggen & Øia 2005).

Young adults have to develop autonomy and their own styles of thinking and behaving. Important developments during adolescence are young people's ability to conceptualize, to reflect on the meaning of their experiences and to establish concepts about themselves as distinctive individuals. During the teenage years the establishment of self-concept and a sense of personal identity takes place. There is a change from relatively concrete perceptions of ones self and of others, to more abstract portraits. These portraits include behavioral traits, attitudes, expectations and values that may be both complex and contradictory. Adolescence is a period where young people still find it difficult to compare abstractions and integrate inconsistencies, and they have to decide which personal qualities matter to them (Rutter & Rutter 1993, Lerner & Steinberg 2004).

Adolescence is a period in which both depressive symptoms and some types of antisocial behavior show significant increases in both prevalence and incidence (Kiesner 2003). Young age can be seen as a new social category, as a result of extended school age. It is a period of rapid development and social learning. Befring (2004) calls it the crossing age because it concerns an interlude or a bridge between childhood and future adult life. He portrays adolescence as a social construction, created by school and working life as well as distinctive commercial and industrial interests (Befring 2004).

The research problem in this study addresses schools and their possible contribution to decrease problem behavior of adolescents. Working with adolescents requires high demands for those who work with them. One is challenged on ones own values and norms. If one want to help young people to find their way in life, it is important to meet them where they are (Gjærum 1998). This means for me as an educator that I should have my own viewpoint, but that I also need to develop an understanding of adolescent life and its distinctive forms of expression, and that I at all times keep myself updated on these forms. Young people should be supported to find meaning in life and to find different opportunities in a reality that is understandable from the youth's own standpoint (Gjærum 1998).

An important factor in this context is that young people's lives increasingly become institutionalized, which means that young people spend more time in institutions such as schools and day care arrangements. One must therefore be aware of the important role schools play in the development of young people. Teachers and special educators can help and take a part in shaping young people's development of a positive self-esteem (Heggen & Øia 2005).

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Erikson (1950) argues that one important psychosocial task of adolescence is the achievement of a stable self-esteem. To achieve a healthy personality development, it is necessary for young people to go through a sort of identity crisis. The process of establishing an identity involves a degree of trial and error as young people gradually find out what sort of person they are and want to be (Erikson 1950). The next chapter will describe and discuss the concept of self-esteem.

## 2.3 *Self-esteem*

By looking closely at the concept of self-esteem, one might encounter several concepts such as identity, self-perception, self-concept and coping. Also linked closely to self-esteem are the notions of self-worth and self-concept (Sommerschild 1998). Self-esteem is a term of great complexity and I want to restrict myself by holding me as close as possible to theories about adolescent's self-esteem.

Having a good self-esteem impedes somehow to have faith in oneself and believe that one can cope with the challenges life brings along. If one succeeds with overcoming the difficulties, this again will take part in shaping one's self (Sommerschild 1998).

Sommerschild (1998) suggests that some research about self-esteem has been about individual differences while others are about modifications in one's self-perceptions as a part of growths and maturations. To see self-esteem as a function of age-specific competence to find measurable aspects of self-esteem, can be difficult. What nourishes the self is the individual's own valuation of his skills. This does not always coincide with the actual ability. The feeling of self-worth forms the basis for the individual's personal perception. Just as well is the spontaneous feeling of self-worth nourished through interactions with others. The proficiency based and the relation-based angle for the understanding of the self-esteem is not set up against each other. They supply one another and shape a greater image of the self that further activates the feeling of self-worth (Sommerschild 1998).

Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2005) use the term self-perception in a more superior way. It is about every perception, evaluation, expectation belief or knowledge an individual has about himself. The term self-perception has many aspects that can be used with various relevance. Self-perception emerges in different areas. It is that a person has a perception about himself on

all areas where one has made experiences. Most aspects within self-perceptions are about dimensions like physical perceptions (appearance), social perception (ability to intercourse with others and popularity), academic perception (own ability level and level of performance), emotional perception (anxiety, happiness or satisfaction) and a moral or behavioral perception. The dilemma with this taxations is that it doesn't deal with the complexity of this term. It deals with parts of one person's self-perception, but doesn't involve the wholeness. It is therefore difficult to measure concrete self-perception (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2005, Somerschild 1998).

In summary one can say that the adolescents' self-esteem can be both specific and limited in the areas I have referred to above, or more general. A specific self-esteem will be about how a student for instance recognizes his own level of performance in sports. The student has an own opinion of how good he is to perform a sport. This view forms the basis for his self-perception in this area. A more general view will be about how students feel in their entirety, if he sees itself as good or weak at e.g. school . If one investigate the student's self-perception in school, it is important to clarify whether you think of the general feeling of being good or weak at school, or if you refer to more specific self-perceptions in specific school subjects (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2005).

Student's self-image contains multiple perspectives. First the perception of the student himself, the private self-perception. Furthermore, there is the discourse of the social self-perception, because the student is always placed in a social cohesion. This perception is about how students see themselves in interaction with others, about how he wants to be, if he can live up to his own ideals or not. It plays a role in what sense the student thinks or feels about how he is seen by others. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2005).

In the next paragraph I would like to discuss how peer relations and social competence can be important takers when shaping the self and arguing about the possible relationship between self-esteem and problem behavior.

### **2.3.1 Peer relationships**

Early adolescence is a time of change and transition. Concerning interpersonal relationships and social adjustment, these changes reflect a growing psychological and emotional

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independence from adults and a corresponding dependence on peer relationships to establish and maintain positive perceptions of the self (Steinberg 1990; Youniss & Smollar 1985 in Wentzel 1998). Adolescents who do not enjoy positive, supportive relationships with adults and peers are often at risk for academic problems (Wentzel 1998). Youniss (1994) argue that the relatively egalitarian nature of peer interactions is necessary for the developments of perspective-taking and empathic skills that serve as bases for pro-social interactions (Youniss 1994).

There is a notion that adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with peers play a fairly unique role in motivating them to help and cooperate with each other. Wentzel (1998) argues that perceived social support is a proxy for the existence of actual support derived from behaving in socially and academically appropriate ways. Well-functioning relationships with parents and peers clearly can have a possible strong influence on students' overall emotional well-being at school. Peer related support appears to play a more significant role in children's lives, especially as they reach adolescence (Wentzel 1998).

To a large extent it is acknowledged that peer relations make a unique share to children's social and emotional development. Two aspects of peer relations that have been studied the most extensively, and that have been recognized to play an important role in the development and maintenance of self-esteem, are the constructs of peer acceptance and friendship (Bukowski & Hoza 1989; Grunebaum & Solomon 1987 cited in Bishop & Inderbitzen 1995).

Sullivan (1953) was one of the first theorists who explored the association between peer relations and self-esteem. He believed that the development of self-worth took place during the grade-school years. Sullivan considered peer relationships to play a significant role in fostering that development. The major tenet of his interpersonal theory of psychiatry was that the personality of an individual was shaped by its social relationships (Sullivan 1953 & Rubin et al. 1990). He believed that friendship, not peer acceptance, was the mainspring behind the maintenance of one's self-worth during the preadolescent and adolescent years. Friendship was defined by Sullivan as a close, intimate, mutual relationship with a same-sex peer that was distinctly different from other types of social interaction. Within the context of these intimate relationships, he believed that youths realize their own self-worth as a result of the positive regard shown to them by their friends (Sullivan 1953).

The benefits of childhood peer interaction have been extolled by learning and social-learning theorists and researchers (Rubin et al 1990). They outline that peers serve as control agents for each other, punishing or ignoring non - normative behaviors and reinforcing culturally appropriate activities. In addition to this, peers can function as cognition and behavior change agents, and they can contribute to developing advances in areas of selflessness, self-esteem and valorousness (ibid.). This shows that peer interaction and peer relationships are important forces of development of competence during childhood. On the other hand, this implies that children who do not interact with their peers or who withdraw from their social community, may be at risk for problems in the social-cognitive and social behavioral arrays (Rubin et al 1990).

One of the strongest and most consistent predictors of problem behavior during adolescence is the association with problem or deviant peers. Research has shown that adolescents were more likely to participate in problem behavior if they accepted similar behavior from their peers or believed that their peers engaged in such behavior (Mason et. al 2008).

There is an ongoing social interaction between adolescents, where establishment and maintenance of friendships and popularity are important propulsions. The ability to cope the social interactions is of great importance and will be an essential condition for the development of adolescents` shape of identity and their life quality. Adolescents` actions and the behavior they show can be seen as social strategies related to peer relations and desirability. Therefore social competence will depend on to what extent adolescents are able to establish peer relations and to whom they establish relations (Nordahl et al. 2005). When dealing with problem behavior, terms as social competence and peer relations become crucial. The next paragraph will discuss the term social competence.

### **2.3.3 Social competence**

Social competence is a term that occurs in my third research question, and that needs more clarification. Social competence is a normative term which connects behavior and context together. It is about behavior that is appraised positively from significant others, like parents, teachers and peers. However, social competence is not always equivalent to social expected or social wanted behavior (Nordahl et al. 2005).



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Rather than defining social competence in terms of discrete social skills or specific traits or capacities, this term more emphasizes the broad, integrative aspects of social adaptation. Social competence can be determined by the extent to which one is able to make the best use out of personal and environmental resources to achieve a good developmental outcome (Waters & Sroufe 1983 cited in Parke & Ladd 1992).

Most important for my study is that social competence can be defined as personal abilities and predispositions for succeeding in social settings. It is an assumption that the social abilities are used in interaction processes which are adjusted to the social environment one wants to succeed in. This requires for the individual to have an understanding for and to possess sensitivity regarding the cultural and ecological characteristics of the context. Another aspect of social competence is that it is result orientated. The individual tries to achieve certain social aims in certain situation, e.g. to get access in a play or to convince a interlocutor (Nordahl et al 2005).

When students fail to be social competent, they might experience peer rejections that can affect their self-esteem. In the next paragraph I want to highlight some important aspects concerning peer rejection and the self.

## *2.4 Peer rejection, self and interaction*

Patterson (1998) argues that problem children's development can be patterned in a sequence of effects that seem to be repeated in many cases. One of his hypotheses is that the child's abrasive behavior leads to peer rejection and academic skill deficits. As a matter of fact, the social environment reacts with rejection to the abrasive behavior. The individual's failure in school limits his social experiences which are available to him, and he begins to seek out a supportive environment (Patterson 1998).

Disturbed adolescents might experience more rejection, first because they engage in negative behavior, and second because they are not capable of sensing what their peers need. (Reisman 1985). Reisman (ibid.) concludes that peers feel less attracted to people that appear to be anxious, weak, slow to learn and disturbed. They do not respond positively to those who try to compel their attention by behave in a troublesome or wrong way (Reisman 1985).

Research indicates that few or no friendships can be found in peer relations between adolescents when there is social incompetence. Social competence implies having valued qualities and skills, this signifies having friends. Through social competence one is being desirable in the judgment of one's peers (Reisman 1985).

Researchers tend to differentiate between peer interactions and peer relationships. The first term refers to behavioral processes, like the sequences of physical or verbal exchanges that occur between members of a friendship or a peer group, like when a student asks a question and a peer answers it. The result of this sequence of behavior can be described as a peer interaction, whereas a peer relationship typically infers from a specific features of individuals' peer-related interactions, thoughts, or feelings. However, important indicators of relationships are the type, nature and duration of the interactions that occur between the individuals (Ladd 2005).

Ladd & Birch (1996) suggest that the quality of children's classroom peer relationships may either serve as supports or stressors for young children. Further they found that children who are engaged in positive relationships with classmates, are more likely to feel comfortable in school and may better adjust and take advantage of the social and learning opportunities they encounter in school settings. There again it can be seen that children who experience peer rejection, might develop negative attitudes toward school that may inhibit them from further development (Ladd & Birch 1996).

Brookover et al. (1964) state that self-esteem is developed through interaction with significant others which on the other hand influences the individuals behavior. When exercised in a specific school - learning situation, a relevant aspect is the individuals' conception of his own ability to learn the accepted types of academic behavior, the performance in terms of school achievement the relevant behavior is influenced (ibid.)

The foundation of social interaction is communication. It is a fundamental instrument through which individuals initiate and maintain social relationships. Communication skills have been found to forebode social acceptance among peers, and training in social skills has been used to strengthen peer acceptance for school children. Hazen and Black (1989) outline three important components on which successful discourse exchange depends; first, the ability to direct initiations clearly, second, the ability to respond contingently to the initiations of others

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and last the ability to reinitiate by providing responses that also function as new initiations (Hazen & Black 1989).

Research has shown (Hazen & Black 1989) that among school-aged children, popular students are more likely than unpopular students to make relevant comments to the ongoing play of the group. Unpopular students are more likely to draw attention to their own needs and interests when trying to enter a group (ibid.). This means that to be able to contribute with relevant comments, contingent responding is required. On the other hand, drawing attention to the self typically involves non contingent responding and disrupts coherent discourse (Hazen & Black 1989).

# 3. Methodology

This chapter will introduce and describe the methodical approach I will use in this thesis. My methodological choices were limited due to the pilot projects guidelines, which uses observation as its methodical approach. I was required to use a pre-structured design of an observation form. In the next section I will specify my methodological approach and discuss its relevance to the pilot project and my research question.

## 3.1 *Qualitative methodology*

This thesis will describe how disruptive behavior of one student occurs in a Junior High School in Berkeley. To be able to characterize this behavior, I had to locate myself in the student's world, or more specifically, in one part of the student's world, his school.

Qualitative research can be a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. Qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). This methodical approach enabled me to study the student in his natural settings, like in the classroom, adversity and on the schoolyard. I have tried to attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings these situations bring to the student (ibid.).

Qualitative research gives opportunities within special education to strengthen the stories one choose to tell about the student with disruptive behavior (Pugach 2001). As the focus of this thesis is put on how schools can contribute to the strengthening of the self-awareness of students with disruptive behavior, the methods of qualitative research also gives me the opportunity to learn about the practice of special education, and about the individuals within the special education system who may not have disabilities (Pugach 2001 & Denzin & Lincoln 2005).

But most important qualitative research has the potential to enforce the frameworks by which these relations are disciplined (Pugach 2001). One fundamental tenet of qualitative research is the belief that the local context is central to the understanding of a phenomenon. In principle

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all qualitative research is idiographic, which means that it is based on the specifics of a situation. The interpretations heavily depend on local particulars for their validity. Understanding these particulars completely requires a long period of fieldwork with interviews, observations and document analysis. In this thesis observation was used as a method, which will give me data to produce the descriptive writing, the distinguishing mark of qualitative research. Through qualitative research one is enabled to learn as much about the context of the phenomenon that is being studied and one can be aware of how one's biases may blur one's interpretations of the context and what one actually learn about it (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, Pugach 2001). Descriptive, interpretive studies make it possible to tell stories of students struggling with emotional and behavioral disorders. It provides a window onto individuals and situations that have mostly been invisible. The stories being told by qualitative research makes them the forefront of debate and dialogue about what schools are for, who provides well by them, and who is not (Pugach 2001).

Ferguson et al. (1992b) argue that behavior is a social construction. More specifically this means that the experience of being an individual with abnormative behavior is socially constructed. In order to understand why students behave like they do, it requires being open to the full context and experience of the lives of individuals with this behavior. However, the disability perspective will dominate the interpretation of the power of qualitative research.

Fergusson et al (1992b) also argue that qualitative research is not a simply alternative method for studying disability. The authors repeatedly outline the underlying belief that experience is socially constructed and that the knowledge of disabilities exists within these social constructions. This is central to the difference between quantitative and qualitative research traditions, and it accurately shows what makes qualitative research so powerful for the study of disability (Ferguson et al 1992b). Quantitative methods focus on objectifying the research process. They keep a distance between the researcher and the subject (Kleven 2002).

Furthermore:

*'Relying on qualitative research, special education scholars have a means to study important, complex problems that face the field and to tell disciplined stories that appropriately capture this complexity (Pugach 2001, p. 446).*

### 3.1.1 Scientific theory

The hermeneutic approach is a field of inquiry that seeks to interpret human phenomena by understanding how their different parts relate to each other. Hermeneutics is about what it means to understand something, and it's about how one reaches an understanding or an opinion, which has scientific nature. The hermeneutic tradition has come to refer to the study of the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of any text. The term 'text' can be a document, but it can also refer to social customs or anything else containing a message that can be "read" (Gall et al 2007). As a single phenomenon is understood in the light of a whole, I see this scientific theory adequate for my study. I will try to understand what characterizes the disruptive behavior in school and I presume that the student's behavior is socially constructed. I therefore must understand the behavior as a part of the context and in conjunction with this. In qualitative research hermeneutics is central because the data are not only being described, but also seen in context and interpreted (Gall et al. 2007).

Geertz (1972) makes a distinction between thin and thick description. Thin description merely reports on an act, while the thick description provides a sense of intentions, meanings, context, situations and circumstances of actions. However, the requirement for an extensive description of context and of people's perception of the phenomenon under consideration, of related events over time, and of systematic methods for the coding, analysis, and interpretation of data conclude in the most common 'rich, thick description'. This is often the base for profound insights about the individuals or the situations (Geertz 1972).

The hermeneutic approach also enables me to use and talk about my data collection, analysis, and representation where each is seen as part of a dialogic, dynamic, holistic, and self-reflective process where interpretation and understandings are developed continuously along the way, rather than as separate stages of my study (Gall et al. 2007).

I also want to mention that I as a researcher already have a perspective on my inquiry, and that I will do my interpretations based on these perspectives. This personal perspective is in hermeneutic theory called presupposition. Our presuppositions are not just about the ideas we have. It also contains our entire personal history and our socialization. This means that factors such as where we come from, what we have done and who has influenced us are part of and determine our presupposition.

## 3.2 *Observational Research*

One of my basic assumptions in this thesis is that the individual's behavior is embedded in the social relations in classroom and with peers and teachers. Observations enable me to see what actually happens in classroom or on the schoolyard. I could gain insight into how the student operates with his peers and his teachers, or I could see if he even communicates with others at all.

Observation involves collecting impressions of the world by using all of one's senses, especially looking and listening, in a systemic and purposeful way to learn about a phenomenon of interest. Observation as a research method can be useful when one don't know much about the subject under investigation (Mc Kechnie 2008).

Primarily observation is a classic technique that presumes that the culture under study is unknown to, or poorly known by the observer (Adler & Clark 2000). Observational research assumes that behavior is purposeful and that it reflects deeper values and beliefs.

Observational research mostly takes part in natural settings to capture behavior as it occurs in the real world. Qualitative observational research is exploratory and it seeks to uncover unanticipated phenomena. It also recognizes the subjective role of the researcher and it acknowledges reactivity to be inevitable on the part of both the observed and the observer. It seeks to address and understand this through researcher reflexivity (Mc Kechnie 2008).

In this thesis the method of observation is seen as systematic attempts to select and report the behavior of `my` student in his interaction with his peers and teachers `there and then.` I will describe these systematic attempts below.

Observation make sense when one wants to understand experience from the point of view of those who are living it or from the context in which is it lived (Adler & Clark 2000). That means for me that I will try to take the student's perspective in my observations and try to understand how different contexts can influence this behavior.

I tried to observe my student in different settings, however, my options were limited. Since this project is about characterizing problem behavior in school, I had to do all my observations in school. I tried to capture `my` student's behavior within different settings and in various subjects. I wanted to figure out if his behavior occurred differently in e.g. physical

education than in a math class. The last observation was made in play time, this means that the student was not observed in a classroom setting at all.

When using observation, relationships between people, both individually and within groups, are explored. Characteristics of the physical setting, including the objects found in it, are noted. Through observation practices, researchers strive to identify broad trends and patterns of behavior (McKechnie 2008).

My observations were reported immediately after they were done. I wrote them down in the given observation scheme and interpreted them through the use of pen and paper in the lessons. This means that my student could see me taking notes, which could have influenced the validity of the observations. I will discuss validity more closely in chapter four.

Observation can be seen as a derivation of data collection. However, observation is more seen as an indicator for what we are looking for, rather than a proof. When using observation as a method, one has to work in a way that the results one get will give a better groundwork for conclusions, evaluations and subject based reflections preferably than ones own assumptions. It is also important to use ones own theory when working, dealing with and understanding what kind of material has been collected through ones observations (Næss 2006). The theory I use in this study is supposed to underlie my observations and I want the theory to strengthen my findings.

### **3.2.1 Observer Role**

It is important for the outcome of the observations which role the researcher adopts. The role constrains what can be observed. In this study I took the role as a participant –observer. A participant observer role makes the researcher observe and interact closely enough to the subject, my student, being observed. A meaningful identity can be established between me as the researcher and the student I observe (Gall et al. 2007). However, this does not include me engaging in activities that are the innermost of the group's identity. This means that I didn't interact with the student on purpose. However, I did encounter situations in which the student started talking to me. Also, once the teacher asked me to walk together with the student to the library. I valued this moments, because I could talk to the student, and he could also get to know me not only as an observer. Through the process of being an observer at the school, I



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came into situations where I was able to talk to my informant. One day I followed him to class where I was about to observe him. This enabled me to talk to him. I had several of these moments, where I had conversations with my informant outside the observation time. These informal conversations were important for my study. I got access to information that is invaluable for my analysis and my interpretations.

The next excerpt will describe informal conversations in relation to qualitative observation.

### **3.3.3 Informal conversations**

According to Gall & Gall (2007) informal conversations rely entirely on spontaneous establishment of questions that come up in a natural interaction. These conversations typically occur as part of ongoing participant observation. The conversations appear naturally, and the research participant may not even realize that he is being interviewed (Gall & Gall 2007).

Through the informal conversations with my subject I could get a sense of how he felt about certain things in life and school. This will be closely described in chapter four. I also had informal conversations with his special education teacher. From her I got information about the student's academic and familiar background. This information will also be recessed in chapter four.

## **3.3 Design**

### **3.3.1 Case Study design**

One approach that falls under the category of qualitative research is case study (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Case studies often focus on how people live their lives and act in particular, situated situations. This type of research is often used when a researcher is looking for in-depth, detailed empirical data about a particular phenomenon (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010).

As I in this study am trying to find characteristics of the student's disruptive behavior and its possible connections to the students' self-esteem, which I think to be socially constructed, I found a case study design appropriate. A case study design enables me as a researcher to investigate issues that might have contributed to the phenomenon.

According to Yin (2009) Case study is used because one wants to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth.

Case study methodologies are flexible and allow the researcher to study a variety of phenomena ranging from unusual situations to complex interactions. These flexible methodologies are beneficial. They provide the researcher with tools for capturing different elements that contribute to peculiarities of the phenomenon under investigation (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010).

Especially within education research it is important to study outlier situations, as they are a reality. The goal is to develop proper adjustments for the pupil with special needs. Disruptive behavior might e.g. be rare, but it does occur, and in order to effectively accommodate children with this behavior, appropriate teaching policy must be created and implemented. The flexibility of the case study approach, which allows for targeted sampling, makes it possible to appropriately and effectively capture these phenomenon along with other situations in a holistic way, so that they can be studied and appropriate policy can be created (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010). My research question stresses how schools can contribute to the strengthening the student's self-esteem. To be able to approach this challenge, I need to see the student in different contexts and situations. A case study design enables me to see the student in a holistic way and I can most likely find solutions to my research question.

Case studies are often carried out in in classrooms or other school related locations (Gall et al. 2007). This is another reason why case study as design fits with my study. Over a period of four weeks I have collected my data in a Junior High School located in California in the United States of America. However, my elementary method of data collecting was, as I mentioned before, observation. Case study should take place in the natural setting of the "case" (Yin 2009), that's why observation is a practiced and suitable method to be used in a case study.

There are three purposes for doing case studies, and researchers generally do it for one of them. They try to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, they want to develop

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possible explanations of it or the phenomena are to be evaluated (Gall et al. 2007). The purpose of my study is to examine and conceptualize the phenomenon of disruptive behavior in school. To capture a good depiction impedes what is called thick description, as explained above.

I use the descriptive approach to the phenomenon. Therefore thick descriptions are to be aimed. I will try to re-create the situations observed and as much of their context as possible. These statements are accompanied by the meanings and intentions belonged in that situation (Gall et all 2007). I try to collect the thick descriptions in this study through the methods of observation, informal conversations and the use of logbook.

The strength of case study research is that it can ask the questions “why” and “how”. These are important in educational practice. More and more case study research is conducted in inclusive education. Patterns will emerge and it will provide researchers and educators with important results that can influence policy and practice. Case studies can also provide rich holistic data that contribute to the understanding of complex situations. Special education is an example of an area that is complex. Each situation is unique with its own challenges. Case study research can be a logical approach to researching many aspects of special education (Yin 2009, Mills, Durepos &Wiebe 2010).

When undertaking case study research in inclusive settings, it is especially vital to describe the contextual situations so that the reader can understand these situations.

### *3.4 Participants and Sampling procedures*

The pilot project “Disorder in schools” (Duesund 2010) disposed the guidelines as a participant of this I should be focusing on. I was to observe one student with disruptive behavior that appeared to disturb himself, his peers, the teacher or the general learning environment. The student should be part of the regular teaching situation during the observation.

In cooperation with my supervisor and the Berkeley Schools Volunteer Program I gained access to a Junior High School in Berkeley. I observed in different classes that were chosen by the special education teacher, who was my contact person. I started the observations with

first getting familiarized with the school and the classes. The guidelines given by the pilot project required two days of internship at the school before I could start the observation. My contact teacher chose the student that I eventually was to observe. The student was regarded to show disruptive behavior, and I already got to know patterns of his behavior in the two days of my internship (Duesund 2010).

To be able to collect rich data material from the Informant, a purposeful sampling was applied. Gall et al (2007) point out that the goal in purposeful sampling is to select cases that are likely to be information-rich with respect to the purposes of the study (Gall et al 2007, pp. 178). The sampling in this study is limited to one student, this allows me to seek depth of the information from the cases (ibid.).

### *3.5 Implementation of the observations*

Starting the observations made me realize that the first days in the field could be challenging and rough, although I had prepared myself and had a clear conception of what my task was, and of what I had to focus on during the observation. I had prepared myself for the observations by talking to my Professor, Liv Duesund, and by reading the guidelines and papers of Liv Randi Opdal. These readings included a technical briefing of the methodology of observation.

In this study five observations were conducted in addition to the two days being a visitor at the school to get familiarized. During these two days I was located in different classrooms while I followed my Informant through his everyday school life. This period was useful to me. The feeling of awkwardness and not belonging that can characterize the first stage of an observation period (Bogden & Bilan 1992), ended with some clear indication of acceptance from my informant. I have not included these first days in my collected data material. However, I did make some notes about the informal conversations which I had with my Informant during these days. The aim was also to make my Informant as comfortable as possible with me being in the classroom. It seemed that my Informant was used to being observed and he didn't really seem to be bothered about my presence. I did, however, at one point realize that he didn't want me to be there. I will describe this in chapter four.

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Mostly, the students did not care about my presence in the classroom. This made me almost a completely independent observer (Gall et al 2007). I tried to make myself imperceptible and not to affect the environment or the observations. By keeping myself in the background and by not initiating contact with the students, I tried to signalize that I was only there to observe and not to engage in the teaching situation or other activities. I once encountered a situation where my Informant started to talk to me during my observation. We talked for several minutes. I had to break off this observation and had to do it again on another day.

The main data in participant observation are descriptions and quotations (Gall et al 2007). It is important that the descriptions are specific and factual, accurate and comprehensive and that no irrelevant details are implemented. It is not necessary and not possible to observe and describe everything that happens.

Observation is holistic in its approach. The researcher collects data about many aspects of the research setting and its participants. The researcher pays attention to the actors or participants in a setting. He collects socio-demographic facts like gender, age, education and class, and descriptive facts like dress and stature, trying to determine who the people are. Acts, activities and events are observed and one try to discover what the student does and with whom, what is happening, and if there are any trends and patterns discernible in these activities (McKechnie 2008).

In addition to these observations being made, the descriptions also include the observer's interpretations, evaluations and reflections. These should be distinguished from the purely descriptive description of the observation.

I used an observation form that was developed by Liv Duesund, Liv Randi Opdal and Sven Nilsen, who are all members of the research group "Disorder in schools". This made it easier for me to make good descriptions and to separate the description and interpretations in an orderly way. The form included a section for descriptions and interpretations for each of the five observations.

In addition to the observation form I also used logbook. This was useful to me because I encountered many situations and impressions which took place beyond the actual observations. I could note these in my logbook and implement them in my analyses. As already mentioned in the chapter about Informal conversations, I got valuable information about my student through these conversations. It was especially important for me to be able to

talk to my student in person and somehow get a brief feeling about who he is as a person and not only as an object of study.

I followed the project's guidelines for the observations (Duesund 2010) and I conducted the observations in March 2011 of one target student. Five observation sessions had to be conducted. The first observation was ongoing for 45 minutes, and the intension was to observe and characterize disruptive behavior in the whole class. This observation gave me an impression of how disruptive behavior can occur in different ways. I have included this observation in my analysis of one student's behavior. The three main observations of my informant lasted for 15 minutes each and were conducted respectively in the beginning of the class, in the middle, and in the end of class. The last observation lasted for 15 minutes and was done during recess. During all observations field notes were taken for supplementary information.

I intended to do my observations in different lessons. The observations took place in Math, Physical education, Adversity and Science. I chose to observe in different classes to get a variety within the observations and to see if different environments and subjects affected my Informant's behavior. As both the teachers and the student knew that they were being observed, this could be a threat to validity. However, the peers did not know that I was observing a certain student, which may have helped me to get the observation on how the student interacts and behaves on an everyday basis. This might have strengthened the aspect of validity. Validity will be discussed further in in the section concerning validity.

### *3.6 Implementation of informal conversations*

The informal conversations comprised background information of the student who is my Informant. These conversations were with the teacher about the student and also with the student himself. I also implement information I got through reading the student's file. Notes were taken after the conversations.

## 3.7. *Processing observation data*

I have chosen the hermeneutic approach, which stresses the issue that one should reflect upon and find sense in the data collected. Further the data should be seen in the context into which it occurs. For me as a researcher this contains to divide the data into smaller parts and to see what they consist of. I have to find out how the different parts are related to each other and how these parts are related to the whole.

Using the hermeneutic approach means reflecting upon the information I get and see if there is a meaning behind this information. The data will be interpreted in the whole of the context.

### **3.7.1 Transcription and analysis of observational data**

After I had completed my fieldwork, I had an extensive set of field notes and data that served as a record for my observations (Gall et al 2007). I now had to analyse, interpret and report this data.

One purpose of my study is to identify patterns in the student's behavior. As an approach to identify such patterns, I have developed my own categories. I had to study my data carefully in order to identify significant phenomena. Further I had to find out which phenomena share sufficient similarities so that they could be considered instances of the same concept. The concept is a part of my category system. Through my categories I will aim to explain phenomena as well as to describe them.

Gall et al (2007) outline the importance of the term constant comparison. This means that I as a researcher continually have to compare segments within and across my categories. The term constant means that the process of comparison and revision of categories must be repeated until satisfactory is achieved. I also try to link the development of my categories to the theory I referred to in this study.

The first step I had to do was to develop a set of categories that adequately encompasses and summarizes the data (Gall et al 2007). I had to decide what was worth being part of my analysis and what seemed less important to my study.

Second I had to describe the data material I had collected. I wrote all my observations into my computer and tried to figure out patterns emerging within the behavior I had observed.

I tried to do a reflective analysis (Gall et al 2007) from a hermeneutical perspective, this means that I had to carefully examine and then re-examine all the data that I had collected. Through the process of my data collection I have tried to find certain features of the phenomena to become salient. Further I have developed an understanding of these features by themselves and in relation to each other.

The analysis should account for as much as possible of the phenomena being studied (Gall et al 2007).

## ***3.8 Validity and Reliability***

Vital to qualitative study are the three factors of validity, reliability and anonymity. Latter is discussed under the section of ethical considerations.

### **3.8.1 Validity**

In the traditional literature of qualitative methods validity is described as the guarantee with which one measures what one intends to measure (Kvale 1996). The question of validity concerning my study can be asked in terms of to which extent the study describes the area in which it aims to uncover. Is this satisfactory? The concept of validity is connected to a certain philosophical understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the world. This relationship can be seen as determined by a criterion where a study is characterized as more valid when it contains the best possible correspondence between the knowledge collected throughout the study and the external world. Validity is seen as an integrated part of the research process and continuous checks, interpretations and theorizing are basic parts of validation (ibid).

Validity is defined by Vedeler (2000) as the degree of correct conclusions one can draw on the basis of results from a given data collection. Further she indicates that validity is about the



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entire research process, and it should be a continually and crucial element throughout the whole research project (Vedeler 2000).

The validity concerning my study is what other theoretical and methodological approaches I could have used. The issue of validity within the question of design is related to whether the chosen method is suitable to illustrate the theoretical problems. What would have strengthened the validity of my study, are the implementations of interviews with the student and teachers. This could have given me a better insight in how they experience being a student or teacher in relation to the concerns of my study. Interviews also would enable me to ask more specific questions to approach my research question. Denzin and Lincoln (2007) call this a triangulation of methods, where qualitative methods would provide more strength to the observations. Anyhow, I did only chose observation hence to the focus of my study, since the interest of the research project was a descriptive identification of the observable phenomena disruptive behavior in schools.

In my study I also have to consider validation when I handle the concepts of “disruptive behavior” throughout my observations and the theory chapter, defining analytical categories. The analysis and interpretation must be considered carefully, and validity is here related to the criteria used in connection with categorizing the data material.

Validation is also about the reporting of data material and whether what is presented in my study covers sufficiently what has been discovered.

In relation to observations, validity has to be considered carefully. Observation as a method includes any threats to it. Therefore it is important to define a clear intention for the observation when wanting to achieve the purpose of the study. The sample in this study is limited and consists of only one student. I have to be aware of that my sample is not necessarily representative for the population. This is where the term of generalization comes in. I have to ask myself if the results of my study can be related to the people who have not taken part in the study, but whom the results of the study still claim to cover (Nielsen 1998). My study will not argue for the question of generality, as I have just had one person to observe. However, my research question is more about characterizing and detecting problem behavior than generalizing this to the population. My thesis is part of a pilot project and my findings can be part of further findings, when this project is using different methods for more examinations in the following years. Genettralization becomes an issue in my study when I

try to connect my findings to the theory used in this thesis. I will try to underline the theory used with my findings.

Another threat to validity in this study is that the student being observed may have changed his behavior, because he knew that he was being observed (Hammersley 1990). I tried to protect the validity by keeping myself as much as possible in the background and by making my presence as comfortable as possible. However, neither the student nor the teacher paid too much attention to my presence, and the student had been under investigation since he went to first grade. So he seemed to be used to it. I did though introduce myself to both teachers and students. Especially the students did not care and showed little interest in my study. In one class I got the feeling that the teacher was influenced by my presence on how she taught. I got the impression that she made an extra effort on teaching well. The outcome on this was positive for my results and it strengthened the purpose of my research question. This will be further described in the analysis.

The most crucial threat concerning the validity in my study, were to my opinion my presuppositions and my subjective interpretations of what is being observed. As an observer one is never entirely free of subjective interpretations, because the observer has theoretical and experience-based knowledge of the phenomena being observed (Vedeler 2000). In literature this is described as “bias” and is being stressed as one of the most critical threats to observational research. Vedeler (2000) defines such biases as subjectivity and coincidences in the observations, and also as the characteristics of the observer (Vedeler 2000). One is always influenced by experiences and attitudes one have encountered in the past, and as an observer such personal “bias” will to some extent influence the observations (ibid.)

The observation forms and logbooks strengthened the validity of my study. The observation form was divided in two columns, description and interpretation, this enabled me to first write down the pure descriptions and then interpret them afterwards. The logbook helped me to write down all I had experienced and observed, the conversations I made and the impressions and thoughts I had during observation. This helped me to make a distinction between the descriptive observations and my own interpretations. I claim that this strengthened the validation of my study and the results.

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### **3.8.2 Reliability**

Denzin & Lincoln (2007) define reliability as an extent to which the results are changeless over time. An exact representation of the total population under study is also in accordance to reliability. If the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research method is regarded to be reliable. The idea of replicability or repeatability of observations is embodied in this definition.

The quality of data material in observational research depends highly on the observer, it is common to be struck about the aspect of reliability to be appropriate for this approach (Denzin & Lincoln 2007).

If a research study is reliable or not, depends on the degree onto which the data is free from random errors of measurement. Reliability can intercept the technical quality and see if it is sufficient to capture the essence of importance in the classroom situation. Errors of measurement correlates to the used concept, the operationalization of concepts, and to the question about if the categories can work as parameters and indicators. The conventional concept of reliability concerns the reliability of the measurement of the individuals within the actual time of the measurement (Kleven 2002). This implies that the results must implicitly be reproduced at the next measurement, changes may have occurred at the meantime. However, it is important to question if the random errors might have affected the data, nevertheless what kind of empirical data is used. Day of time and day of observation can be factors that might have affected the results. Also the observers opinion about what seems relevant and important to him might affect the results (Kleven 2002).

## ***3.9 Ethical considerations***

Observational research is associated with a number of ethical issues. Prior to the observations, I had deliberated and prepared myself for the ethical challenges I would encounter during the implementation of my study. One major concern is the use of deception by the researcher. One can violate the principle of informed consent when practicing covert observation, assuming a false role, or mislead participants about the research in other ways.

Due care and attention must be paid to ethical issues in these cases. The researcher must maintain confidentiality by both protecting the identity of participants and refusing to reveal sensitive information gathered during the research process that could harm the individuals involved. It is important that the researcher is inclusive and realistically representing the voices of all participants in a research setting (McKechnie 2008).

In case study research the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality are closely linked together. Anonymity is the protection of a research subject's identity. Confidentiality is the safeguarding of information obtained in confidence during the course of the research study (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010).

In my study it has been a priority to ensure the students' and teachers' confidentiality and anonymity. The student's anonymity is in this study assured by using the term "Informant" in the collected data. The teachers who were involved in this study are named "Teacher". It will not be possible to identify the school nor its location in this thesis.

As I am an unexperienced observer, the teachers might have felt themselves threatened about my presence. It was important for me to show respect and humility during my observations as in my approach as a whole.

The Informant in my study was a minor. (Den nasjonale forskningsetiske komité for samfunnsfag og humaniora [NESH], 2006) states that children participating in research have particular requirements for protection. Their needs and interests must be protected in other ways than when using adults in research. During my observations I had this in mind, and I had decided on ending a current observation if the student was uncomfortable with me being present. I once encountered a situation where my Informant was in a bad mood. We walked together to his class and he seemed like he didn't want me to be there. I asked him if he wanted me to leave, but he said no, and I pursued the observation. This displays what NESH (2006) states by saying that the child's own consent is needed when the child is old enough to express it. My Informant was twelve years old, and I decided to give him information about my presence. I told him who I was, that I was from Norway and that I wanted to learn more about American schools. I did not tell him exactly what I was observing, this was to ensure the validity, but my Informant did, however, know that he was the reason why I attended several of his classes. It is also required to get consent by the parents, and I therefore wrote a letter that explained who I was, that I would like to observe their child and that I ensured the

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confidentiality of my observations. In addition, the special education teacher called the mother of my Informant and explained her why I wanted to observe her child. I got the mothers consent. The researcher must be aware of protecting the identity of the research participants and he must preserve the confidentiality of information obtained during the study. The need for maintaining the anonymity of the research subject and the confidentiality of information can create ethical and methodological challenges for the researcher at various stages of the research process (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010).

Still it may be questioned if protecting the research participants' identity eliminates the need to protect information obtained during the research that may be of a confidential nature. One of the major cornerstones of the ethical research policies concerning the use of human subjects in research are privacy and confidentiality.

The characteristics that make case study research valuable in terms if providing insights and in-depth information about a particular phenomenon are the same characteristics that create ethical and methodological challenges concerning anonymity and confidentiality (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe 2010).

## 4. Results and Discussion

This chapter will present my data material and findings of my observations including the informal conversations. The following will start with a brief description of the case. Further I will present and discuss my observational findings.

### 4.1 *Case description*

In the following I will usher information about the student and the subjects I observed in. The information being presented is taken from informal conversations with the teacher and the student.

#### 4.1.1 The student

Informant

My Informant is a twelve-year-old boy born in America. He comes from an African-American family and speaks American, which is his mother tongue and only language. His parents got divorced when he was five years old and he now stays with his mother and his granddad. According to his special education teacher his father is from an area where you shouldn't remain because one could get shot. The Informant is the second of two children. In one conversation I had with the Informant, he told me that he had several brothers and sisters. His dad has had different women, and has several children with these women. My Informant said he had four siblings and that he came along well with all of them, although he was not staying at the same place as they did.

According to his file, his Godmother who was also his aunt, was victim of violent crime. Her husband shot her. After this incident he had to cope with his mom crying at night. In one conversation the Informant had with his teacher, he told that he get yelled at a lot from his mother, especially when school calls his home to tell about his behavior. During another

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conversation I had with the Informant, he told me that he had a good relationship to his granddad and that his granddad spoiled him.

He has had academic difficulties and problems with absence behavior, motivation, effort and his attitude towards school since first Grade. His teacher back then expressed his concern about the boy`s behavior and how this influenced his performance in school.

In third grade my Informant had been examined and tested by the school psychologist, and deficit in sensory-motor skills were found. Further possible deficits in learning and auditory processing and his natural disposition and approach to learning were discussed. Mostly he seems to be off task and inattentive during explanations of math and writing activities.

His teacher says that he is characterized by making unusual noises, gestures and faces. He has difficulties with control of whole body movements and has few male friends. He often sucks his fingers, and peers like to pick on him. He might yell out loud for no apparent reason and he has very poor focus and attention. He has difficulty sitting for any length of time. His academic progress is negatively impacted by his attendance.

Before I first met my Informant, his teacher told me that he was a tough student with a lot of issues, and that I immediately would recognize him through his behavior. His behavior would especially be bad when he was in the same room with a certain girl. The teacher also told me that he was popular among his peers and that he had a lot of friends. In his file I could see that it was noted that he mostly had female friends and few male friends.

The Informant is a bit overweight and tall. He appears bigger than his classmates. He has long dreadlocks, which makes his appearance more thoroughgoing.

### **4.1.2 The School**

The school where I conducted my data collection is a middle school located in the Berkeley school district, California, USA. The school is a public school and it teaches a large amount of students from sixth to eighth grade and has over a 100 employees including teacher, office staff and counselors. The school is part of the Berkeley Unified School District which has the mission to ensure that all students discover and develop their special talents, achieve their educational and career goals, become life long learners and succeed in a rapidly changing

society by empowering students, parents and staff and offering alternative learning experiences in a racially integrated, multilingual environment. Also special for Berkeley Unified School District is that 1993, after much community study and discussion, the School Board voted to change the district's grade configuration to a K-5, 6-8 (middle school), 9-12 system, with controlled choice of schools at the elementary and middle school levels. Through the controlled choice systems, parents can choose a school for their children as long as racial integration is maintained throughout the district. This means that students from poorer and maybe more stereotyped areas can go to schools not located in their neighborhood. This also means that the diversity of students at schools is higher and that the school both can have students from very rich families and students from very poor families.

The school organizes classes. The academic curriculum is built upon six ideals that should insure the individual student would be valued as an individual and same wise is a contributing member of a nurturing and equitable learning community. The ideals of the school are equality, academic excellence, community action, respect for self and others, nonviolence and leadership. The school also offers a variety of after school activities and has an active sports department. Drama classes, chess club, math club and dancing are other activities the school offers. Teachers are staying behind after school day has ended and are being available to students who might need help with their homework. This is called school homework assistance. The students are graded in all subjects and must obtain a passing grade in twenty of the twenty-four semester classes during the seventh and eighth grade to be able to graduate.

#### **4.1.3 Subjects in which observation took place**

I observed the student in four different classes. I made this choice to see if the student behaved differently in each subject. I could find this to be the case. I observed in a Math class, Physical Education and Advisory.

The Math class was a group of sixteen students and was well structured and organized. The students had to both work independently and as a group. I could observe some disruptive behavior from students, but this was mostly in intersections where the teacher gave new tasks. During my observations the students had to work on linear equations.



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The second subject I observed in was Physical Education. This was in my opinion a loose structured lesson, where I had difficulties in understanding what the students were supposed to do. There were three classes and three teachers. My informant was part of a class with twenty students. They had a supply –teacher for this lesson, and it took part on the schoolyard and on the sports ground. The students had first to warm up, which was lead by three students, chosen by the supply teacher, and then they had to run around the sports ground. Latter they did together with the two other classes.

The third subject in which I conducted my data collection, was Advisory. There were eighteen students in this classroom. All students had to read a book, their own book. There was no obvious disruptive behavior in this class.

The last subject in which I collected my data, was Science. This was an afternoon class and the class that consisted of twenty- seven students. The students were learning about fertilizing. Their first task was to read a text about fertilization. Second, they watched a movie on how babies develop. The students got a cloze that they solved together. In this class the teacher was well organized and the class was structured. However, there were many students in this class and they were seated in groups by four, which in my opinion seemed unfortunate.

## ***4.2 Research question 1 : How does disruptive behavior occur at school?***

To approach my research question on how schools can contribute to strengthen self-esteem to young adults who struggle with behavioral problems, I first had to find out how disruptive behavior of one student occurs in school. I therefore had to develop my own categories, where I could implement and sequence my observations made in school.

### **4.2.1 Categories of the student`s behavior**

During by observations I could catch some behavioral patterns which characterized the student I observed. The categories of the student`s behavior are developed on the background

of the collected data material. I have also had the theory presented in chapter two in mind when I designed the categories. There will in reality always be a diversity of interpretations of disruptive behavior. This depends on various things, like e.g. subject or the mood of the student or the teacher on that special day. The extent to what the student is characterized as disruptive depends on the definition of disruptive behavior. These categories are supposed to be an appliance for describing what kind of behavior the student shows in situations where he is described as disruptive, and the extent of this behavior.

#### Category 1:

Verbally calm on own chair/ physically restive without doing any subject related tasks:

This category intends to capture the situations where the student is mostly physically and verbally calm, but where he still is disrupting himself through being restive and for example throwing his head back and forth, turning around, or gazing.

#### Category 2:

Physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related task. Triggered by peers. Disruptive to him and his peers:

This category intends to capture situations where the student emerges as physical and verbal disruptive on his own seat in the classroom. Examples of this behavior are: talking to other peers about non-subject related themes, speaking out loud without permission, or playing with things being nearby his seat. This category also includes that this behavior is triggered by peer reactions or no peer response.

#### Category 3:

Physically and verbally calm in the classroom/ involved in subject related tasks:

This category intends to capture situations where the student shows on-task behavior such as; writing and reading, raising his hand and responding to the teacher or peers, working on subject related tasks in a group.

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Observation number 1:

The first observation was done in the forenoon. The subject was math, and the students were supposed to do a task given by the teacher. During the first observation, the analysis of the data shows that the Informant was disturbing himself. This fits under the 2<sup>nd</sup> category, physically and verbally calm on own chair / seat in the classroom without doing subject related tasks. The student enters the classroom approximately ten minutes late, and he does not get any response for entering late. However, the class has not started yet and the student gets the opportunity to follow the instructions. The first observations I make in this class starts with the following:

*He willfully sits down on his chair without taking off his backpack. He looks around in the classroom and shows little interest in what is happening around him. He lays his head on the table. After several minutes he takes off his backpack and takes out his pencil case, because he is asked to do so. He plays with his pencil case and gazes. He pays no attention to the instructions given by the teacher. He sucks his thumb and swings his head back and forth.*

During the minutes this sequence lasted, the Informant did not do anything on -task related. He was mostly doing nothing than sitting on his chair and gazing around. He did not do the task he was asked to do. The fact that he had his backpack on for several minutes can be interpreted as not being interested or motivated to attend this lesson. However, this behavior was more disrupting himself than any of his peers. This fits into category 1; physically restive on own chair and verbally calm, without doing any subject related tasks.

What happened next was that the students were divided in three groups. The Informant was placed in a group of six students. They were asked to work on linear equations;

*The Informant sits quietly on his chair and he does the task he is supposed to do. His teacher asks him to share his solutions in front of his peer. He does this correctly and smiles when he has finished the task. He sucks his thumb.*

This behavior fits into category 3; physically and verbally calm on own chair/ involved in subject related tasks. The Informant did the assignment he was asked to do and cooperated with both teacher and peers. The teacher was mostly available for the group of students which the Informant was part of. It seemed as if this group needed more help than the other students

in the class. The teacher was continually encouraging the group and the learning environment seemed good. The Informant was asked to answer questions about the linear equations and he answered them correctly. The teacher reinforced him all the time and he seemed satisfied.

The behavior I observed during this section was an on-task behavior. Compared to the first section of this class, where the whole class was set together and asked to work individually on a task, the Informant seemed more comfortable with being placed in a smaller group and with getting more attention from the teacher. In this sequence the student did not disrupt himself nor did he disrupt his peers. I could observe, however, that he once in a while sucked his thumb.

#### Observation number 2:

The subject is Physical Education and the lessons take place outside on the schoolyard. The Informant is part of a group which is highly being disquiet. The students are asked to stand in rows and warm up. The Informant stands on the side of the group with four other girls. During the sequence, the Informant is not following any of the given instructions. The following excerpts are taken from the observation form and describes what the Informant does during the remaining observation;

*All the other students are standing in rows and warming up. The Informant stands outside the group with four other girls. He talks loudly and strikes an attitude. He is showing off in front of the four other girls. They are laughing. He uses words like "bitch" and "motherfucker". The teacher wonders if some of the students want to lead the warm up. The Informant does not react, He starts dancing in front of the girls and entertains them. Suddenly he pretends like he kicks one of the girls in her back several times. The girl laughs. Then he takes the girls purse and pretends like he would throw it away. He swings his head back and forth while he is talking to the girls. During the whole warm up he had been turning his back to the teacher and he did nothing subject related.*

*The class is asked to sit down. He does not follow this instruction. He stands and continues talking to the girls. He moves around to another girl standing close to him and takes her backpack and puts it on his back. The girls are laughing. He starts*

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*dancing again. Then he takes the backpack off and throws it on the ground. He dances.*

*The students are asked to go to the sports ground. The Informant is running around while screaming and shouting. He turns around to the girls and walks slowly to the sports ground.*

Through this section the Informant was not paying attention to the teacher nor the subject at all. He was more engaged in getting the attention from the four girls. In this observation he was disrupting himself and his peers. He showed a behavior that is described in my second category; physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks.

Through a conversation with his special education teacher I was illuminated about the fact that the Informant used to behave like this when he was together with these girls. Especially one of the girls seemed to trigger his behavior and I want to discuss this further in the analysis of my second research question. However, I clearly could identify that he was seeking for attention from these girls and that their response provoked more disruptive behavior.

### Observation number 3:

The subject is Advisory, where the students bring their book which they currently are reading. They are supposed to read their book under attendance from a teacher. I meet the Informant before the class. He is supposed to take me to the classroom. He was in a bad mood and didn't want to talk to me. He comes late to the class and sits down on his chair. He lays his head down on the desk. The following describes what happens in the next section of the observations:

*The Informant scratches his head he sits up and looks around in the classroom. He takes out his book and starts scrolling through his book. After a couple of minutes he takes a piece of paper lying on his desk and starts to tinker around with it. He interfolds it. Then he folds it back again and reads the paper. He synchronously plays with his book. He interfolds the paper again and puts it away. He leans back on his chair and gazes. He turns around and looks at the watch hanging on the wall. He takes the piece of paper again and tears it into pieces. Then he gets back to his book. He reads his book while sucking on his thumb. He scratches his neck and head, then he swings his head back and forth. He asks the teacher for a piece of paper. He*

*receives one and interfolds it and put it into his book as a book- mark. He puts his book in his backpack and he walks to the door.*

Throughout the whole section the Informant was verbally calm. However, he did not do anything subject -related. He pretended to read his book, but he could not focus on the readings for more then a couple of minutes. He was restive and busy with overcoming the class. This behavior fits in the category 1; verbally calm on own chair/ physically restive without doing any subject related tasks.

#### Observation 4:

The subject is science and the students are learning about insemination. The students are listening to the teacher who uses an overhead projector to show different phases of the insemination. The following happens in the next section:

*The Informant does finger plays on the overhead He shows his middle finger. The shadow of his finger is projected on the wall. He looks around and sees if somebody has noticed it. He does not get any response. He moves around on his chair. He chews gum and smacks loudly. He sucks his thumb.*

*The teacher shows a movie. The Informant sucks his thumb and puts his foot on his desk. He turns around and looks at his peers. He swings his head back and forth. Then he takes down his legs and then puts them up again. He starts playing with the overhead projector, which is located next to him. He swings his head back and forth and sucks his thumb. He turns around to his peers and looks around in the classroom. Occasionally he comments on things happening in the classroom.*

The behavior I observed during this sequence can be described as category 2; physically and verbally disruptive/ without doing any subject related task. This behavior shows that the Informant is restive with his body and that he wants to get attention from his peers on his behavior. Further in this sequence following happened:

*Teacher stops the movie. The Informant luffs on his chair. The students get the assignment to either draw or write a subject related picture/ text. The Informant refuses to do this assignment and starts arguing with the teacher. He says "I don`*

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*wanna do this shit". He smacks on his gum and shows no interest through his facial expression. He takes a piece of paper from the teacher's desk, which is placed next to the Informant. He asks the teacher if he can do another assignment and the teacher says no. He starts talking to a girl sitting on the other side of the classroom and tells her that it is boring. He sucks his thumb.*

In this section I observed verbal interruptions within a short time interval. First he interrupted the teacher and second he interrupted the learning environment by contacting the girl sitting on the other side of the classroom. He also interrupted himself by luffing on his chair, taking a piece of paper from the teacher's desk and refusing to do the given assignments. He was paying attention to the teacher's request of doing the assignment, which he nevertheless refused to do. This behavior fits into the category two; physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks. His behavior was disrupting himself, his peers and his teacher.

#### **4.2.2 Summary**

The analysis of the Informant's behavior shows that it through observation one first may coded as belonging to the first category of behavior; verbally calm on own chair / physically restive without doing any subject related tasks. However, as observation number one shows, this behavior changed through the shift of the learning setting. As the Informant was set in another group with a different task, he changed his behavior, which may be coded as belonging to the third category; physically and verbally calm in the classroom / involved in subject related tasks. Observation two shows a completely different behavior from the first observation. The Informant is highly disruptive to himself, his peers and the teacher. This behavior is coded with the second category; physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks. The third observation shows a behavior that fits into category one; verbally calm on own chair / physically restive without doing any subject related tasks. The fourth observation is once again coded with category two; physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks. An analysis of the observations all together shows that what characterizes the disruptive behavior of the Informant, is behaviors that combined the two categories; number one and two. The behaviors were characterized by an on-own seat

behavior, not concentrating on tasks, physical restiveness, and disrupting other peers and the learning environment with verbal approaches.

However, it is interesting to see that the analysis of the Informant's behavior also could be coded with category three; physically and verbally calm in the classroom / involved in subject related tasks.

### **4.2.3 Discussions**

In the previous sections I have presented the data material concerning how disruptive behavior occurs in school by using a descriptive approach. In this section I intend to discuss the findings in accordance to the research question and the previously presented theory.

The analysis shows that the behavioral problems I have been observing, to a large extent coincide with what I describe in chapter two as behavioral problems that violates school rules, norms and expectations. This behavior inhibits teaching and learning activities and the students' learning and development. It also impedes positive interactions with others (Ogden 2007). This is pointed out as the most frequent behavior in classroom situations. This was also the most frequent behavior within the classroom that I observed. My Informant had physically restive behavior as the most frequent disruptive behavior. This was combined with verbal approaches to peers and teachers. The definition of problem behavior which I use in this thesis, is related to the school and it suggests that students with social difficulties encounter different problems in relation to learning and ones social exposure. The definition emphasizes that both the student with behavioral problems and his peers are affected by this behavior (Haugen 2008). The surroundings my Informant was part of, characterized and formed his behavior. My observations show clearly that the Informant could function both socially and academically when he was in a setting where he could solve the given task and when he got attention and was followed up continually by the teacher. In this situation the Informant was given an assignment which he was able to solve. He was motivated to do more tasks because he got the feeling of succeeding in coping with the task. This correlates with the further theory I used: that behavioral problems are a result of the student not functioning in his role (Slåttøy 2002). In this situation the Informant did function in his role. So there was no reason for him to disrupt neither himself nor his peers. The teacher had in this situation created good working conditions for my Informant.



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I would also like to comment the observation made in Physical Education, were I could observe the most highly disruptive behavior of the Informant. Through this observation I could see a behavior that is described in the theory chapter as poor social skills and as a deviation from the norms of how one should behave in the classroom and school environment (Ogden 2007). My Informant's disruptive behavior was expressed by making lots of noise and starting conflicts with his peers. He annoyed his peers by e.g. taking one peers' backpack and pretending like he would throw it away. This is what Ogden (2007) describes as violation of social norms by being rude, through self-assertion, and inconsiderate statements. This behavior often occurs with students with social difficulties (Ogden 2007). Through conversations with his special education teacher, I was told that this kind of behavior mostly occurred when he was together with this group of girls I mentioned in the analysis. I would like to discuss this more closely in relation to the second research question.

What needs to be discussed further, is to what extent the behavior I observed in school differs from the behavior of the rest of the group of students. Within the first conducted observation, I observed what happened in the class during the course of one hour. I would say that there was disruptive behavior of several students during this class, but mostly did this disruptive behavior occur when situation transitions were made by the teacher. I could observe disquietness when the lesson started, when the teacher gave new tasks or when the students were waiting for new instructions. In this observation of 45 minutes I could see that the Informants behavior varied from being disruptive to himself, to being on-task. I could not observe prominent disruptive behavior from the other students. I interpret this in relation to the class being well structured and the teacher being present for his students. The behavior of my Informant was therefore deviant from his peers. But I could find that his behavior heavily depended on the situations, the subject and his peers. Problem behavior is also a question about frequency, degree of intensity, duration and scope. It was interesting to observe different degrees of intensity of my Informant's problem behavior. Especially did my Informant show a high degree of intensity of problem behavior in Physical Education, while he showed a low degree of problem behavior in Adversity. This is important to reflect on when interpreting the behavior in my study. The behavior must be seen in its social context. I also have to remind myself that it is not possible for me to make any general conclusions about the students having a problem behavior as it is defined by Ogden (2007) based on 45 minutes only of observation.

The definition for problem behavior which I used in this thesis, stresses that problem behavior inhibits teaching and learning activities and that it hinders the students' learning and social development (Ogden 2007). This is what my Informant's behavior shows clearly. I hardly was able to code his behavior with the category of on-task behavior. He did have one on-task behavior during observation one, which lasted for over five minutes. But during the observations of my Informant, I found that he was disrupting himself or other peers more frequently than his peers were. However, the behavior of disrupting himself, and not the one disrupting the others, dominated the observations in the subjects of adversity and in the first part of the math class.

The purpose of the first research question was to describe where and how disruptive behavior occurs. The descriptions I made can only be applicable within the observations I conducted. The informal conversations and the reading of my Informant's file supported my empirical findings. The special education teacher gave me lots of information about the student. She labelled him as a student with really bad behavior. It seemed to me as if she was frustrated and had given up on him. I could observe the Informant as a student that was able to behave in a better way, but my impression was that for this to happen, he would need more structure and limitations.

I conducted my observations in five different subjects, and four of them have been analyzed above. I could code the observations in three different categories. It is interesting that the Informant's behavior occurs differently in diverse settings or subjects. I could detect that his behavior depended on subject, peers and on how the class was organized. The observation conducted in physical education showed most clearly how the Informant behaved disruptively to get attention from his peers and how his behavior was triggered through their response to his behavior. Through conversations I had after my observations with his special need educator, I got information about how his behavior changed when he was together with certain peers. This is what I observed in physical education and in science. I have tried to identify and assess those situations in which behavior problems occur. I have found that the most frequent behavior was the one described in category three, physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks and where the student is being disruptive to both himself and his peers. I hypothesize that this behavior is triggered by certain peers and on how the peers react to his behavior.

### *4.3 Research question 2: How does disruptive behavior influence communication between peers?*

In the section above I have described and discussed how disruptive behavior occurs at school. In the following section the focus of my discussion will be how the Informant's behavior influence the communication between him and his peers. Based on the observations I have made during my data collection, it came apparent that the behavior of the Informant changed when he was with certain peers, and in one observation, in the subject of adversity, he didn't disrupt any of his peers at all. I therefore interpret that the Informant's behavior depends on whom he is surrounded by. I also want to use my observations to see if the Informant communicated with his peers, how this communication took place and if there was any purpose for the communication made.

The notion of interpersonal relationships is an important issue between peers in early adolescence. This is a phase in life when young people develop emotional independence from adults and a dependence on peer relationships (Wentzel 1998). Further, positive peer interactions are necessary for the development of perspective-taking and empathic skills that serve as bases for pro social interactions (Youniss 1994). How the Informant interact with his peers and how the peers react to the Informant's behavior is important to consider when wanting to understand how this can affect the Informant's behavior. Finally, the interactions between the Informant and his peers might interrelate with his self-esteem and again cause for certain behavior patterns.

In the following I want to outline interactions between the Informant and his peers and discuss it in relation to my research question. On the basis of my data collection and the theory of peer relationships (Youniss 1994, Wentzel 1998), I have divided the communication between the Informant and his peers in two categories, peer interactions and peer relationships. Below, these two categories will be presented and correspondently my findings will be placed into one or more categories. Extents from the observations will be cited in order to exemplify and place the form of communication into the different categories. The findings will be discussed in a later paragraph.

### **4.3.1 Peer relationships/ Peer interactions**

Peer relationships are difficult to observe, because a peer relationship typically interfere from a specific feature of the individuals` peer-related interactions, thoughts or feelings. Important indicators of relationships are the type, the nature and duration of the interactions that occur between the individuals. Another important issue one have to face is that there are differences in the quality of children`s friendships. They may differ in terms of how supportive or conflictual they are (Ladd 2005). This might describe what I was able to observe. I could see if there were conflicts in some peer interactions, and I could also find supportive interactions. I want to outline and interpret my observations in relation to the theory I refer to in this thesis. Thereby I will try to show wether the Informant was part of peer relationships in school through combining the informal conversations mentioned above with my observations.

I talked to the special education teacher and told her that one fraction of my thesis would be about how self-esteem could affect the student`s behavior. She then told me that my Informant had tons of self-esteem and that he was very popular among his peers. I had difficulties in supporting this statement through my observations.

The following excerpt is taken from my observations. According to Ladd (2005), I have now divided peer relationships into two further categories; conflict interactions and supportive interactions. This will help me to see if the Informant had opportunities to build up good and valid relationships.

### **4.3.2 Positive response**

I was able to observe occasions where verbal or physical exchanges between the Informant and any of his peers occurred, either in a classroom situation or outside the classroom. Interactions occurred when e.g. the Informant asked one of his peers a question and the question was being answered, or when the Informant did anything physically and got attention for this behavior. The following situation is taken from my observation:

*Informant is standing in the school - yard, he is surrounded by four girls and talks to them. He speaks up and uses inappropriate words. He is showing an attitude. He starts dancing for the girls. They laugh and clap their hands.*

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In this case the Informant attracts attention from his peers through outgoing physical and verbal behavior. The girls react to his behavior, they laugh, scream, clap their hands and talk. The impression is that the Informant likes that the girls respond to his behavior and his behavior continues like in the following:

*The Informant kicks one of the girls in her back several times. It is not violent, more in a fun way. The girl laughs. Then he takes the girl's purse and the Informant pretends like he would throw it away. All the girls laugh loudly. The girls surround the Informant and he swings his head back and forth.*

In this sequence the Informant continues to entertain the girls. It is clear that he behaved this way because he got positive response from the girls. None of this behavior has been inappropriate in relation to the girls. This means that the girls didn't get hurt neither physically nor psychologically. This behavior did, however, disrupt the teaching situation, it disrupted his peers and himself.

The observation shows that there was a peer interaction between the Informant and his peers. The Informant behaved and got response to his behavior, which further triggered new disruptive behavior.

Through conversations with his special educator, I got the information that these four girls were the Informant's friends, and that his behavior changed completely in their company. In the following, I therefore want to outline one more attempt of peer interaction which I observed in a different situation with different peers. I will do so to achieve a broader perspective for my discussion.

### **4.3.3 No peer interaction/ no peer response**

The subject is science and the Informant is sitting alone on a table in the front. There are 27 other students in the classroom and they are placed four students each at one table group. The following is what happens in the beginning of the lesson:

*The Informant luffs on his chair. He has a look on his face that signalizes boredom. He starts talking to a peer sitting on a desk next to him. The peer does not response. The teacher tells him to be quiet. The teacher uses an overhead projector to show*

*examples on inseminations. The Informant starts making figures with his fingers on the overhead projector. Shadows of his finger figures are seen on the wall. The Informant looks around and sees if anybody reacts. None of his peers react. The Informant turns around and sucks his thumb.*

In this section the Informant tries to get attention from his peers. He first contacts one of his peers verbally, but his attempt remains without any response. He then tries to be funny or to disrupt the teaching situation by making shadow finger figures on the wall. He gets no attention for this behavior either, and then he turns around and sucks his thumb, which seems to give him comfort. The next sections are taken from my observation:

*The teacher puts on a movie. The Informant puts his foot on the desk. He turns around and looks at his peers. He swings his head back and forth and takes down his legs. He once again turns around to his peers and gazes around in the classroom.*

The students now get an assignment to do. The Informant refuses and starts arguing.

*The Informant starts talking to a girl sitting on the other side of the classroom. She answers him shortly. The Informant starts playing with a tissue, he sucks his thumb and looks around in the classroom.*

These sections describe how the Informant several times tried to get in contact with his peers and how he tried to do anything possible to attract their attention. However, none of his peers did really react and the Informant eventually surrendered. He ended up sucking his thumb but without doing any subject related tasks.

#### **4.3.4 Conflict interactions**

The first subject I went to was also Physical Education. It was raining that day, so that five classes were put together in one big gymnastic room. It was noisy. My Informant came late to this lesson and started putting lotion on his legs and arms. The students were then supposed to run rounds in the gymnastic room.

*Suddenly the Informant starts a verbally fight with one of his peers. She is female and shouts back at him. The situation gets out of control and the Informant gets really angry and starts attacking her in an aggressively way. Other peers surround them. It*

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*goes on for about five minutes until a teacher interferes into the situation. The Informant is clearly angry and shouts at the teacher as well.*

The girl he started a fight with is one of the four girls who he was surrounded by in the observation sequence of the other Physical Education lesson.

Another example of the Informant being in a conflict interaction was in the special education class. This was a room where the students who struggled with schoolwork could come and get some extra help with it.

*The Informant is supposed to do a math assignment with a special education teacher. He seems little interested and starts moaning and complaining about how he doesn't understand it. There is a girl sitting behind him. She starts telling a story about a fight she had with her teacher. The Informant starts laughing and teasing her. They start a verbal fight. The special education teacher tries to stop them, but the argue gets louder and more aggressive. They continue arguing for about six minutes. Then the school bell rings and the lesson is over.*

This case shows that the Informant was not able to communicate with his peer in an appropriate way. They argued loudly and were using bad words. However, there was a communication going on, but the outcome of this communication was negative.

I could observe positive and supportive communication in one classroom situation. This will be described in the following.

#### **4.3.5 Supportive interactions**

As already mentioned I have chosen to include a category called supportive interactions. There was one situation when I could observe positive and supportive communication between the Informant and his peers. This situation occurred in the first observation I made in a math class. The students were divided into groups and they were supposed to work individually on an assignment. They were allowed to ask their peers for help if this was needed. After they had worked on the assignment, the teacher joined the group of which my Informant was part of, and they solved the assignments together. Following is an excerpt from my observations:

*The teacher asks the Informant to solve one linear equation. He hesitates, but the teacher reinforces him and he starts solving the equation. He does it right and the teacher praises him. He smiles and turns around to his peers. They smile.*

In this case the Informant communicated with his peers in a positive way. Even if they did not talk to each other I could observe a non-verbal communication. It seems as if the peers were encouraging each other to do well.

As the teacher let them work on their own again, I could observe following:

*The Informant turns to his peer next to him. He asks him a question and his peer answers it. The Informant continues working on his assignment.*

I interpret this section as if the Informant was stuck in his assignment and needed help to be able to move on. He asked his peer to help him and his peer responded in a positive way. A good communication was developed. I would call this a supportive interaction where the outcome is good and contributes to good behavior.

### **4.3.6 Summary**

As I observed the Informant's disruptive behavior, I also took notice of how he communicated with his peers and how his peers reacted to his behavior. There were three different types of interactions between the Informant and his peers occurring.

First, there was the category of positive response on the Informant's behavior. The behavior was, however, disruptive to the learning situation. The Informant got attention and reactions to his behavior, which gave him the signal that it was ok to behave the way he did, and so he could continue behaving this way. It was clear that he liked to get the girls' attention and that this was a reason for him to behave like he did.

I also observed that the Informant's behavior and his way of communicating with his peers could arise conflict interactions where the outcome of the communication was negative. When I observed this kind of behavior I could see how it affected the Informant negatively. It seemed that he was exhausted after these episodes. Through conversations with the special education teacher, I was informed about these situations and likewise the conflict interactions being the most common communication forms that the Informant was involved in. This



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behavior was also disruptive for himself, his peers and the teaching situation. Compared to the first category of positive response from peers through disruptive behavior, I see the latter category of conflict interactions as more severe than the first category. This will be discussed more closely in the next chapter.

The last kind of communication I observed belongs to the category which I call supportive interactions. The Informant had verbal exchanges with both his teacher and his peers, and they both responded to him. The response he got triggered him to behave well and work further on his assignment.

### **4.3.7 Discussion**

In the previous paragraphs I have described the different interactions and communication forms the Informant was involved in, and I also described how his peers reacted to him how they were involved in these interactions.

My findings are interesting and show a great diversity. I first want to discuss the first category of positive response to the Informant's behavior. I want to implement the information I got through the informal conversations. The four girls the Informant was interacting with during the sequence of my observation were as already mentioned his best friends at school. They were all female. I had seen him before with these girls, especially during playtime and in the hall during the breaks. I interpret the Informant's behavior as a call for attention. He needed to behave in a way that entertained his peers and that made them laugh and have a good time. It was clear to me that it was the Informant who took the role of the entertainer, and that he worked on a repertoire he could use to show off. I interpret this situation in this direction with the background information in mind that the Informant knew these girls well, and therefore exactly knew what would make them laugh. Behavior that is given attention has a tendency to repeat itself (Webster-Stratton 2000), and that it was I could observe. He repeated his behavior and it seemed as if he had to entertain even more and bring in new things, like to pretend to throw the girl's purse away, to keep the attention from his peers. Children work each day in class to maintain and establish interpersonal relationships (Wentzel 1998). The Informant's behavior showed that he had the need to be seen and accepted from his peers. It might have been a way for him to both maintain and establish his interpersonal relationship with his girlfriends.

I interpret the interaction observed in science, where the Informant desperately tried to get the attention from his peers through disrupting himself, the teacher and his peers, as another way of getting attention. I like to interpret it as if the Informant wants to be accepted and respected by his peers. They ignore his behavior and the Informant is not able to filter these reactions. It seems to me that he got insecure when nobody reacted to his actions, but he gave it another try and once again behaved disruptively. Patterson (1998) argues that the child's abrasive behavior can lead to peer rejection and academic skill deficits. The social environment reacts to the student's behavior. In this sequence I could observe that the Informant was doing no subject related tasks. He was busier with being disruptive and getting attention for this behavior. I interpret this as a way to communicate. The Informant tried to communicate with his peers by doing funny things, like the finger play on the overhead projector. He might have been used to being the entertainer, as I mentioned in the first category of positive response, but in this situation his behavior was being ignored. However, ignoring bad behavior hardly leads to the end of the bad behavior (Patterson et al. 1992). This was the clear tendency in my data collection. In the situations where the peers met the Informant with ignorance towards the disruptive behavior, the behavior did not decrease. However, the Informant did react to the ignorance. His body language showed signs of insecurity and he started sucking his thumb.

I want to put the two categories of behavior up against each other and investigate how they could affect the Informant's choice of seeking friends or peers he want to spend his free time at school together with. The individual's failure at school will limit the social experiences which are available to him. Here I implement the failure of getting response on the Informant's behavior. The Informant begins to seek out a supportive environment (Patterson 1998). The first category describes how the Informant gets response and how his peers react to his behavior. These four girls were his friends that he liked to spent time together with. The example with the girls show how peer relationships develop and maintain. The girls were giving him attention and they responded to his actions. This might have given the Informant the feeling of acceptance, and he therefore might like being around them outside the classroom situations. Children who experience peer rejection develop negative attitudes toward school, and these experiences might inhibit them from further academically and socially explorations and development (Ladd & Birch 1996). How peer rejection can have an impact on the Informant and his self-esteem will be discussed throughout the next research question.

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I want to have the perspective developed by Ladd & Birch (1996) in mind when I discuss the next category of conflict interactions. The quality of children's classroom peer relationships may either serve as supports or stressors for children (ibid.). In the situations where the Informant was involved in conflict interactions, the participants of these interactions were likely to be deviant peers. One of the strongest and most consistent predictors of problem behavior during adolescence is the association with problem or deviant peers (Mason et al. 2008). When the Informant was involved in conflict interactions, I could observe that his whole behavior and body language changed. He seemed stressed and dissatisfied. In both episodes of the conflict interactions, the other part of the interaction was highly disruptive in his behavior. The disruptive behavior of both students together seemed to be too much and it exploded. This shows that the Informant's behavior was influenced and shaped by his social environment there and then. The sequences of conflict interactions show how the Informant through his behavior had difficulties to adapt socially. His behavior hindered him in establishing social relationships with his peers, and it became difficult for him to relate himself to the environment in a constructive manner (Heggen & Øia 2005).

His behavior was also influenced and shaped in the situation where I observed the behavior; throughout the communication process of supportive interaction. This positive interaction displayed clearly how the Informant was able to communicate with his peers without showing any kind of disruptive behavior. This interaction is a good example of the benefits of peer interactions. It shows how peers can serve as control agents for each other and how they can reinforce culturally appropriate activities (Rubin et al. 1990). The peer who helped the Informant to solve a linear equation, functioned as a cognition and behavior agent. He contributed to develop advances in the area of the Informant's self-esteem. At least the Informant must have got the feeling of somehow being valuable and the feeling of coping with a problem. The Informant did not only cope with the given assignment, but he managed successfully to interact with his peers as well.

The analysis shows that the Informant has the ability to behave and communicate in various ways. Throughout the entire analysis I had in mind that my Informant is a young adult standing in a phase of life where he is confronted with many challenges. Peer relations is an important factor in this life phase, and the school's playground and the classrooms represent arenas for peer relationships to develop. Peer relationships are built upon peer interactions and depend on how well functioning these interactions are. However, peer relationships again do

have an impact on the students' actions. Peer relations in school can be closely linked to the students' behavior in school. Peer relations also imply their commitment, their motivation, coping and the results in learning (Nordahl 2000). The school represents a social arena where the students' actions are characterized by rewards from their peers (ibid). The Informant may in my study have been labelled by his peers in a certain way, which might give the him the feeling of being obligated to act in a certain way to live up to his reputation. This might have been the case in some situations. However, based on my observations I can say that this is not always the case.

#### ***4.4 In what ways could social rejection and social incompetence interrelate with self- esteem?***

In the section above I have described and discussed how the Informant's behavior influence the communication between him and his peers. I have the opinion that any kind of attempt of communication has a reason and in depth is meant as a positive attempt. However, I could observe that the Informant mostly seemed to have difficulties when he tried to communicate with his peers. I could find that some of his attempts to communicate with his peers ended up with the peers' rejection. His failure in communication also showed that he in some ways seemed to be social incompetent. On the basis of my observations I want take a closer look on how social rejection and social incompetence could interrelate with the Informant's self-esteem.

The basic assumption behind this research question is that social rejection and social incompetence are closely linked together. Social incompetence might lead to social rejection. In the collected data it seemed to me that the Informant experienced social rejection from his peers by the means of his social incompetence. To approach this research question I decided to display one sequence each of the observation where I could find social rejection caused by the Informant's social incompetence. In each category of social rejection and social incompetence I want to display the Informants reactions to the displayed observation. In the discussion I will interpret my findings in relation to self-esteem.

#### 4.4.1 Social rejection and social incompetence

##### Example case 1:

The subject of science was the context in which I interpreted that the Informant experienced a high level of social rejection. I have already outlined some of these observations under the paragraph of; no peer response/ no peer interaction. This paragraph will interpret the observation more deeply in relation to how no peer response can be experienced as social rejection from the Informant. Limited to the five observations I made, I need to use the same data I used in paragraph no peer response/ peer interaction again. However, will I briefly show flinders of the observations to avoid repetitions.

*He starts talking to a peer sitting on a desk next to him. The peer does not response.*

The Informant here tries to contact one of his peers verbally. The peer seems little interested in responding. The Informant does however get a reaction from the teacher:

*The teacher tells him to be quiet. The teacher uses an overhead projector to show examples on inseminations. The Informant starts making figures with his fingers on the overhead projector. Shadows of his finger figures are seen on the wall. The Informant looks around and sees if anybody reacts. None of his peers react.*

Once again the Informant tries through his actions to get attention from his peers. I could see that he did the finger play because he wanted some response from his peers. I interpret his facial expression as one marked with disappointment and uncertainty, as a reaction to not getting response to his behavior and actions.

The next sequence of the observation is what I want to interpret and categorize as social incompetence:

*The Informant puts his foot on the desk. He looks back at his classmates and swings his head back and forth.*

The Informant got poor or no reaction from his peers on his first inappropriate behavior. He then puts his legs on the desk. I interpret this as a way of pretending that he was nonchalant. This is how I experienced the situation there and then. The Informant seemed as if he wanted to get attention from his peers, but then didn't really know how to handle the social rejection.

His reaction to that was to force up his behavior in a negative way instead of letting the matter rest.

### Exemplification 2:

The following sequence is taken from the observation of recess and playtime. The observation was conducted in the long break and I started it right after the school bell had rung;

*The Informant is ambling around. He looks on the ground. He walks towards some boys, who are standing and talking. He says something. They don't react but continue talking to each other. The Informant pushes one of the boys and laughs. The boy pushes back and says something with an angry voice. The boys walk away. The Informant is left behind.*

In this situation the Informant tried to come near to a group of peers who was standing in the schoolyard. The way he walked and his look on the ground showed that he is insecure and that he didn't really know how to adjust to this setting. He tried to include himself by standing beside them, but then he realized that none of them noticed him or even wanted to notice him. A few seconds later he pushed one of the boys, as a way for him to be paid attention to. The peers seemed to have known it to happen before. The Informant did not arrest their advertence, but in contrary, he provoked them by pushing them and therefore gets a negative perceptible response. This example shows how social incompetence results in social rejection.

Finally I want to discuss one noticeable act of behavior the Informant used to do several times during my observations. Already in the first observation I spotted that the Informant sucked his thumb now and then. I wanted to see if I could find a pattern behind this behavior. At first I thought that it mostly occurred when he was insecure or in situations in which he felt uncomfortable. Later it seemed not be like that yet, since I could also observe him sucking his thumb when he was with the four girls or when he was doing school-work. To find out the reason for this behavior would have needed further examination. I do however interpret this behavior as social incompetence, hence it is unusual for 12 year olds to suck their thumbs. It also seemed so contradictory to his appearance, this big boy sucking his thumb. In my observations I never experienced that any of neither his peers nor his teachers reacted to this behavior. It seemed as if they were used to it and had accepted this behavior.

#### 4.4.2 Summary

In this section of the analysis I have focused on the situations where the student showed social incompetence and where this behavior resulted in social rejection from his peers. I was interested in exploring how the student approximated himself in social settings and how this approximation was adopted from the peers. Ogden (2007) states that problem behavior is a result of interaction with others and that problem behavior can be a reaction of the student not functioning in his role. (ibid.). My observations approve this statement. During my observations I found that the Informant used unfortunate attempts when he tried to make socially approaches. I could see that his peers showed abrasive and incurious reactions to this behavior, which I interpret as experienced social rejection. This again brought on further antisocial behavior and resulted in the Informant being insecure and left behind.

During my observations I found what was surprising to me; that the Informant's behavior differed considerably in e.g. Science class and Advisory. In the latter subject he seemed careless about his peers. I figured that this had to depend on the peers being in the class. In all the subjects I observed, there were different peers. There were no set classes, the students were rather divided in groups due to the different subjects. In the subject of Science I could observe that the peers were rougher and maybe what one in colloquial language would consider as 'cool'. I also have the heart to claim that there were a group of four male students who were "the top dogs" in this class. This observation might lead in the direction that it was more important for the Informant to be accepted from the peers in the science class than from the peers in advisory. School settings today are not only about one setting in one classroom, it is much more complex than that. One has to consider the whole environment around the school, long breaks, way to school, subjects and after school activities. In this environment there can occur different hierarchies of students. Most likely do the higher-grade students have more prestige and some students are characterized by being very popular of whatever reason. Adolescents are concerned with being in the leading crowd and with having the social skills needed to gain access to these groups (Eder & Kinney 1995). I mention this because students with lower self-esteem often look up to those students and give a lot to get accept and respect from these students.

This consideration was approved during the observation I conducted in recess/playtime. I could recognize some of the same boys from the peer group mentioned above, into which the

Informant tried to get access. I also dare to claim that I could see that this peer group was one of the more popular ones.

In summary I want accentuate, that the Informant might have looked for acknowledgement from peers he thought might be important to bolster his own status among the students. However, the Informant's low social competence and his antisocial behavior took over the social situations he was part of and led to unfavorable social interactions.

In this section I have tried to bring out situations where the student experiences social rejection as a result of his behavior, which again is a release of his social incompetence. My research question aims to explore how social rejection and social incompetence could interrelate with the Informant's self-esteem. In the following discussion I want to comment on how the examples of social rejection and social incompetence found in my observational material could influence the Informant's self-esteem.

#### **4.4.3 Discussions**

The individual's own assessment of his social skills is what will nourish his self-esteem, and the feeling of self-worth forms the base for the individual's personal concept of himself. At the same time, the individual's self-esteem is fostered through interactions with other people (Sommerschild 1998). In my observations I found that the Informant had difficulties in interacting with his peers, and that his low social competence hindered him in mastering specific social tasks and thereby in achieving a positive developmental outcome. In contrary he was excluded by the peers he so hardly tried to make friends with.

Rubin et al (1990) argues that the exclusiveness of close friendships can lead to rejection and stereotyping of others. Through the very closeness and desirability of friendships, the fostering of insecurity and the concern about their loss might occur (ibid.). The Informant might have wanted to be part of one exclusive friendship, and he might have felt the need of being accepted by peers who had a good reputation among many students. It seemed like the Informant had not built up any friendship with the boys he tried to get close to, so this section is more about the desirability of a friendship. However, the Informant might have experienced several situations where he was socially rejected. It might explain his behavior as he entertained the four girls. The informant might have been afraid of failing to measure up to



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the expected standards. I would like to consider that he felt anxiety about being rejected again, and entertaining the girls helped him maintaining their attention and the feeling of being accepted by them. Friends also often encourage each other to regressive and antisocial acts (Rubin 1980 cited in Reisman 1985). I do not think that the four girls directly encouraged the Informant to antisocial acts, however, I do think that this might well be so in a more indirect way. Peers can demand a lot to accept others, and it seemed to me that the four girls were close friends and that the Informant would fit in because he could make them laugh.

The importance of peer relations is clearly embodied when students assess their social competence in school (Nordahl et al 2005). For students, their social competence in relation to peers seem to be more important than their own social competence in relation to teachers and other adults. It is important for a student to be social competent, because it helps building friendships and therefore contributes to the student's popularity among other students (ibid.). My Informant didn't manage to built up a relationship to peers of the same sex in the observations I made. My findings show that his major problem must have been self-control. Through my observations I could see that he had difficulties to control his feelings, thoughts and actions, which are basic dimensions and social abilities that are part of social competence (Nordahl 2005). When the Informant tried to get in touch with his peers and they rejected him, he showed social incompetence through pushing one of the boys. It seemed like he couldn't control his feelings of disappointment and therefore had to respond with a negative physical action. Research indicates that few or no friendships in adolescents or disturbed peer relations can be associated with social incompetence. Social competence implies having valued qualities and skills (Reisman 1985). This supports my findings, I could see that the Informant had disturbed peer relations and these were maintained by his social incompetence.

In the stage of early adolescence peers, chums, and friends are important. Sullivan (1947) refers to this stage as the juvenile era when the child is supposed to progress from insensitivity to compassion and caring. The critical reactions of peers often have cruel reactions to behavioral characteristics which they find unfavorable. This can be a major force in shaping desirable behaviors of an individual. However, the negative evaluations of peers may cause anxiety and can therefore be damaging to the self-esteem. But peers can also contribute in the socialization process and provide a major source for approval and the enhancement of status through their positive responses (Sullivan 1947). During my observations I could find that the Informant had to experience social rejection several times.

These negative experiences could have caused anxiety. I don't claim that the Informant's self-esteem was damaged, I do however advance the view that peer rejections do not leave the Informant untouched. Self-esteem is built upon experiences one makes, both academically and personally (Bekkhuis 2008). Too many negative gained experiences will most likely have an impact on both the behavior and the self-esteem of a student. The Informant might have got a negative reputation and he might have felt like a student who doesn't succeed in many areas. Friends and friendship are important to adolescents because they spend more time with their peers than with e.g. their teachers, and are cumulative affected by them in dress, interests, and behavior (Reisman 1985).

In the next paragraph I will return to the main research problem and discuss it based on the findings of my observations. I have tried to outline major factors that are important when it comes to the Informant's behavior. First, I could find that the disruptive behavior did influence the communication between the Informant and his peers. This disturbed communication resulted in social rejection from the peers and in further social incompetence by the Informant. The basic assumption in this study is that a positive self-esteem of a student might help to diminish problem behavior. I have tried to show that social rejection and social incompetence do interplay negatively with the student's self-esteem. This is an assumption and it is difficult to prove its validity. I did, however, try to exemplify possible ways in which social rejection and social incompetence could interrelate with self-esteem. With this in mind I would like to return to the main research problem and discuss how schools can contribute to the strengthening of the self-esteem of young adults who struggle with behavioral problems.

The feeling of playing an important role in social settings is essential to build the students' self-esteem. When students develop a healthy self-esteem, problem behavior could be controlled. Students with behavioral problems often become a negative reputation. They are seen as students that don't manage to cope neither academically nor socially. The school is challenged to help these students to find their way through the tough every day life in school. I focus on adolescents in this study. Schools and their employees should be aware of the importance of this phase of life as an indicator for problem behavior. Teachers and educators should look for positive characteristics within the students who struggle with behavioral problems and help them achieving experiences of success in social life. The intention of strengthening a positive self-esteem is that the student can develop social competence to be able to face the life as an adolescent with joy and sorrow, challenges and impertinence. A

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major aim schools should have is to help adolescents to develop resolution and a feeling of self-worth. It requires a disposition of positive school experiences and a safe and faithful relation between the teacher and the student (Befring 2004). This study did not focus on the relation between the student and the teacher, but it is a crucial factor for students' development of their self-esteem. But school can also determine and direct how peer relationships can function. I do not say that they can determine who is friend with whom. I rather suggest that schools can limit their boundaries on what behavior is accepted and have a clear focus on how peers should treat each other. Further they can guide students with behavioral problems and teach them how to behave in certain situations. Bandura (1977) emphasizes the significance of models and vicarious learning. Seeing how peers behave and learning what consequences they enjoy or suffer can be important in determining an individual's action. An example in the wrong direction can be delinquent activities, where the maintenance of peer acceptance can lead young adults into what might be called social incompetence. Peers can be role models and so can schools be a role model for their students. Adolescents are supposed to find their way regarding values and choices they make in life. Adolescents are in a phase of life where flexibility characterize the choices they make, this can be a positive thing. The young adult has one opinion until he gets a new one. What can be challenging in this phase of life is that adolescents have a high degree of vulnerability for all kinds of impulses, ideologies and moods. If the adolescent is being put on his own in this deduction, he will be badly primed to handle the challenges adolescents bring along. The result will be poor self-esteem, replication of problems and progression of problem behavior (Befring 2004). Looking at students with behavioral problems, they can often be identified by insecurity and disaffection with themselves. Poor self-esteem, along with a history of defeats both academically and socially, can often be found with students who have behavioral problems. Information I got from my Informant's teacher let me know that the Informant already in pre -school had been known as a student with behavioral issues. In 1<sup>st</sup> grade he was told that he didn't fit into the group because he was black. This is what the Informant's mother told his teacher. He also had had academic difficulties since kindergarten and problems with absence behavior, motivation, effort and his attitude towards school. This information shows distinctly that the Informant's school career seemed to have an unfortunate start where he didn't seem to fit in as the one he was. I want to refer to Bandura again (1977), who believes that adolescents are learning through the observation and imitation of a person they think they can identify themselves with, one who seems authentic to them. For this to

happen it is important that the person being imitated is seen as real, from the angle of the observer. The reason why I mention this is because Bandura through the term of self-efficacy has put the focus on humans need to control actions that impedes their lives (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece 2008). Adolescents who need help to improve their behavior need reliable role models, who can be peers, teachers or special educators.

The student needs to value the subjects he succeeds in. I could observe that the Informant was showing good behavior in one subject. He was working on task and it seemed to me as if he had fun solving the math equations. The teacher took good care of the Informant and helped him through the lesson. This shows that the Informant got the feeling of success and he had no need for using his behavior to get attention or as a possible deviation. The Informant didn't have the need to state himself in the math -class in a negative way. Coping has not been a focus in this study, but it is a possibility to handle problem behavior. Schools can strengthen the self-esteem of students who struggle with behavioral problems by giving them positive experiences, academically and socially. The students need the feeling of mastery and self-worth. Schools are faced with a great and important challenge.

## *4.5 Additional Discussions*

In this section I wish to reflect upon and discuss aspects and thoughts concerning my results, which are not necessarily connected to my research problem. I have a systemic focus and a holistic perspective, and I therefore find it important to reflect upon these aspects. I once again have to emphasize, that it is impossible for me to make a conclusion in the cause or the origin of the problem behavior. Observable behavior and pure descriptions are giving me too poor evidence to make any conclusions. Hence, I will reflect upon and discuss how other non-observable factors may be significant in an understanding of the observed behavior.

### **4.5.1 Social background**

As described in chapter two, other causes for problem behavior be closely related to conditions in childhood and environmental factors outside the school. My Informant's social

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background was contaminated by broken family relations and domestic violence. His parents broke up when he was little, and his father was from a part of the United States where there is a lot of crime and delinquency. The Informant told me that he had several siblings, but that they had different mothers. The Informant also had been witness of the murder of his aunt. These factors together are heavy burdens to carry with oneself. In literature they are described as risk factors (Nordahl 2005, Ogden 2002) which can contribute to the development of problem behavior. I don't know how these events have affected the Informant and if they are causes for his problem behavior. But it is crucial to know about a student's social background because it may have an impact on the student's actions and his behavior. Schools need to get a deeper understanding of why certain students are disruptive, come late to class or act in an inappropriate way in school.

During my first two days in this school, I also got to know other students who were in the learning center. These were students who struggled with either problem behavior or had some kind of learning disability. However, I got to know that many of those students, and especially the African Americans, came from similar social background as my Informant. The special education teacher told me that it was not unusual that these students grew up with either a grandmother or some other relative. Broken family relationships were part of the day's schedule. Peers can share their experiences and might not feel as an outsider because of a troubled family background. However, I do want to reflect upon the picture children and adolescents get, when coming from families where their fathers have had several girlfriends or the mothers have beat loose. I recall a situation where I listened to a conversation my Informant and a peer had. They were talking about their mothers and the peer said that he had to move with his grandmother because his mother was in jail. This was a normal conversation where none of them seemed to be bothered about the topic of the conversation. What I try to exemplify is that the students can get a distorted picture of what family and especially relationships are about, and their values and norms are formed by this picture. This is where the school needs to interfere and try to be clear about its values and how one should treat one another.

## 4.5.2 The aspect of race and ethnicity

It is relevant for my study to reflect about the aspect of race. I am aware of that the question of race is not that actual in Norway, but after having spent one year in the United States and been an observer in an American school with a great diversity of race, I see this as one big difference compared to Norwegian schools. Society in the United States has long been characterized by ignorance about social styles and traditions, and by negative media images of African Americans. Especially African American males been focused in the discussion and educators may project negative attitudes about African American Students. There might be cultural differences, as for example an African American student may speak out loud during instructions of a lesson, the student might interrupt the teacher. Dandy Culp (2006) suggests that this might be an attempt not to disturb the environment, but to demonstrate their rebellion against lessons they consider irrelevant, racist, or simplistic, and against teachers who perceive them as incapable of achievement (ibid.). Focusing these problems could help encouraging African American Students to take responsibility for their actions, to understand why a behavior change is needed, and to encourage them to commit themselves to change (Schwartz 2001).

The reason for bringing in this point of view is that problem behavior also can be considered through the notion of cultural differences. As I mentioned in chapter two, there are many aspects playing a role when it comes to behavioral problems. Different ethnicities bring different cultures, values and norms along. Especially in the United States, where African Americans have an engraved history, with racism, segregation and suppression, one should be aware and sensitive about this matter. My Informant was African American. I could observe that he mostly spent time with other African Americans, that they had their own way of talking to each other and that they shared the same interest for especially African American music artists. This topic could be of interest for further investigation considering the influence of role models for adolescents. I heard conversations African American adolescents had about African American rappers and how they admired them. They admired them because those music artists had achieved to get famous and rich. In a conversation my Informant told me that he would like to be a rapper. If you listen to this kind of music, the lyrics and the message they deliver are often problematic from an ethic point of view. I mention this, because when working with adolescents, one has to meet them where they are, being updated on what is popular, what their interests are and what fills their lives and thoughts.

## 4.6 Summary of findings

In this section I wish to sum up what my main findings are and tighten the plot. The main research problem in this thesis was to find how schools could contribute to strengthen self-esteem to young adults who struggle with behavioral problems. I needed further research questions to approach my research problem, thereby first had to characterize disruptive behavior and see how it occurs in schools. Then I had to ask how disruptive behavior influences communication between peers. Further, I wanted to investigate in what ways social rejection and social incompetence could interrelate with self-esteem. I have asked the research questions in accordance to my main research problem in order to achieve a better understanding of my Informant's behavior in relation to his peers and the rest of his environment.

My results show that what mostly characterized my Informant's behavior, was being verbally calm on own chair/ physically restive without doing any subject related tasks, disrupting either himself with non subject related activities or distracting his peers through his behavior. The non- subject activities the Informant was disrupting himself with was mostly gazing, swinging his head back and forth, sucking his thumb or playing with items which were lying around near to his seat. On -task behavior was represented to a far lesser extent than off-task behavior. The most frequent behavior I observed was the behavior characterized as physically and verbally disruptive without doing any subject related tasks. This behavior was highly disruptive to himself and his peers.

When I observed the communication between the Informant and his peers, I chose to categorize three different kinds of communication; no peer interaction, conflict interactions and supportive interactions. I found the tendency that the Informant mostly was involved in conflict interactions, where the outcome of his communication was negative. These interactions inhibited him both socially and academically, in addition his peers were being disrupted. I could also find that the Informant got positive response on his disruptive behavior, which made him continue disrupting the learning situations. The latter category I could observe once was a supportive interaction, where social interaction between him and his surroundings functioned well and he was encouraged to continue this good behavior. This was an important finding, because it shows that positive interactions encouraged the Informant. It also might be an indicator for finding possible answers to my research problem.

I could also find that the Informant showed social incompetence, which mostly resulted in social rejection from his peers. The Informant had difficulties adjusting to social settings. This strengthened my assumptions about that the behavior of my Informant partly being a reaction to his environment and a result of interactions with others. I could see the tendency that the behavior of my Informant changed in different settings. This I interpreted in terms of him behaving worse in certain situations where he wanted to become extra attention from peers that were important to him. I dare to claim that the Informant wanted acknowledgement from certain peers he thought would give him a higher status among the peers ins school. However, his antisocial behavior did influence the social interactions, which again resulted in social rejection.

My results show how disruptive behavior occurs in Junior High school based on the observations of one student. During my observations I found that peers had a significant influence on the student`s behavior. For this reason I chose to emphasize these aspects in my study. I wanted to investigate other factors that could have an impact on the student`s behavior and explore if this could interrelate with his self-esteem. Knowing that peers and peer relations play a role in all students life, and how they can have an impact on the student`s self esteem, schools should be aware of this matter and guide and help building positive interactions among in school.

My results show that there is much valuable information included within a short time limit in a classroom. In my point of view it is therefore useful for schools to implement a more comprehensive observation of students with problem behavior in order to look for possible sources that may cause unwanted behavior.



## 5. Final considerations

As a part of the pilot project “Disorder in Schools”, I got the opportunity to write a master thesis regarding case studies of disruptive behavior in school. The project’s concern was to find characteristic of disruptive behavior for further research. The aim of my thesis was to identify and characterize disruptive behavior in school. I also tried to see the behavior in context with the Informant’s peers, how the behavior possibly affected interactions with others or if interactions with others influenced the disruptive behavior. I was surprised by finding a high degree of antisocial behavior by my Informant in the context of his peers. My findings confirm the importance of well-functioning interactions between the student and other participants of the school environment for decreasing problem behavior. The results are based on a limited case study, but it deals with the school’s role and idea of upbringing with their arrangement of norms and values. I could see that the students were often left on their own and I hardly could see adults were present during playtime or recess. What I am trying to say is that students in today’s world, adolescents who are in a challenging phase of life, with decisions and choices to be made, are often left alone in this challenging situation. Especially adolescents who struggle with behavioral problems, which result in rejection from peers and possibly teachers and parents, have a strong need to be taken care of. Adolescents have to develop autonomy and their own ways of thinking and behaving, and they have to decide which personal qualities matter to them (Rutter & Rutter 1993). Interpersonal relationships and social adjustment, and a growing dependence on peer relationships to establish and maintain positive perceptions of the self (Steinberg 1990; Youniss & Smollar 1985 cited in Wentzel 1998) are important issues for schools to focus on. Adolescent’s lives are increasingly institutionalized, they spend more time in institutions, such as schools. Therefore schools should be aware of the important role they play in the development of adolescents’ lives. Teachers and special educators can help and play a role in shaping young people’s development of a positive self-esteem (Heggen & Øia 2005). This will further help to achieve a healthy development and decrease disruptive behavior.

There is also the aspect of social background. Many students seem to have a troubled background, with broken family relations and domestic violence. This shows further how schools should be a place where students can feel safe and learn values and norms that are needed in life to succeed both academically and socially.

Students need to get acknowledged as who they are. It is crucial that they get the feeling of being worthy and important. Focusing on building well-functioning social relationships and interactions is one aspect that can contribute to the strengthening of the self-esteem of students who struggle with behavioral problems. Positive response to good behavior and valuable interactions will encourage the students to continue with this kind of behavior. However, is it important for schools to guide the students through this process.

My study represents a limited case, with little value to the aspect of generalization. However, I have found support in literature for my findings and my assumption that poor self-esteem among other factors can result in disruptive behavior. On the basis of my experience I do understand how challenging it can be to work with students who show disruptive behavior. One can feel desperation and frustration. It is therefore important for those who work with students showing disruptive behavior to get a deeper understanding of why students behave like they do. With the findings of this thesis I hope to contribute to such an understanding.

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# Appendixes

## INTERNSHIP REPORT: 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR OF BACHELORS' DEGREE 2010:OBSERVATION: DISQUIET BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOL/PRESCHOOL

This internship report is related to the students` internship their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of bachelors` degree in special needs education. The internship assignment involves observation of pupil/child behavior in school/preschool.

Focusarea is: students` experience of disquiet behavior in school/ preschool, i.e. behavior that appear disturbing to the pupil/child him/herself, to fellow pupils /other children and/ or to teacher /educator.

This report is to be submitted to supervisor at the end of the internship, for approval and signing. The signed report is to be submitted to Professor Liv Duesund at UCB after completed internship.

### ***Key elements in observation:***

The student must have attended two days of the internship PRIOR to observing. The first two days are used by the student to familiarize her/himself with the class/group.

The class/group as a whole is to be the focus of the 1<sup>st</sup> observation. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> observations are individual observations where, in cooperation with the teacher/educator, the student chooses which pupil /what child that is to be the focus of the observations. The pupil/child who is selected is one that from the teachers experience shows disquiet behavior to a greater or lesser extent.

Every student in each group chooses one pupil/child each to focus their observations on. (different pupil/child for each student) Student observes the same pupil/child throughout the series of observation, starting at the 2<sup>nd</sup> observation.

The 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> observations are made either in the beginning, during or at the end of class/ group session. (See guidelines for observation) The 5<sup>th</sup> observation is made during recess/playtime.

Student has to provide the correct time for when observation starts and ends.

During individual observation the student is to describe what the pupil/child does/says etc. and any interaction with others during the observation period. Key questions are: What is happening? Who is doing what?

The student must try to distinguish between descriptions and interpretations. In the interpretation the student must try to assess whether the behavior described can be





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Questions you may have to what is described and interpreted:

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**2<sup>nd</sup> observation: Individual observation of disquiet behavior.**

**One single pupil in the class /one single child**

**in the group session.**

**First 15 minutes of class/group session.**

OBSERVATION IS TO BE MADE ON THE 4<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF THE INTERNSHIP.

15 minutes (continuous) observation IN THE BEGINNING OF class/ group session.  
Selection of pupil/child is made in cooperation with teacher/educator.

Task: (use the form below)

- a) Describe what happens during class/ group session (cf. handout)
- b) Try to interpret your observations. (cf. handout)
- c) Write down any questions/comments you might have to your observations and interpretations.

Date:	Type of institution: (school/preschool)	Grade/age group:	Subject/activity:
Number of pupils/children in class/group.	Observation starts at:	Observation ends at:	Total time elapsed:

Description:	Interpretation:

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Questions you may have to what is described and interpreted:

**3<sup>rd</sup> observation: Individual observation of disquiet behavior. One single child in the class/ one single child in the group session.15 minutes halfway through class/group session.**

OBSERVATION IS TO BE MADE ON THE 5<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF THE INTERNSHIP.

- 15 minutes (continuous) observation HALFWAY THROUGH class /group session. Observe the same pupil/child as you did previously.

Task: (use the form below)

a) Describe what the pupil/ child does/says etc. and any interaction with others during the 15 minutes. (cf. handout)

b) Try to interpret your observations. (cf. handout)

c) Write down any questions/comments you might have to your observations and interpretations.

Date:	Type of institution: (school/preschool)	Grade/age group:	Subject/activity:
Number of pupils/children in class/group:	Observation starts at:	Observation ends at:	Total time elapsed:

Description:	Interpretation:

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Questions you may have to what is described and interpreted:

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**4<sup>th</sup> observation: Individual observation of disquiet behavior.  
One single pupil in the class / one single child in the group session.  
15 minutes at the end of class/group session.**

OBSERVATION IS TO BE MADE ON THE 6<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF THE INTERNSHIP.  
15 minutes (continuous) observation AT THE END of class/ group session.  
Observe the same pupil/child as you did previously.

Task: (use the form below)

- a) Describe what the pupil/child does/says etc. and any interaction with others during the 15 minutes.(cf. handout)
- b) Try to interpret your observations. (cf. handout)
- c) Write down any questions/comments you might have to your observations and interpretations.

Date:	Type of institution: (school/preschool)	Grade/age group:	Subject/activity:
Number of pupils/children in class/group:	Observation starts at:	Observation ends at:	Total time elapsed:

Description:	Interpretation:

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Questions you may have to what is described and interpreted:

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**5<sup>th</sup> observation: Individual observation of disquiet behavior.  
One single pupil during recess/ one single child during playtime.  
10 minutes during recess/playtime.**

OBSERVATION IS TO BE MADE ON THE 7<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF INTERNSHIP.  
10 minutes (continuous) observation during recess / playtime  
Observe the same pupil/child as you did previously

Task: (use the form below)

a) Describe what the pupil/child does/says etc. and any interaction with others during recess/playtime. (cf. handout)



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Questions you may have to what is described and interpreted:

**Main results**

Describe what you consider to be the main results of the observations you have made, seeing the observations in relation to each other. Emphasize the results concerning disquiet behavior:



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**Learning profit**

Describe what you consider you have learned from doing observational fieldwork during the internship:

**Submission**

Completed by the student:

Internship report is submitted (in stapled paper edition) to supervisor on  
...../..... 2010

Students name/signature: .....

**Approval**

Completed by the supervisor:

Internship report is:            approved            not approved.

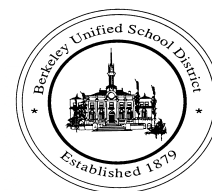
Date: ..... 2010

Supervisors signature: .....

Responsible for the composition of observation guide: Professor Liv Duesund, Professor Sven Nilsen and Professor Liv Randi Opdal.

# Berkeley Unified School District

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## OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

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### *Director of Student Services*

*Kay Altizer*

### **PROGRAM SUPERVISORS**

Diane Colborn

Elaine M. Eger

Don Klose

Meredith Raymond

## LETTER OF CONSENT

To whom it may concern,

I am a Norwegian Graduate Exchange student from UC Berkeley. I am currently involved in a project concerning student's classroom behavior. This study is a collaboration between the University of Oslo and UC Berkeley. The aim of the project is to compare classroom behavior between the two different countries. This research is to help improve education and services for all students. I am going to observe students at a Junior High School. I wish to observe the students during one of your child's classes. I would appreciate your permission to observe in your child's **one** class. I will not use any student names related to our observations. This is strictly confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

Veslemoey Maria Fossum

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\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I allow Veslemoey Maria Fossum  
to observe my child in the classroom environment.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not allow my child to be observed in the classroom environment.

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Parent Signature

Date