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THE RELATIONAL WORLDS OF A CHILD WITH A

SIGNIFICANT DISABILITY

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Special Education

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2011

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DEDICATION

In dedication the two most inspirational, supportive and unconditional friends I have known in my life – my mother, Carol, and my father, Jon.

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I would like to express my huge appreciation and many thanks to all those who participated in this dissertation process and made it all possible.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the relational worlds of a single child with a significant disability. Previous research on relationships for individuals with significant disabilities has heavily relied on the perceptions of and information from others, rather than the individual with a disability him or herself. This research is an ethnographic exploration of a single child with a disability, Julia, and the dynamic ecosystem of her relational worlds. The affect and behaviors of this child were explored in the school setting. The findings revealed that "friendships" were present for Julia, and that they resulted in expressions of enjoyment and happiness. These friendships, however, were found to be inconsistent with more typical manifestations of this relationship type, and were far fewer in number than other types of engagement, including solitary, fringe, unilateral and other mutual forms of engagement. The findings also suggested that, while aspects of Julia's cognition, communication and experience contributed to the kinds and qualities of relationships, the larger ecology of her relational worlds were also of significant impact to relationship formation. The findings of this study support that for positive relationships to develop, and for the maximal growth and

satisfaction of individuals with significant disabilities, greater attention must be given to not only how the individual uniquely responds to and benefits from relationships, but also how the ecosystem of relational worlds can be better understood and altered so as to accommodate opportunities for and the growth of relationships for the individual.

Keywords: Relationships, friendship, disability, ecology, ecosystems, cognitive skill, communication, social experience

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Research

Overview of Research

The right of the individual to participate in and maximally benefit from the educational process is at once of individual, moral, ethical, civil and legal significance. This fundamental human right to an education has been recognized internationally (United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,* Article 26, 1948). However, human history is replete with instances wherein basic human rights have been neglected, if not altogether violated. What is upheld morally and legally may not, however, be supported in practice. The history of educational participation of students with disabilities is one case in point. While the United Nations has acknowledged the right of individuals to an appropriate and inclusive education (United Nations, *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, Article 24, 2006), the recognition of the moral rights of students with disabilities, and the establishment of supporting legal rights has been slow to emerge, and has certainly subject to great debate. Although, over the course of the 21st Century, the legal rights of students with disabilities to an education have become better established, there arguably exist degrees of discord between the intent and application of the law.

In light of the above, the idea that all individuals have the right to *participate* in the educational process lends itself directly to the understanding that individuals are *included* in something larger than themselves. As with the history of education, those more broad and encompassing moral aspects of inclusion and participation of individuals with disabilities have similarly met contention and neglect. What is certain is that, with few exceptions, the

education and growth of all individuals is strongly correlated with what is learned, experienced and shared through social participation and exchange.

This dissertation explores the participation of a single child with a significant disability within the educational setting in an effort to understand how the social inclusion of this individual benefits the overall growth and satisfaction of this individual.

Moral and Legal Underpinnings of Inclusion and Education

Fundamental human, inalienable rights are not culturally-specific or confined constructs. Rather, human rights are globally recognized, and have been of tremendous import to children throughout the world. In 1989, the United Nations (United Nations, 1989) recognized and affirmed the international "right of all children to be valued equally, treated with respect and provided with equal opportunities within the mainstream system" (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000, p. 192). In relation to educational rights, the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994), brought further international recognition to the understanding that all individuals, regardless of capacity and difference, were to be granted access to an education as a basic human right.

Within the United States of America specifically, the rights and freedoms of all individuals, regardless of race, creed or ability, have long been recognized. Since the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776, individual rights to equality, freedom and well-being have been legally recognized.

> We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness (The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, 1776).

The ratification of the United States Constitution (signed in 1787), further entrenched the importance of individual rights and freedoms, by providing guidelines and restrictions to the power to the federal and state governments of the United States. The introductory statement of the Constitution clearly substantiated that the protection of rights, liberties and safety of the individual was of critical importance to the overall functioning and well-being of the entire country (or, the "common good").

> We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our prosperity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America. (The Constitution of the United States of America, 1787).

Subsequent amendments to the Constitution have further refined the rights and freedoms of all citizens of the United States. Many of the Constitutional amendments, such as the 1st Amendment (specifically, the right to freedom of association), 5th Amendment (the individual's protection under due process) and 14th Amendment (which among other things, ensured an individual's equal protection and due process), have been crucial to the protection of civil rights and liberties of minority populations, including individuals with disabilities. The application of Constitutional law and pertinent amendments has been pivotal to the advancement of special educational law and the rights of persons with disabilities.

In spite of the rights and equality identified under the Constitution and subsequent amendments, there is no contest that inequities among individuals and groups of individuals have persisted. In fact, the history of the United States is rife with instances wherein provisions of the Constitution have been violated and the moral and legal rights of individuals have been denied. The pervasive subjugation of black Americans is a single, though undeniably strong case in point. The recognition and contestation of subjugation and

violation among black Americans has been pivotal to the refinement and advancement of the rights of *all* persons of minority status. The civil liberties movement has directly impacted policy, procedure, social awareness, and social justice and equity in specific regard to the education and social inclusion of students with disabilities.

The 1954 court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (347 U.S. 483) was a key turning point in the advancement of civil rights and equality, especially as relating to the education, but also in a broader sense in relation to social justice, equality and participation. Legal precedent established prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, had determined that segregation did not negate the equality of an individual (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 573, 1896) and, further, that segregation and the assertion that separate was equal, did not constitute a violation of the 14th Amendment (equal protection of privilege and immunities). The U.S. Supreme court in *Brown v. Board of Education* determined otherwise. Judgment rested on the assertion that the physical segregation and separation of students on the basis of race or color *did* in fact violate Constitutional law, insofar as such segregation "… deprives children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal" (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 1954, Syllabus section, ¶ 5). The final court decision established a new and enlightened precedent of equal opportunity and participation in education. Separate was not equal.

> Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance, laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society…. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in the awakening the child to *cultural values* [Italics added], in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to *adjust normally* [Italics added] to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to *succeed in life* [Italics added] if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to

provide it is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms (*Brown v. Board of Education* 347 U.S. 483, 1954, Opinion section, ¶ 10)

The decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* is of obvious import to educational law in general, and special education law in specific. The physical separation of students results in differential exposure of students to learning opportunities. In some instances, students may in fact be *denied* exposure to essential learning opportunities. As such, students become differentially able to adjust to, respond to and function within a society of which they are equally a part. Ultimately, separation serves to perpetuate differences, both in quality and quantity.

As highlighted in the above passage, while specifically advancing educational law, the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, also spoke to the importance of social participation and belonging, albeit within the educational context. In addition to supporting aspects of belonging to the larger community (i.e., "citizenship"), the ruling substantiated a need for the recognition and appreciation of difference, or specifically of "cultural values". The outcomes and benefits of equitable participation and inclusion, are those, then, which better ensured the normal adjustment and ultimate life success of the individual.

Since the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* educational law, as specific to individuals with disabilities, has continued to be refined. The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA), as reauthorized in 2004 (PL 108-446, 2004), is the current mandate which ensures the appropriate education for, as well as the access to and participation of individuals with disabilities within the educational process. Current legislation is the cumulative result of years of legal refinement stemming from the Education Act for All Handicapped Children (1975, PL94-142). Today's IDEA legislation rests on the 6

principles set down by PL 94-142 (and its many reauthorizations) which include: (a) 'zero-reject', or the understanding that no child can be denied access to a public education; (b) the understanding that each student must be appropriately assessed, classified and placed in accordance to his/her disability and individual needs; (c) the understanding that every child must be afforded a free public education best suited to their individual needs and abilities, and that such needs are to be detailed in an individualized education program; (d) that every child with a disability must receive their education in whichever environment is determined to be the least restrictive to their progress; (e) that, in keeping with the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, that both students with disabilities their parents have the right to legally contest local and state government agencies to ensure that their right to a free and appropriate education have been upheld; and (f) that parents and students both have a right and an obligation to participate in the process of determining what is the most appropriate form of public education for the child in question (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000; *Federal Regulations Implementing IDEA 2004*, 2006).

While each of these tenets of current IDEA special education law are of considerable import with regard to the successful participation of students with disabilities in the educational setting, two of these tenets are of particular importance in relation to not only the education, but also the participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. These critical tenets are: (a) what constitutes or defines a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE); and (b) what can be determined or defined as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for learning and participation for students with disabilities. These will be discussed in turn.

Free Appropriate Public Education

IDEA (2004), defines FAPE as special education (at all levels, pre-school to secondary) and related services provided to individuals at public expense, which meet state determined guidelines/standards and which meet the needs of the individual as specified in the student's individualized education program (IEP) [IDEA 2004, Section 1402(9)(A)-(D)]. According to Regulations for Implementing IDEA (34 CFR Sections 300 & 301, 2006), the domain of FAPE and what constitutes public education extends beyond the confines of classroom academics, and in fact, includes services related to : (a) assistive technology (Federal Regulations for IDEA, 2006, 34 CFR Sec. 300.105), (b) extended school year (Federal Regulations for IDEA, 2006, 34 CFR Sec. 300.106), (c) non-academic and extracurricular activities including athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, counseling services, school and district sponsored special interest groups and clubs, and referral (i.e., employment) agencies (Ibid, Sec 300.107), (d) regular or adapted physical education (Ibid, Sec. 300.108) as well as those optional educational programs available to students without disabilities such as art, music, home economics, industrial arts, and other vocational programs (Ibid, Sec. 300.110).

The determination as to what is appropriate to the student with a disability is determined by the development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a legal working document which considers what programming and services are most appropriate for each student given certain implications and limitations of disability. While the form and function of the IEP has certainly evolved over time, eight key components have remained at the fore and are currently identified under IDEA 2004 law. As with previous incarnations of IDEA, the current enactment embraces the IEP as the principal tool by which

a student's academic and functional needs are addressed and accommodated within the public educational setting. The majority of the key elements of the IEP aim to specify if and how the student is to have access to the general curriculum and how the student is to participate, and ultimately, to progress along-side their general education peers.

Least Restrictive Environment

As with FAPE, the determination of what constitutes the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities strongly influences the extent to which such students are able to participate in the general education curriculum and environment. The relation of the LRE to FAPE invokes the "chicken or the egg" scenario: "Does appropriateness drive placement, or is placement the starting point for any consideration of an appropriate education?" (Crockett, 1999, LRE as a Rebuttable Assumption Section, ¶ 1). Embedded within this conundrum, is the equally important debate as to what defines the "LRE", and how this definition ensures "appropriateness" and accrues benefits to the student in question.

The fundamental premise of LRE under IDEA law rests on the understanding that, to the maximum extent possible, students with disabilities are to be educated along with their general education peers. A denial or removal of the student with a disability from such a placement is only to be entertained under the circumstance wherein the nature and severity of the disability, even with supports and services, negatively impacts the student's educational benefits and achievement.

Ultimately, the pursuit of the LRE is a means of protecting the individual's constitutional rights as provided by the First Amendment (freedom of association), and Fourteenth amendment (equal protection to individual rights, here specifically to an appropriate education and due process). Although the most appropriate placement of students

with disabilities favors maximal integration within the general education setting, it also can accommodate segregation (Crockett, 1999; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). "(When) it is not possible to grant liberty and at the same time provide effective treatment (or education), the doctrine allows the state to deprive the (student) of his or her liberty only to the extent necessary to provide treatment (education)" (Turnbull &Turnbull, 2000, p. 244).

Given the above, maximal inclusion in the general education may not be attainable for all students. As a result, between the extremes of full integration and segregation, IDEA regulations require that a continuum of placements and appropriate services are available to each student according to the child's individual needs (as specified on the IEP). A child's determined least restrictive placement must be as close to the child's home as possible (Federal Regulations for IDEA, 2006, 34 CFR Sec. 300.116), and must extend beyond the classroom to non-academic and extra-curricular activities and settings as recognized under FAPE (Federal Regulations for IDEA, 2006, 34 CFR Sec. 300. 107 & 300.117). While the entire educational team works towards the determination as to what will be the child's least restrictive environment, the burden of proof rests on the state, district and, most importantly, the school authorities to demonstrate that the LRE has been appropriately conceived *and* implemented to the extent that the student is maximally able to participate and benefit from mainstream participation (Yell, 1995).

A Disconnect between Policy and Practice

While the letter of the law is clear, the extent to which such laws are adhered to and applied may, however, be questionable. In recent year, aspects of accountability for student growth and progress, as linked to the *No Child Left Behind Act* [NCLB, PL107-110, (2002)] and the alignment of IDEA to such aspects of accountability (Turnbull, 2006), has arguably

restricted how the specific needs of individuals with disabilities (and perhaps the needs of *all* children) are accommodated within the educational setting. While *participation* in the educational process persists, this participation has become increasingly (if not exclusively) "academic" in nature and, as such, has arguably become more distant from the more visionary aspects of student growth and success addressed in *Brown v. Education* (1954). The importance of social participation and inclusion to the education of the individual has been minimized, perhaps lost, in the process of accountability.

For many children with disabilities, especially those with more significant disabilities, access to the 'general education curriculum' may present real challenges, and in some respects, may not appear to be of immediate import to the student's needs. For such students, typical standards of growth may be entirely inappropriate. What is more, the very presence of such standards may further impede the extent to which the individual with a disability is able to participate within and across those areas acknowledged under FAPE and LRE. As such, the social experiences, social learning, and social growth of the individual with a disability may be significantly impacted.

A Need for Research

Humans are by their very nature social creatures. Social experiences (specifically, friendships) serve a variety of functions, including the acquisition of skills and the satisfaction (happiness) that occurs with a sense of belonging. Current educational practices need to be explored so as to better understand if and how those vital aspects of social growth are addressed and accommodated within the educational environment. This is especially critical when addressing the educational and other needs of individuals with more significant disabilities who may not accrue benefit from strict academic, standards-based learning.

This dissertation investigates the relational worlds of a single child with a significant disability within the educational setting. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature and research as relevant to the conceptions and experiences of friendship, both generally and as relating specifically to individuals with disabilities. Subsequently, Chapter 3 details the methods of data collection and analysis which were used to explore and better understand the relational worlds, including friendship, of the focal child. In Chapter 4, the kinds of relationships experienced by the child, as revealed through ethnographic inquiry, are explored from a predominantly child-specific vantage (i.e., affect and behavior in response to interactions). Next, in Chapter 5 how the educational processes and settings, or more specifically socio-"ecology" of relationships, impact the child is explored. In Chapter 6, the impact of the larger ecosystem in which the child was observed is discussed with an emphasis on understanding how and where the ecological circumstance and setting can and should be reconsidered and changed so as to better support the relational experiences and outcomes of the focal student, as well as other individuals with significant disabilities. While the benefits of social inclusion to all children are undeniable, the extent to which these benefits are realized will be considered for the focal child. Recognizing what relationships exist and how they impact the individual is critical to understanding how, as educators (and as social partners, ourselves) we can better accommodate the needs, maximal growth and satisfaction of all those individuals that we teach, and with whom we interact socially.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

For children with disabilities, access to friends and opportunities to develop valuable friendships may be limited, and consequently, such limitations may have a negative effect on the individual's sense of overall happiness and fulfillment. For Americans, happiness is an inalienable right and indeed it is proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence (*Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America*, 1774). Children, regardless of ability, cannot and should not be deprived of such a fundamental right and ultimately should be afforded every opportunity to pursue this right. If friendship is a means towards happiness, then it follows that the pursuit and facilitation of friendships should be tantamount. However, the paths to friendship are as many and varied as the individuals who pursue it.

This chapter will explore friendships and the vital role they can and should play in the lives of children with disabilities. The first section will attempt to define what "friendship" is, how friendships evolve, and why they are of such great value to the social and developmental well-being of the child. The next section will explore how friendships among children with disabilities can and have been measured, with an emphasis on the trends revealed through applied research. Next, the potential barriers which threaten friendship formations will be explored. Finally, and with a better understanding of friendships in terms of form and function in place, a justification for a new approach to understanding relationships for individuals with significant disabilities will be presented.

Friendships: On Form, Function, and Formation

Defining friendship. Even at its most basic level, "friendship" is difficult to localize within the confines of a precise definition. This difficulty rests in the fact that friendship is

defined and lived through the eyes of its beholders. A review of the literature does support, however, that certain elements or recurrent themes regarding friendships may lend themselves to arriving at a better understanding of and definition for friendships. These are: the social construction of friendship (how friendships manifest is neither uniform, nor universal), the perspective and practices of a shared life, and the qualitative importance of friendships, especially as relating to happiness.

"Kindred Spirits" - common ground amid difference. Humans by their very nature are social creatures and, as such, necessarily form strong social bonds, networks or *relationships* – the ultimate of which might be said to be friendships. While having friendships is certainly universal, how they are defined and the extent to which they are permitted arguably depends on very specific societal and cultural values and contexts (Carrier, 1999; Rezende, 1999). The extent of interactions between individuals may be underwritten and guided by "public and private messages circulating in the larger society" (Carrier, 1999, p. 34). As such, predispositions to friendship may be said to be institutionalized (Parsons, 1915), or socially embedded in the larger society (Crosnoe, 2000)

There is a general human proclivity to separate and categorize individuals based on difference (Marger, 1985). When categories of difference become institutionalized, practice and perceptions of differences become more precise in their definition. Individuals then begin to sort and place individuals on a socially constructed hierarchy of similarity/difference (Rezende, 1999). The relational position of individuals vis a vis others, effects degrees of affinity, and ultimately the development of friendships. As such, friendships, at their root, may be guided by socially instilled values of "kindred" and "kind".

"A friend – one soul, two bodies" - A sharing of "self" and of interests. A second theme of friendship rests on the notion that it is something necessarily shared – or something that unites two individuals, two souls. As mentioned, the affinity which draws friends together may have certain links to overarching societal values. However, the individual's conception of self, and the self-disclosure of one's self to others (and vice versa) factors significantly into friendship development (Cocking & Kennett, 1998). The mutuality of self-disclosure allows for further similarities to be revealed and explored in the realm of developing friendships (Doll, 1996; Cocking & Kennett, 1998).

In addition to the mutual sharing of self with the other, friendships are developed in light of and defined by numerous other "shared" factors. Certainly, the elemental feature which secures and strengthens friendships is the sharing of preferences and interests (Howes, 1983; Doll, 1996). Shared likes *and* dislikes clearly align people towards friendships. In addition, larger, more overarching socio-demographic aspects of the individual's life (for example one's community, culture, educational experience, socioeconomic status, and so forth) also contribute to an individual's preferences and interests (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In essence, a determination and recognition of *compatibility* between individuals is the core of friendships (Stainback & Stainback, 1987). However, as Cocking and Kennett (1998) noted, a person's likes and interests – aspects of their compatibility – are neither discrete nor static. Rather, they are often relational and evolve in response to the self-disclosure (of preferences, interests, and so on) and interaction with others.

Beyond interests and preferences of the individual, the *sharing of power* is also key in defining friendships. As Hartup (1989) explained, the distribution of power in a friendship is horizontal, implying a 'sameness' and certain equity. This horizontal distribution of power as

embodied in friendship is distinct from other relationships (such as colleagues, or acquaintances, or non-friends) wherein power may differentially spread out along a hierarchy (such as observed between employer and employee (Hartup, 1989).

Reciprocity is another feature which defines friendships. While certainly, reciprocity may manifest itself in the physical giving and receiving between individuals, it also factors very much into more abstract notions such as attraction, affection and loyalty (Doll, 1996). The attraction between individuals "points to the mystery that brings two people together and recognizes that friends feel some kind of unity that they can preserve, deepen and express by being together" and, further, it is something that is piqued by the similarities and/or differences perceived in others (O'Brien & O'Brien, 1993, p. 12). In turn, the reciprocity of affection invokes the understanding that there is a mutual sensibility and responsiveness predicated on caring and supportive behaviors. Loyalty requires the mutual attention to and protection of the individual's interests (Ibid). Friendships also reflect a mutual enjoyment, not only of each other but of the activities and experiences which come about through friendships (Howes, 1983). Such mutual enjoyment is reflected through positive affective social exchanges between the participating individuals (Howes, 1983, p. 1042).

"Strength in numbers" but "He who has many friends, has no friends" - Quality versus quantity. While social networks can benefit the individual in terms of supports and the acquisition of social capital and social opportunities for learning and participation (Richardson & Schwartz, 1998), the quality as opposed to the quantity of relationships is a better indication of the meaningfulness and ultimate effectiveness of a friendship (Crosnoe, 2000). As Hartup and Stevens (1997) explained, "while having friends may be a

developmental advantage, all friends are not alike" (p. 366). In their review of research on friendship, Hartup and Stevens (1997) reported that friendships, both in terms of their forms and functions, can be markedly different between individuals. Additionally, relationships may demonstrate considerable change in terms of both quality (for example, deep versus superficial relationships) and significance across an individual's lifetime (Ibid). True friendships demonstrate a positive, pro-social interaction between individuals – interactions which are moderated not only by the aforementioned aspects of mutuality, but also by internally strong mechanisms of support, intimacy, and conflict management (Hartup, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Siperstien, Leffert & Wenz-Gross, 1997). Unlike friendships, relationships with acquaintances lack the underlying elements of mutuality and sharing, and further, may be predicated on unilateral benefits and expectations (Salisbury & Palombaro, 1998). Certainly, relationships with non-friends may be founded on convenience, wherein individual needs and interests are addressed only unilaterally, if at all (Hartup, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997).

The importance of friendship. As discussed in the next section, the formation and importance of friendships involves a life-long learning process. What is important here is to note that the social interactions and learning experiences relevant to the formation of effective friendships must begin very early in the individual's life if the cumulative effects of friendships are to be felt. This section will explore the important and varied roles that friendship plays in the overall development of the individual.

The literature on friendship confirms that friendships provide an array of benefits to the individual. All the benefits may be defined under the broad term of "supports". Regarding both individual friendships and social networks, supports may be broken down to four

discrete kinds: (a) social; (b) emotional; (c) cognitive-informational; and (d) practical-instrumental (see Richardson & Schwartz, 1998, and Hartup, 1991 for alternate breakdowns). These categories are not mutually exclusive, rather, as depicted in Figure 1, there is significant overlap and interplay between each of these support areas.

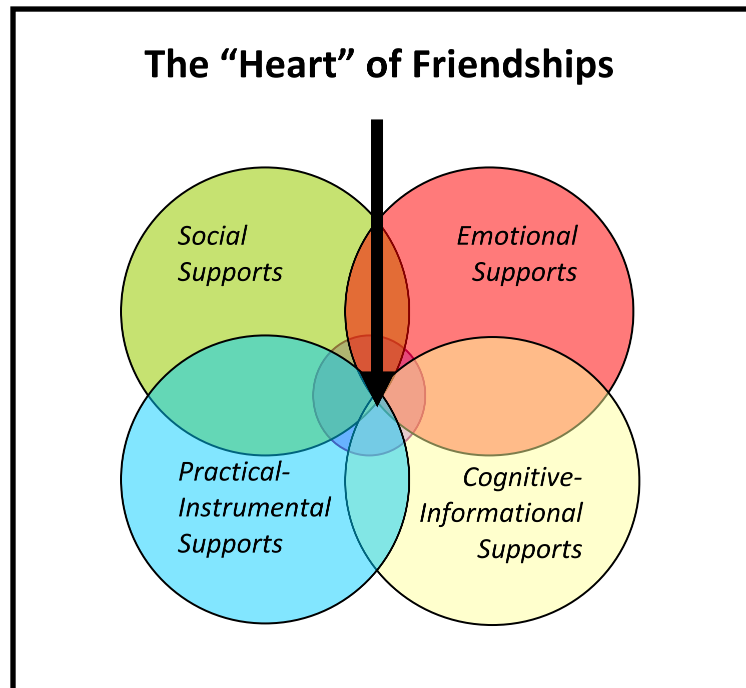

Figure 1. **The "Heart" of Friendships.**

Social supports. Friendships are critical in the extent to which they afford individuals with valuable social experiences, provide them with necessary companionship and allow them to forge important social networks. Increased experience with and exposure to social interactions helps to widen the individuals' social worlds, and allows them to acquire and elaborate on the social skills needed for daily interaction and living (Hartup, 1989; Hartup, 1991; Doll, 1996). In addition, social supports and interactions provide individuals with much needed companionship (Doll, 1996). In the absence of companionship, individuals are at a much greater risk of suffering from the effects of loneliness, namely the aversive

repercussions on physical well-being, mental health and behavior (Amado, R., 1993). Finally, social supports provide the individual with social templates upon which later social relationships can be modeled and elaborated on (Hartup, 1991) and from which social networks can be established and expanded.

Emotional supports. The extent to which individuals interact with others and establish friendships is said to influence patterns of the individual's social acceptance. As Doll explained, "being with friends changes the way that a child is treated by peers" (1996, p. 165). Engagement and acceptance in social relationships, specifically friendships, has been directly linked to the development of more positive attitudes towards oneself and a higher personal regard – and ultimately serves as an "ego booster" (Hartup, 1991; Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975). In addition to moderating the individual's perception of self, friendships provide the opportunity of emotional support by providing an emotional outlet. Positive, pro-social interactions facilitate happiness by providing opportunities for fun (Hartup, 1991). In addition, friends offer positive emotional support during times of emotional stress (Ibid).

As previously mentioned, when an individual does not engage in social interactions or friendships, there exists a greater likelihood that their emotional health will be adversely affected by loneliness (Amado, R., 1993). The more isolated an individual becomes, the less likely they will be able to acquire the skills they need to effectively manage and control their emotional understanding and responses to a social interaction (Doll, 1996). In the absence of friendships, then, individuals can become increasingly "socio-emotionally disadvantaged" (Hartup, 1989).

Cognitive-Informational supports. The development of friendships and the elaboration of social networks effect the cognitive development of the individual. Cognitive

development occurs in response to the aforementioned widening of the social world. Heightened exposure results in a greater need for socially relevant knowledge and the associated skills. Such skills include, but are not limited to: (a) the acquisition of language, communication and the associated ability to use and interpret symbols; (b) problem-solving skills; and (c) the acquisition of increasingly more complex social knowledge, specifically as related to cooperation and conflict within the social milieu. Cooperative and supportive collaborations between friends directly impact the extent to which individuals master certain skills. Friends learn from their friends through tutoring and modeling, as well as through the reciprocal processes of cooperative and collaborative learning (Hartup, 1991).

Practical-Instrumental supports. The application and practice of acquired knowledge and skill is the final area of support. When in a social setting, and when engaging with supportive friends, individuals are able to practice and refine their social knowledge. Practical-instrumental supports require, therefore, that individuals have access to others so that skills may be appropriately and naturally practiced. Social efficacy is enhanced through social participation and interaction with friends, and, subsequently, is reinforced by positive, pleasant and successful interactions with friends (Doll, 1996).

The formation and evolution of friendships. The development of social competency and the ability to form and maintain friendships occur neither automatically, nor spontaneously. Rather, they are on-going processes wherein from birth to old-age the individual differentially develops and utilizes different mechanisms to cultivate and respond to friendships. This section explores the processes which facilitate social growth and competence, and by extension, which facilitate friendship development.

The seeds of social competence are planted immediately after birth and are cultivated by an individual's parents and family. Parents are the first individuals with whom a child interacts, and are the first to expose the child to experiences and explorations of the social world around them (Richardson & Schwartz, 1998). Both a child's attachment to his mother and the responsiveness of both parents to the child are considered to be critical in the extent to which a child is later able to establish and maintain relationships with others (Arthur, Bochner, & Butterfield, 1999; Hartup, 1989; Richardson & Schwartz, 1998). The availability and extensiveness of a parent's own social support systems are thought to impact not only how a parent responds to their child, but also how the child will respond to others as they grow up (Richardson & Schwartz, 1998).

As a child continues to grow, and as she ventures further and further from her mother's reach, the child begins to independently explore the environment, and consequently, has a greater opportunity and likelihood of interacting with others (Hartup, 1989). During early childhood (2 years) early interactions with others, especially other children, are typified by self-centered behaviors – an egocentrism – wherein social interactions are motivated by concrete activities and exchanges (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Lefton, 1994). As Doll related (1996), early childhood interactions among preschoolers and kindergarten students function out of convenience and are highly transitory. Children are immediately drawn to (and soon lose interest in) objects of interest to them, usually things physically near or attractive to them, and consequently come to interact with those individuals near or around those objects of interests. At an early age, children tend to identify friends as those with whom they spend time and with whom they share certain activities (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Howes, 1983; Grenot-Scheyer, Straub, Peck, & Schwartz, 1998). During this stage of life, children are

increasingly able to see and respond to their surroundings in symbolic ways. Verbal language, as symbols, allows children to interact and respond to their interactive partners (that is, their friends). Further, children increasingly become able to engage in imaginary play activities. Increased engagement in *social* imaginary play is thought to be indicative of the emergence of a child's ever-developing social competence (Arthur et al., 1999; Howes, 1983)

School-aged children begin to extend their interpretations of friendship and identification of friends. Friendships are increasingly founded on and fulfilled by on certain shared expectations, or unsaid contracts (Doll, 1996). During the elementary school years, students begin to understand the importance of self-disclosure with regard to establishing a shared mutuality and reciprocity (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). What is more, they begin to respond to and act on nascent feelings of loyalty and trustworthiness, and recognize the importance of these qualities with regard to the establishment and maintenance on friendships (Ibid). Children begin to recognize the qualities possessed by their peers which best align with their own values ("character admiration") (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1998). These qualities, and not just subjective experiences or activities, become the foundation upon which more stable and longer lasting friendships are built (Ibid).

As individuals progress into adolescence, relationships become increasingly more stable and intimate (Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1998). Individuals no longer define friendship as merely concrete activities; rather they are more apt to define friendship in more abstract terms (Doll, 1996; Lefton, 1994). The more enduring quality of friendships requires the individual to recognize and apply such important friendship

characteristics as commitment (to one another and to the relationship), and mutual loyalty (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1998).

Through adulthood, friendships evolve and adapt in response to the individual's age and circumstance (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Conceptions of friendship are decreasingly reliant on "what friends do together" and become more strongly founded on aspects of character admiration and mutuality: "Older individuals describe an ideal friend as being supportive (dependable, understanding, and accepting), a confidant, and trustworthy" (Hartup & Stevens, 1997, p. 356).

The necessary foundations for friendships. Up to this point, the processes of friendship formation and the variables which effect formation have been discussed. However, before one can even begin to think of establishing a friendship, it must be carefully considered if a stable enough foundation has been laid upon which to scaffold the friendship. A very brief review of the literature reveals what contributes to the laying of a solid foundation for friendship.

To begin, an individual must have sufficient skills and understanding as to what constitutes and maintains a friendship. As such, the individual must demonstrate both the cognitive and social skills that would support a friendship (Doll, 1996). In terms of cognitive skills, a child must be able to see beyond himself and must be able to take on others' perspectives – they must have the capacity to empathize, or an established "theory of mind" (Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Freeman & Kasari, 1998). The child must also be able to assess himself and his qualities, likes, dislikes, and so forth, in relation to his peer so as to establish areas of compatibility (Ibid). In addition, the child must be able to engage in interpersonal problem solving, especially as relating to conflict resolution which is so crucial

to the maintenance of friendships (Doll, 1996, Stainback & Stainback, 1987). In order to actualize a friendship, the child must be able to conceptualize what constitutes a good friendship, and further, must have a solid *working* knowledge of the importance of trustworthiness and loyalty to friendships. Finally, and as related to cognitive skills, children should be able to understand, manipulate and respond to symbols in their environment. More specifically, children need to be able to express themselves and respond, verbally or otherwise, to those with whom they wish to interact (Freeman & Kasari, 1998).

Socially, the key characteristics which define friendships are positive, pro-social, cooperative interactions (Stainback & Stainback, 1987). To achieve such interactions children must be able to see friendship beyond personal convenience. Children necessarily must be able to reciprocate overtures from, to share with, and provide a range of supports to their peers if friendships are to take root (Ibid).

While the child in question must possess or acquire necessary social, cognitive and communicative skills, a child's pro-friendships skills and experiences can be facilitated by the assistance of others and the structure of the environment. Falvey and Rosenberg (1995) explained that providing children ample opportunities, supports, diversity (in potential friends, interactions, and environments), continuity and structure, and allowing children to freely explore and experience compatibilities can greatly increase a student's success and secure more positive outcomes for those pursuing friendships.

An Ecological Approach to Understanding Relationships and the Individual

The above discussion outlines trends of friendship formation across the life-span. While most typically developing children follow this trajectory, factors immediate and influential to the individual can contribute significantly to the development of friendships,

both in terms of quality and quantity. These factors represent the socio-ecology of the individual, and reflect relevant aspects of time, the environment, and characteristics and behaviors unique to the individual him/herself.

The importance of ecology vis a vis processes of human development and adaptation was first recognized and expounded through the works of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1999). Bronfenbrenner, in his ecological model for understanding the individual situation and individual development, maintained that observations of human behavior in isolation were not sufficient to explain and understand the development of the individual. Rather, the complex and dynamic interplay between the individual and “the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment” must be carefully considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 5). As Bronfenbrenner explained of his ecological approach, it “focuses on the progressive accommodation, throughout the life span, between the growing human organism and the changing environments in which it actually lives and grows. The latter includes not only the immediate settings containing the developing person but also the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which these settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514).

An individual’s ecology can be best envisioned as four concentric spheres or systems (the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem and the Macrosystem) which both directly and indirectly impact the individual’s experiences, development and adaptation (see Figure 2).

The *Microsystem*, as envisioned by Bronfenbrenner, is that structure or component of the ecological system which most directly influences the embedded individual. The Microsystem is important for the nested individual because of the more intimate interplay

between the specific setting, the nested individual, and other individuals within the shared setting. With regard to others within the Microsystem, Bronfenbrenner acknowledged the importance of reciprocity between participants of this system. Specifically, he suggested that the individuals do not exist exclusive to one another, but rather engage in 'reciprocal processes' which include "not only the effect of A on B, but also the effect of B on A" (Bronfennbrenner 1977, p. 519). The physical setting is also identified by Bronfenbrenner as having an impact on the nested individual, if only in a less direct way.

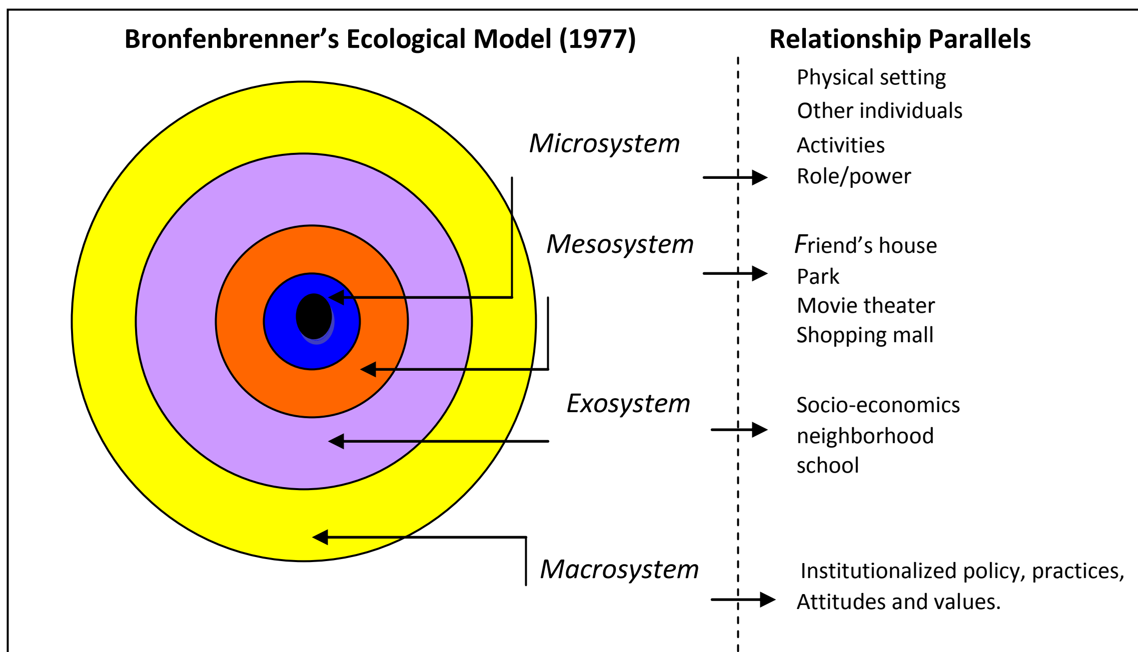

***Figure 2.* Ecosystems of Friendship (Bronfenbrenner's Model).**

The *Mesosystem* encompasses not only those specific settings in which the individual participates, but interplay between the settings. As Bronfenbrenner devised, the interactions between principal settings may impact an individual's development and behaviors not only within, but also across these settings. As Bronfenbrenner further proposed, in observing "the same person in more than one setting" one should be better able to "take into account the

possible subsystems, and associated higher order effects, that exist, or could exist across settings" (Ibid, p. 525). In essence, the individual's transitions across settings and even across time can impact not only the experiences of the individual, but also the development of the individual. Specifically, the individual, and other interacting individuals, may assume varied roles and differential participation in activities across time and place.

The *Exosystem* embodies those contexts external to the nested individual and the immediate settings as encompassed in the Micro and Mesosystems. The Exosystem consists of those broader, higher order contexts and influences surrounding the individual "that affect events within the immediate setting" (Ibid, p. 527), and which includes broader social networks and environmental circumstances which impact the nested individual. Around the Exosystem exists the *Macrosystem*, or "the overarching institutional and ideological patters of the culture or subculture as they affect human development" (Ibid, p. 527).

In terms of relationships, one can extend this idea of ecological impact of the various spheres towards a better understanding of how individuals vary in their formation of relationships. The individual is ultimately nested in the center, or the *Microsystem*, of the larger ecological system. The individual's opportunity for relationships is largely determined by the availability of possible interactive partners, friends or playmates in the immediate area, the types of activities the individual is allowed to participate in, the physical features and restrictions of this setting, and the role (one might also assume *power*) that the individual assumes in this setting.

Around the Microsystem wherein the individual is nested is the *Mesosystem,* or those other settings which surround the individual, and within which the individual periodically visits and participates. In terms of friendship formation, the kind and quantity of friendships

an individual establishes may depend on the extent to which an individual is afforded access to these alternate settings. For a child pursuing friendships, these settings which comprise the Mesosystem may include such places as the school, and the sub-settings therein, the playground, the shopping mall, the park, the movie theater, a potential friend's house, and so forth.

As Bronfenbrenner explained, the surrounding *Exosystem* is an extension of the Mesosystem (1977, p. 515). It is further distant from the embedded individual, and may only indirectly impact the development and adaptations of the individual insofar as it may delimit or completely restrict opportunities for growth. For the child pursuing friendships, such factors which affect friendship formations may include school policy and climate, the student's neighborhood, and his access and participation therein, a student's socio-economic background and his access to the necessary resources which could facilitate friendships (i.e., buying toys with which to engage with peers, tickets to a movie, a bus ticket, nice, clean, new clothes, and so forth).

The outer-most sphere is that of the *Macrosystem*. "A macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems of which (the smaller spheres) are the concrete manifestations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). With regard to friendships, this sphere represents the overarching, institutionalized attitudes and value systems which ultimately moderate to what extent friendships are deemed appropriate and how they are to be formed. Conceptions of appropriateness, difference, and superiority, to name a few, all affect the extent to which friendships can be formed.

Rizzo and Corsaro (1995) supported Bronfenbrenner's idea and further extended it to the area of friendship, specifically friendship in the classroom setting, and demonstrated that all "spheres" encompassing the individual do impact the ways that friendships manifest. Within their immediate classroom environments, children use friendships as a means of overcoming certain challenges and stresses placed upon them. They further elaborate that the classroom "ecologies and friendship styles are both reflections of and embedded within the larger contexts of neighborhood and culture" (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995, p. 412). Pervasive, more encompassing factors of the Meso and Macrosystems (socio-cultural and demographic factors, in addition to social policies) also have also been identified as major forces in affecting the extent to which children interacted and how they ultimately develop in the social context (Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Crosnoe, 2000).

The *individual* exists at the core of the ecosystem. While the larger community may have an impact on the individual and his ability to form friendships, the power and influence of the autonomous individual and the malleability of friendships must not be taken for granted. As Crosnoe explained, "Children are not simply receptacles; they adapt … routines (and friendships) to their own needs" (2000, p. 380). As previously discussed, friendships are predominantly based on degrees of similarity. Children take an active role in carefully and deliberately selecting who their friends are (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Moreover, friendships based on similarity can slowly evolve and mutate as children gain greater familiarity and comfort with one another (Ibid).

Friendship and Disability

As discussed in the previous sections, friendships are neither simple to define, nor easy to form. Friendships, while they have the potential for many positive outcomes - the

ultimate being happiness - unfortunately do not come with instruction manuals. Indeed, friendship can be apparent through concrete manifestations (i.e., play and other activities), but it is fundamentally an abstraction. Friendships are the reflections of the participant individual – their forms and functions are as diverse as the people who participate in them. The following sections explore briefly if and how relationships and friendships can be accurately qualified, quantified and measured, and how friendships have been measured (or at least interpreted) among children with disabilities and what these "measures" have revealed.

"Measuring" friendships. Among quantitative researchers, the defining quality of good and solid research rests on the understanding that research, as supported by clearly defined and precise measures (data), is replicable (Gay & Airasian, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As such, the ultimate goal of quantitative methodology is to objectify and clearly identify and define that which is being studied (Ibid). For research on friendship, such objectivity presents a conundrum. How can such a varied abstraction be accurately and objectively measured? While efforts towards objectivity have been made, the findings may be subject to considerable qualification. Research on friendship has taken both "objective" and subjective approaches as a means of identifying and interpreting friendships.

"Objective" measures. *Sociometric* and *other rating scales* have been the most frequently employed means of "measuring" friendship. Sociometry in its strictest application estimates the "like-ability" of individuals. Peers are asked to nominate or rank their associates with regard to the extent that they would (positive nomination) or would not (negative nomination) interact with those around them. Although this continues to be a popular and widely used assessment (Larrivee & Horne, 1991; Sale & Carey, 1995;

Gottmann, Gonso, & Rasmussen, 1975; Howes & Wu, 1990; Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman & Kinnish 1996), it has been subject to much criticism (Doll, 1996). The mere process of ranking others serves to create hierarchical arrangements among peers and, consequently, perpetuates negative perceptions and feelings towards others. Further, there has been little validation that nominations correlate with actual social interactions, friendships or affiliations among peers (Doll, 1996; Freeman & Kasari, 1998).

Typically, sociometric scales are used only during later childhood. It is postulated that children must have both the language skills to express and the understanding of what friendship is before they can attempt to select and rank their peers (Freeman & Kasari, 1998). The limitations of using sociometric scales to assess friendships for children with disabilities are clear: "How, then, do we identify friendships of children with atypical development who are not able to cognitively or linguistically define friendships?" (Freeman & Kasari, 1998, p. 345).

Other ranking scales have been used as a means of assessing attitudes towards peers, including peers with disabilities. These include: the Perception of Social Closeness Scale (Stanovich, Jordon & Perot, 1998), Social Cognitive Mapping (Pearl, Farmer, VanAcker, Rodkin, Bost, Coe, & Henley, 1998), the Perception of Ability Scale (Stanovich, Jordon, & Perot, 1998), the Severely Handicapped Perception Inventory (Stainback & Stainback, 1982), the Friendship Roster Rating Scale (Siperstien et al., 1997), and the Play a Game scale (Cook & Semmel, 1999; Siperstien et al., 1997). Some of the pertinent findings of these measures will subsequently be reviewed.

Siperstein, Jordon and Perot (1998), explored specific friendship dyads among 373 fourth through fifth grade students within an integrated setting. The students with disabilities,

ranging from mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, and their interactions with their general education peers were assessed using the Friendship Roster Rating Scale. Identified dyads then participated in the Play a Game scale, wherein all participants were asked who, if they were to play a game, they would most like to play with. The analysis of data supported two discrete dyadic categories: a) friendship dyads and 2) acquaintanceship dyads. Subsequent observations of these dyads in action revealed that for those dyads wherein a child with a disability was included, significantly less collaboration, cooperative play, shared laughter was present. Additionally, a distinct hierarchy of power was noted in the relational roles played by each dyad partner. While individuals with disabilities were identified as friends, observations of their interactions with peers strongly suggested that these interactions were not so much identifiable as friendships, rather, something more akin to acquaintanceships.

In a similar study of children (grades 4 through 6) with mild cognitive impairments, Pearl et al. (1998) found that these children with disabilities represented what they termed ‘social isolates’. Measures taken from socio-cognitive maps corroborated this notion of social isolation. Additionally, peer behavioral assessments revealed that general education students associated their peers who did not participate in a peer social group (and hence were more isolated) with anti-social participation and negative behaviors, rather than more pro-social participation.

Stanovich et al. (1998) explored relationships among 2,011 students within inclusive educational settings. In addition to individuals with disabilities, English language learners and at risk youth were compared to ‘uncategorized’ regular education peers with regards to their perceived abilities (using the Perception of Ability Scale for Students) and their social

inclusion and acceptance (using the Perception of Social Closeness Scale). The findings supported that of the ‘categorized’ groups, both those individuals with disabilities and English language learners received lower rankings for both their perceived ability and their social inclusion. Of these two groups, those individuals with disabilities received significantly lower ranking in terms of their social inclusion and social closeness.

Cook and Semmell (1999) employed peer nominations among 285 elementary aged children with and without severe disabilities. The study explored the extent to which severity of disability corresponded to levels of acceptance across school environments (including those containing a heterogeneous or a non-heterogeneous representation of students). Students were asked to nominate those peers with whom they would most like to play. The results supported that in environments of low heterogeneity, because students with significant disabilities may tend to stand out as ‘different’ from the rest, students with disabilities may more readily meet expectations for difference, and therefore, may correspondingly support greater degrees of acceptance. Regardless of degrees of heterogeneity, the results suggested that for individuals with more significant or severe disabilities there was a low correspondence between positive, play nominations and actual observations of pro-social, friendly behavior. As such, the nominations of friends and potential playmates did not correlate with observed interactions indicative of such relationships for individuals with severe disabilities.

Hall and McGregor (2006) used socio-metric nominations to explore the levels of acceptance of three children with disabilities (including mild to moderate intellectual disabilities as well as other physical and communicative impairments) in an inclusive setting. This longitudinal study followed the same three children as they progressed through

elementary school. Their findings revealed that of the three boys, none of them were ranked as of low social status by their peers. All of the boys, as they progressed from entry to upper grade levels demonstrated an increase in their levels of social acceptance. However, across the study, they continued to receive significantly fewer nominations as potential playmates, both positive and negative, from their peers.

Zindler (2009) looked at the effects of inclusion within her second grade inclusive classroom. In addition to observational and interview data, Zindler used socio-grams to identify and understand the social networks that existed between the students with disabilities (seven students, demonstrating an array of disabilities, from intellectual disability, to physical impairments) in her class of 24 students. Her findings supported that while sociograms revealed that all students, regardless of ability, were chosen for and participated in social interactions at least once, overall, the frequency of their selection was considerably lower than their classmates without disabilities.

In summary, collectively these sociometric studies support that individuals with disabilities (from mild to severe) may not have access to the kinds and qualities of relationships as their general education peers. Specifically, rather than true friendships, the above findings suggest that social participation for children with disabilities may be restricted to varying degrees of isolation (Siperstien et al., 1998), or degrees of acquantainceship (Pearl et al., 1998). While children with disabilities are certainly not ignored or dismissed by their general education peers, the lower frequency of friendship and playmate nominations certainly supports a framework of relationships which is exclusive to true friendships. However, and as demonstrated by Cook and Semmell (1999) it is important to reiterate that what is reported or ranked by others may not directly correspond with what actually is

observed to exist. Both in their ability to ascertain friendships and in terms of their use for children with disabilities, these scales, like other sociometric ratings, are questionable (Freeman & Kasari, 1998).

For each of the above studies, the shortcomings of strict socio-metric studies were repeatedly mentioned, with indications as to where research might turn its focus so as to gain better insights and understandings of friendships. Siperstien et al. (1998) have suggested that, in moving beyond socio-metric measures, there is a definite need to focus on the more qualitative indications and features of friendship. In keeping with this, Cook and Semmell (1998) suggested that the more discrete qualities and characteristics of individuals, as well as varied contextual and environmental factors may provide greater information regarding friendships. Additionally, the impact of teachers, and adults in general, on friendship development is an area of needed consideration (Stanovich et al., 1998). Specifically, how the attitudes and beliefs of adults (Ibid) and the training of and techniques employed by teachers toward the goal of pro-social skill development are of key consideration for future research (Ibid; Zindler, 2009).

Given the above shortcomings of strict socio-metrics, *direct observations* are also frequently used (alone or in concert with socio-metrics and other measures) to assess friendships. Typically, the focus of such observations as relating to the determination of friendships rests on documenting social play behaviors among children (Hall, 1994; Guralnick et al., 1996; Freeman & Kasari, 1998). As previously mentioned, observations do more accurately identify *actual* dyadic interactions (as opposed to hypothetical statements/rankings, per sociometric results). However, interaction does not presuppose friendship. Discrete behaviors are not indicative of the more subtle qualities of friendships. In

other words, mere interaction does not require reciprocity – a cornerstone to friendships (Freeman & Kasari, 1998). In relation to children with disabilities, the ascertaining of friendship must include the identification of at least minimal engagement *and* reciprocity.

Proxemics, or the assessment of physical propinquity and association, is another means of measuring friendships. However, as with observations, the physical closeness of individuals is not a solid or sure indication of friendship. As Hall (1994) explained the shortcomings of using proximity as an indicator of social interaction and friendship are of especial impact when studying children with disabilities. Often, the focal child will be approached by others, not for that child's attention, but for the attention of others who are in the same area (Ibid).

Subjective measures. *Verbal reports* and *disclosures* are the principal means by which more subjective interpretations and measurements of friendship are arrived at. Self-Disclosure is one means of acquiring information about friendships, real and perceived. Typically, self-disclosure measures are not attempted until children demonstrate sufficient communication skills and a solid understanding and definition of friendship (Freeman & Kasari, 1998). As with peer nominations and ratings, the problem exists that children with disabilities may be unable to verbally communicate about or fully comprehend their personal relationships. What is more, the information disseminated by children with disabilities may reflect conceptions of friendship far different from, or even at odds with, those expressed by more typically developing peers (Ibid).

Parent and teacher interviews and reports are a frequent source of information (Freeman & Kasari, 1998). Teachers often can provide information that either supplements or raises questions about how others disclose and describe friendships. Indeed, teachers'

perceptions and documentations of friendships often do vary dramatically from others (i.e., peers and parents) (Hall, 1994; Freedman & Kasari, 1998). Parents too may provide valuable information by which a child's friendships may be assessed. Certainly, parents may have a more expansive view and greater access to and knowledge of a child's interactions across settings. However, it has also been suggested that parental information of friendships is potentially misleading as they may be based on inflated assumptions and misinterpretations about their child's social interactions (Freeman & Kasari,1998).

Finally, peers also provide information regarding both the quality and quantity of friendships. As Hall (1994) related, children can provide information ranging from which children they play with and what toys and activities they engage in, to how the friends characteristics (i.e., disability) influence the relationship. Children can provide individually, or via constituent group participation, a larger perspective of friendship dynamics and support networks (Meyer, Park, Grenot-Scheyer, Schwartz, & Henry, 1998).

A summary of research on friendships and disability. Because there is arguably no way to achieve a purely objective understanding of friendship for children with disabilities (and *all* children), and because of the possibly biased and misleading undertow of more subjective measures, it is difficult to arrive at a solid understanding of how friendship can be best measured. It may be, however, that there are certain trends that may help to better understand why, how or if friendships develop among students with disabilities and their peers.

Under the mandate of federal law, specifically the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 108-446, 2004) the maximally appropriate inclusion or integration of students with disabilities in a more heterogeneous, general education

curriculum and environment is the rule. The participation of all students with disabilities into this general education environment certainly exposes these students to a more extensive array of social and learning environments. The more natural and typical these environments, the greater the benefit will be for the social growth, supports and interdependence of the student with a disability (Kennedy, 2001).

Increasingly, teachers who have an understanding of disability, and who are versed in the practices of inclusion are recognizing the benefits that inclusion has for students with disabilities (McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson & Loveland, 2001). Indeed, while there is some contention, many assert that inclusive practices help not only those students who are to be "included" (i.e., via enhancement of social and communicative skills) (Rafferty, Piscitelli, & Boettcher, 2003; Murray-Seegert, 1989), but *all* students. Through exposure and experience, students *without* disabilities gain a greater understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities, while they also learn to better support, accommodate and value diversity (Murray-Seegert, 1989). The maximal integration of students with disabilities has been demonstrated to increase social interactions among these children and their peers (Rafferty et al., 2003; Peltier, 1997), and as a result, students with disabilities are more likely to forge friendships with their typical peers (Buysee et al., 2002). However, research has also suggested that the inclusion does not eliminate engrained, negative social perceptions regarding students with disabilities and their inclusion (Sale & Carey, 1995).

Attitudes toward and perceptions of persons with disabilities have very deep social and historical roots. Such attitudes are strongly linked to the human proclivity to dichotomize similarities and differences, and to arrange these similarities and differences according to a hierarchy of preference, not unlike racial hierarchies (Tringo, 1970; Marger, 1985). Such

proclivities have been entrenched and strengthened by the continued subjugation and deprivation of those on the lowest rungs (Marger, 1985). Hierarchies of disability are often thought to be based primarily on aesthetic perceptions (Olkin & Howson, 1994), the saliency or visibility of disability – ultimately the perceived *severity of disability* (Richardson, 1971). It is important to note, however, that such hierarchies are not static in their structure. Rather, and as supported by Strohmer, Grand and Purcell's statistical analysis (1984), hierarchies may be circumstantially modified by such variables including type of disability and social contexts. This research further supports that such circumstantial variables may strongly correlate to the extent to which individuals with disabilities are perceived and accepted by others (Ibid).

Research suggests that typical students generally have a much more negative perception of *all* students with disabilities than they do with their typical peers (Stainback & Stainback, 1982) and that as a result, *all* students with disabilities may tend have fewer friends than their typical peers (Buysee et al., 2002). While the mere presence or absence of disability may be of impact to the formation of friendships, degrees in the *severity* of disability have been demonstrated further and differentially impact friendship formations. Research has found that the severity of disability may not necessarily affect the social growth or status of a child (Rafferty et al., 2003). In fact, Hall (1994) demonstrated that all students, regardless of disability etiology and severity, received positive nominations from their peers when in an integrated setting. However, while peers may nominate students with disabilities as people they would like to associate with, and while they may express a positive attitude towards other children with disabilities, they may still remain unwilling to establish

reciprocal relationships – let alone friendships - with these students (Nikolaraizi, Kumar, Favazza, Sideridis, Koulousiou, & Raill, 2005).

The extent to which an individual may be willing to interact with or have a relationship with a person with a disability is suggested to be related to the severity of the disability (Miller, Chen, Glover-Graf, & Kranz, 2009). Research by Cook and Semmell (1999) has suggested that children with more severe cognitive or physical disabilities, who were included in more heterogeneous, mainstreamed environments rather than more restrictive, non-heterogeneous environments, were far less accepted by their peers without disabilities. What is more, individuals with severe mental delays and negative behaviors have been demonstrated to be the most negatively perceived and least accepted of individuals with disabilities (Gordon, Feldman, Chirboga-Tantillo, Feldman, & Perrone, 2004; Tringo, 1970; Guralnick, 2006; Miller et al., 2009). Guralnick (2006) postulated that the higher rates of rejection and isolation of children with mental and behavioral limitations is due to an apparent lack of the necessary and appropriate social processing and emotional regulation skills. Overt, aggressive, negative, inappropriate behaviors tend serve as the salient features which distinguish and separate students with mental delays from their peers (Ibid).

Although physical disabilities, especially severe physical disabilities, provide an immediate aesthetic indicator, these disabilities typically do not place children at a higher risk of rejection. While research suggests that students with more severe or salient disabilities may be less likely to be placed in an inclusive setting (Rafferty et al., 2003), when they are in these settings, they are more readily accepted than their peers with cognitive delays and learning disabilities. Cook (2001) suggested that the reason these students may experience greater levels of acceptance may in part due to the salience of their disability, and the

expectations that others have formed with regard to the perceived disability. Because differential expectations have been established vis a vis different disabilities, a system of differential tolerance towards individuals with disabilities becomes manifest (Cook, 2001; Cook & Semmel, 1999).

Those students with obvious, easily identifiable or pronounced disabilities meet expectations, are better tolerated, nurtured and protected by their peers (Cook, 2001). By contrast, students with less salient characteristics of disability, such as persons with learning disabilities and more mild disabilities, are expected to meet the same expectations of their typical peers, and when they do not, are rejected. Consequently, students with less obvious learning disabilities and mental delays become comparably isolated (Pearl et al., 1998). For such individuals, social engagements are often typified by more negative social interactions (Guralnick, 1996) which may correlate with lower verbal skills or participation, minimal, if any, collaboration and a markedly asymmetrical distribution of power (Siperstien et al., 1997).

For individuals with disabilities, their relative access to or isolation from social interactions and the corresponding opportunities to participate or engage in both educational and leisure activities with peers may be affected (Wendelborg & Kvello, 2010). Wendelborg and Kvello (2010), have found that the 'educational arrangements' (i.e., offerings and programs) offered to and accessible to children with disabilities may differentially impact the extent to which students are able to participate in both educational and leisure activities at school. The extent to which students with disabilities participate across school activities, in turn, may directly correlate with peer perceptions and levels of acceptance (Ibid). As such, for individuals whose atypical or unacceptable behaviors impede participation, as well as for

individuals whose physical or medical concerns are perceived by others to be an impediment to participation, educational arrangements moderated by type or severity of disability, may impact peer perceptions.

Ultimately how children perceive disability in their peers can and does affect the kinds and qualities of friendships that are formed. Of course, while motivated by perceptions of disability, the importance of individual personalities cannot be overlooked in the important role they play in the variable formation of friendships. It does, after all, take two to tango! As Meyer et al. (1998, 2001) have devised, children's frameworks for friendship (as one can be assumed are structured around *both* perception and personality) can be reduced to six basic forms: (a) best friend; (b) regular friend; (c) just another kid; (d) somebody I'd help; (e) the person that is included; and (f) the guest or ghost of the classroom. Frameworks for friendships may be said to be largely influenced by the roles and patterns associated with a specific relationship. As Richardson and Schwartz (1998) related, relationships may range from unilateral "helper" or "helpee" interactions, to mutual patterns of play and companionship, to extremes of conflictive interaction between individuals. The extent to which each of these patterns emerges and manifests itself will affect the ultimate form a friendship takes.

Perceived equitability also has been determined to have a strong impact on the extent to which friendships develop. Evans, Goldberg and Dickson (1998) suggested that within the heterogeneous classroom environment, students with disabilities may be perceived as, or may in fact *be*, receiving differential treatment and opportunity. For students without disabilities in the same environment, this may be interpreted as unfair and unequal treatment (Ibid). As such, these students may begin to harbor certain resentments towards their peers with

disabilities, and consequently, may be reluctant to interact or form friendships with these peers. As Evans et al. (1998) have explained there exists a "complex interplay among children's feelings about each other, social policies that influence their lives and the development of morality and social understanding" (p. 145). Consequently, these authors cautioned that adults must not only clearly explain justice principles (the very principles that underlay friendship principles), but they must also take care to 'practice what they preach'. Students will be more apt to experience strong and valuable friendships if the core features of such friendships are fairly and accurately modeled for them.

Justifications for Research: A Need to Explore the Specific "Voices" and Ecologies of Friendship and Disability

As discussed above, friendships serve very real and meaningful functions for all individuals. The ultimate outcome of friendships contributes to the overall well-being and happiness of the individual. In the absence of friendships, the opposite holds true. Persons without friendships become isolated from the world around them and may experience profound depression and loneliness as a result (Amado, R.S., 1993; Doll, 1996). For children with disabilities, whose perceived differences or deficits and actualized behaviors impede their ability to fully and appropriately participate in friendships, the impact loneliness and isolation is significant. As already mentioned, not only does isolation and loneliness negatively affect one's mental and physical health (Amado, R.S., 1993), but it also impacts one's conceptions of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Doll, 1996; Stainback & Stainback, 1987). Isolation can also increase the occurrence of anti-social and maladaptive behaviors and, consequently, will limit the individual's overall social and cognitive growth (Doll,

1996). The cycle perpetuates itself – maladaptive behaviors induce isolation and isolation strengthens the maladaptive behaviors.

The absence of friendships – and the negative repercussions of this absence– affects not only the child with a disability, but those who are part of his social ecology and surroundings. Families and caregivers are certainly among those most negatively impacted. For families of children with disabilities - especially disabilities which evidence extreme and challenging behaviors - it often becomes increasingly difficult to carry out daily activities and routines both in the home and out in the community. As such, these families are increasingly placed at risk for more "pandemic" social isolation (Vaugh, Wilson, & Dunlap, 2002; Vaughn, Clarke, & Dunlap, 1997).

From a general perspective, it is important to recognize the value of relationships to all individuals – regardless of ability levels – and for research to explore how relationships can be facilitated and cultivated across an individual's settings and circumstances. As reviewed in this chapter, previous research has helped define the varied forms and functions of relationships in general, and friendships in specific. What is more, it has made clear the importance of relationships – specifically friendships - to the fulfillment (or not) of individuals with disabilities, as discussed previously. However, to date, very little research has been conducted specifically regarding the importance and impact of friendships to individuals with significant disabilities as identified and voiced by these individuals themselves.

It is important to note that in spite of the large body of research pertaining to friendships for individuals with disabilities, overarching conceptions, perceptions and measures of friendships - and relationships in general - have relied heavily on information

gathered from everyone *but* the individual with a disability him/herself. As a case in point, Grenot-Scheyer, Straub, Peck, and Schwartz, (1998) in their article "Reciprocity and Friendships: Listening to the Voices of Children and Youth with and without Disabilities", focused heavily on teacher, parent and peer reports of relationships with little attention or reference given to the views and voices of those individuals with disabilities ultimately researched and discussed.

Ethnographic research has been conducted as a means of delving into the details and dynamics of the relational worlds of children with disabilities [for example, Debbie Staub's "Delicate Threads: Friendships between Children with and without Special Needs in Inclusive Settings" (1998), Susan Peters' "Integration and Socialization of Exceptional Children" (1990), Roberta Schnorr's "Peter? 'He comes and goes…': First Grader's Perspectives on a Part-Time, Mainstream Student", and Srikala Naraian's "Teacher Discourse, Peer Relations, Significant Disability: Unraveling One Friendship Story" (2011), to name a few]. However, again, in spite of comprehensive analyses and thick description of observational and other sources of data such ethnographic endeavors have similarly relied heavily, if not exclusively on reports and reactions of those around the individual with a disability, rather than on the individuals with disabilities themselves. For example, Naraian (2011) sought to strengthen meaning and understandings of the relationships of a child with a significant disability from the vantage of the classroom culture and context. Inter-subjectivity and agency of the child were identified as areas of paramount interest in this study. The voice and mediating actions of the teacher, however, were presented as the primary means by which relationship development and relational types were to develop.

Teacher and peer discourse, rather than the "voice" of the child with a disability, were the lenses through which relationships were viewed and understood.

Schnorr's ethnographic study (1990) parallels many aspects of the current research covered in this dissertation (the details of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). Firstly, her ethnography focused on the social participation of a single child, Peter, with a significant disability, specifically Down syndrome. Additionally, while Peter was assigned to a classroom for children with more significant disabilities, efforts were made to have Peter participate – or mainstreamed – into a first grade, general education classroom. Unlike the research presented here, Schorr's account of Peter's relational experiences were drawn from student interviews and consequently documented through the perspectives of Peter's general education peers. Specifically, students' perceptions of who Peter was as an individual, and how Peter's participation within the inclusive setting was perceived were both considered by the researcher. However, as with Naraian's research, neither the voice of the individual with a disability, nor his perspectives on his place and participation in the inclusive classroom were directly addressed.

Given the importance of relationships with regard to the overall fulfillment and happiness of the individual, and in light of the potential obstacles presented in relationship development for individuals with disabilities, especially significant disabilities, it is imperative that relationships be explored and understood from the distinct vantage of the target individual. We cannot seek to improve the quality of relationships for individuals unless we are clear as to what the meaning and importance of these relationships are to that same individual. Unlike previous research, this current research will explore the relational worlds of a single child with a significant disability. While relationships must necessarily be

explored in the contexts of dynamic interaction, the actions and reactions – ultimately the unheard voice – of the child with a disability will be studied in an effort to better understand and appreciate individual meanings and importance of relationships.

In sum, this ethnographic exploration will seek to uncover a greater understanding of where a single child with a significant disability sits within her relational ecology. What is more, attention will be given to understanding how a child's behaviors and affect or expressions may be used to identify the unspoken or un-hearable "voice" of a child with a significant disability as she participates within and across relational arenas. From this vantage, we will better understand her impact on systems which encircle her, and in turn, will better understand how these systems impact her. In attending to the individual and in hearing her voice, we may better realize the meaning and importance of her relational worlds. Such realization should not only help identify the agency of the child – her impact on cause and effect – within her relational worlds, but should better help to identify how this agency can and should not only be recognized, but also appreciated to as to best facilitate the development of positive and fulfilling relationships, and ultimately enhance her opportunities for happiness through friendship.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction to the Research

Certainly, humans are social beings – and social systems and strategies are significant in defining life styles, life stages and, ultimately, survival. While there may exist subtle to profound variation in social patterns and processes across populations and cultural groups, parallels in social relationships, in terms of both the form and function, exist globally. In spite of common socio-relational threads shared globally, much of what constitutes "relationships" and the importance and meanings attributed to relationships, especially *friendships*, are as varied and unique the social participants.

As reviewed in the previous chapter, there exists a great need to explore how friendships can be identified and defined for students with significant disabilities who may otherwise be unable to overtly or adequately express their feelings about friendship and friends. The importance of delving into the personal importance, meaning and unique manifestations of friendships between children with disabilities and their peers is pivotal to the improvement in the quality of and/or increase in the quantity of opportunities for full and meaningful participation or inclusion of individuals. In turn, meaningful inclusion and participation across social arenas may ultimately enhance the personal satisfaction and overall sense of fulfillment for the participant individuals.

The research for this dissertation was conducted in an effort to find means of more accurately identifying individually meaningful aspects - both in terms of form and function - of relationships of a single child with a significant disability (the definition of "significant" disability, as specific to this study, will be explored in greater detail in a subsequent section

of this chapter) and, in turn, to better understand the benefits and outcomes of social participation and experiences of this child. For individuals with more severe disabilities, cognitive, communicative, behavioral and physical limitations may make individual affect and expression difficult to interpret. Such difficulties have often lead previous research in this area to focus heavily on what is externally perceived, defined and presumed by those around the child with a significant disability, rather than drawing out, listening to and sifting through the layers of meaning and intent of the 'voice' of a child with a disability, unspoken though this voice may be.

Given such limitations of previously conducted research in this area, the principal questions explored with this current study are: (a) how can the relevance and meaning of relational experiences of a child with a significant disability be accurately identified; and (b) what are the actual, not simply perceived, effects and outcomes of the actual relational experiences of a child with a significant disability?

The specific objectives of this research were to closely study the expressions and responses of a child with a significant disability across her relational worlds and experiences. Through intense, individually focused observations the research endeavors to amplify the "voice" of the child with a significant disability in order to discern personal relevance, meaning and importance of social interactions and relationships. The identification of relationships, their appreciation, cultivation and the ultimate outcomes of friendship may help to not only enhance individual experiences, but also may help build and strengthen child-centered programming and planning (i.e., for daily living, schooling and community participation).

Approaching the Research

This research employed qualitative rather than quantitative methodologies. Specifically, an ethnographic approach was used for this research in an effort to better reveal and understand the "silent self" of – or the indiscernible voice and perceptions of – a child with a significant disability and to better understand the subtle cues and meanings of relationships for this child across educational settings.

Why a qualitative versus quantitative approach? The driving force of this research was the exploration of relationships – kinds and qualities – as revealed through the direct experiences and reactions of a child with a significant disability. Relationships, their forms and functions, are not simply defined, measured, or quantified. They are as dynamic and diverse as those individuals who participate in them. Similarly, the notion of disability is equally as varied in its definition and may be best conceived as "a continually transforming process rather than a static and individual characteristic" (Jones, 1996, p. 353).

The major axioms of quantitative methodologies (as contrasted with qualitative methods) rest on the understanding that 'reality' is a single and tangible entity that can be observed and measured. What is more, the entity or 'reality' under study is conceived as autonomous, independent and unaffected by time. These theoretical underpinnings aside, and as previously discussed in Chapter 2, quantitative measures, such as ranking and sociometric scales, of relationships/friendship among children with and/or without disabilities have proven to be problematic. Such methodologies as applied specifically to relationships among children have demonstrated weak correlations of nomination or rank to actual relationships (Doll 1996; Freeman & Kasari, 1998) and have led to biases stemming from differential expressive and cognitive skills of subjects (Freeman & Kasari, 1998). Given these

shortcomings, combined with the ambiguous, subjective nature of both relationships *and* disability, quantitative measures and methods were rejected for the purposes of this research.

By contrast, qualitative approaches to relationship and disability research offer the researcher access to the more subtle nuances and subjectivities of the concepts under study. When viewed through the more changeable, and interchangeable lenses of qualitative methodologies, the multiple realities of friendship and disability may be better viewed and appreciated. The adoption of a more qualitative approach allows for these notions to be accepted and explored as dynamic entities effected simultaneously by time (history), context (environment) and values (society and culture) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Jones, 1996). The exploration of these notions and their manifestations across contexts, will further elucidate how other variables such as attitudes, opinions and beliefs further moderate conceptions *and* manifestations of relationships and disability. In sum, qualitative research "can explore the nature and the extent to which a practice has a constructive impact on individuals with disabilities, their families or on the setting where they tend to work, reside or be educated" (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p. 196).

Why an ethnographic approach? In its broadest application, ethnology is a means of exploring the varied forms and functioning of cultural groups. In a very general sense, culture may be defined as "an integrated system of meanings, values, and standards of conduct by which the people of a society live" (Murphy 1989, p. 26). Culture is learned and shared within a population. Further, through the spatial and temporal transmission of culture, the phenomenon is fluid and ever-changing across generational participants. Given this conceptualization of culture, for the purposes of this study, the classroom and larger school

environments were conceived as real cultural phenomena, and therefore, could be best explored through a more culturally sensitive approach such as ethnography.

Ethnography is a descriptive and interpretive methodology (Brantlinger et al., 2005). It is holistic in its approach. As Jacob explained, "holistic [ethnographers] focus on the study of the culture of bounded groups with an interest in describing and analyzing the culture as a whole. [The] goal is to describe a unique way of life, documenting the meanings attached to events and showing how the parts fit together to an integrated whole" (Jacob 1998, p. 19). In accord with this definition, an ethnographic approach to understanding relationships and disability would necessarily look at these notions and their manifestations not in isolation, but as dynamic parts which respond to the great whole or culture of which they are a part.

Ethnography embraces the importance of cultural relativity, or the understanding that cultures can only be understood in and of themselves, and *not* in comparison to other cultures which may differ quite fundamentally from that culture being considered. In keeping with a relativistic approach, a full appreciation for and understanding of specific cultures can only be achieved once the underlying effects of subjectivity and ethnocentrism are recognized and overcome (Johnson, 2011). What constitutes a culture 'reality' is only to be understood through the unique language, behaviors and artifacts expressed and produced by that culture. In this present research, the terms and definitions of relationships and disability occur within a specific environment (i.e., the classroom), and may be considerably different from those observed in other cultural settings and groups, for example on the playground or at the individual's home.

Ethnographic studies are naturalistic in their approach, meaning that what is important to, or what defines a culture can only be drawn from what is directly observed

during natural and daily routines. What is more, and in order to fully grasp the subtleties and nuances of a culture, the ethnographers must fully immerse themselves in the culture, not only through observation, but through varied degrees of participation in that culture. With on-going participant-observations, the research will continue to accumulate knowledge in response to the ever-changing dynamics of the culture being observed. In many instances, ethnography has embraced a "dynamic, interactive-reactive" approach to understanding the circumstance and impact of cultural systems (Zaharlick, 1992). This approach has proven to be of great impact within educational research, insofar as it has provided the means through which educators have been able to "learn more about the culture of schools and about the total context of schooling so that they can be in a better position to improve educational practice" (Zaharlick, 1992, p. 122).

Given the above discussion, the qualitative methodologies inherent to ethnographic inquiry are those most suited to a study of relationships for a child with a significant disability. As Spradley (1979) summarized, ethnographic research is ultimately "a search for the parts of a culture, the relationships among the parts, and their relationship to the whole" (p. 92). Within a school, and even within a classroom, it may be argued that there is a certain culture which exerts a constant and subtle (or not so subtle) influence on both the classroom form and function. In turn, such a culture certainly impacts how relationships are conceived and realized. As such, relationships as culture, may best be understood not only within their larger context of culture, but should be considered as a sum of component parts or influences.

In focusing on a single child's relational experiences and the personal relevance of these relationships within and across cultural contexts and environments, it is hypothesized that more socially responsive, individually appropriate and relevant activities and programs,

across all social spheres or arenas of the child's life, may be coordinated. A greater sensitivity to the "silent self" will invariably support the building and strengthening of more inclusive educational and community environments which recognize, appreciate and respond to the needs of all individuals.

Embarking on the Study

Research site. Research was conducted at a public elementary (pre-kindergarten through fifth grade) school, in a city in north central New Mexico. Previous research on relationships and social participation for children with significant disabilities has suggested social opportunities and experiences and relationships tend to be more circumscribed when considered within the home and immediate community environment (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010). For this reason, a school setting was selected for research in order to capture a larger range of social situations and environments.

The school, Vista Alta Elementary, is in a quiet neighborhood nestled a mere block from one of the city's busiest intersections. The houses surrounding the school are mid-20th century, and showing their years. While most are well maintained, during the period of research a smattering of houses - just visible from the school-grounds - sported florescent fliers in the windows notifying of "condemned" status, a status reportedly *not* due to the *structural* condition of the house. The school itself was built in the late 1950s and, as the houses around it, is showing its age. In spite of, or perhaps *because of,* (in combination with?) a massive campus improvement project and renovation, the open-air campus is dusty and weeds climb up the chain-link fence surrounding the school. Evidence of their rampant seeding is visible throughout the school's inner courtyards.

Vista Alta was classified as a Title I school at the time of the study, and received federal funding to support the learning needs of those students identified as being socio-economically disadvantaged. A key socioeconomic indicator of student need for Title I supports was the number of students who qualified for the free or reduced price lunch program on campus. In total, 294 students participated in this program (or 63.8% of the student body).

Vista Alta is a school which serves a large number of students with disabilities. Out of the total student population registered at the school during the 2008-2009 school year (total 461), 100 were officially reported by the district as being enrolled in some type of special education program (22% of the total student population). During the research period eleven special education classrooms were in operation at the school including two Child Find programs, four Intensive Support programs (for students with significant cognitive or physical disabilities), three Autism–specific, and two programs for children with severe emotional needs. Additionally, an on-site special education resource teacher was employed full-time to serve additional students with less intensive learning needs on a pull-out (from general education) or consultation basis. Vista Alta was not the home or neighborhood school for a large number of students with more significant disabilities. Consequently these students received curbside (door-to-door) transportation to and from school. In the special education classroom wherein research was ultimately conducted, four out of the five students, including the focal student, were not attending their home or neighborhood school and were bussed to school.

The high number of students with disabilities on campus, especially students with significant disabilities, was a primary consideration when selecting a school for research.

Having worked at Vista Alta for three years prior to beginning my research I was familiar with the teaching philosophies and school mission of the school's principal, who strongly advocated for the maximal and appropriate integration of students with disabilities, generally for their inclusion within the general education environment. Special education teaching and support staff throughout the school shared and practiced these same philosophies and outlooks – these shared teaching philosophies helped to loosely define the school climate and culture. An additional consideration in selecting a research site was the extent to which students with disabilities were included and participated with their general education peers across environments and activities.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to distinguish between the various settings which often correlate with the education and participation of students with disabilities within the educational arena. The setting types considered in relation to this study were of three different kinds: a) segregated classrooms, b) integrated classrooms, and c) full inclusion classrooms. *Segregated*, or self-contained classrooms, consist of those settings wherein children with disabilities are educated in a special education environment completely separate from their general education peers, and have minimal if any social contact with their general education peers. To my knowledge, no classrooms at Vista Alta fell under this setting type. By comparison to segregation, the majority of classrooms observed at Vista Alta (including that of focal special education student observed) were noted to involve some degree of *integration* of the students with disabilities (or their partial, though not consistent, participation across environments and activities along-side their general education peers). The *full inclusion* (or the complete immersion, participation, acceptance and membership of students with disabilities within the general education

classroom and community) was not observed at this school. To restate, regular integration, if not inclusion, was the expectation by the school principal for all children with disabilities.

Participant recruitment and subject selection. A month before the 2008 winter break, with the school site selected, and permission granted by the school principal and the appropriate school district and university review boards, I was able to begin my preliminary research and recruitment. My first visit to the school included a lengthy visit with the school principal to detail the scope of my proposed research and to narrow down possible classrooms and students who would be most suited to my research. Because of my history at the school, and in an effort to minimize bias and to increase objectivity of selection, I requested that the school principal, Ms. Otto, select a classroom in which I could conduct my research. The primary criteria for the selection of a classroom, and ultimately the selection of my focal student, as specified in my proposal of research, were that: (a) the class contain a number of students, each with significant cognitive and/or communicative delays; and (b) that this group of children regularly integrated with their general education peers for a significant part of the day across school environments. Again, to minimize any potential biases, I further extended my criteria to include the conditions that: (a) the students in the classrooms were not students with whom I had previously worked or knew; and (b) the classroom teacher preferably not be someone who I knew well or had worked intimately with before.

Fortunately, during the year in which this research took place, there had been a high turnover of students due to progressions to middle school. As a result, all special education classrooms contained a large percentage of students new to both the school, and to me. Ms. Otto suggested an intensive supports program (ISP). These programs are intended to meet the

educational and other needs of students with significant cognitive, communicative, behavioral and/or medical considerations, by providing these students more individualized, intensive education programs within small group settings with high adult to student ratios. The placement of students within intensive supports programs at Vista Alta was individually determined by criteria specified on each child's IEP. Specifically, two placement criteria are considered. Firstly, the level of 'Special Education and Related Services' (specified as a percent of the day that a child is to receive the necessary supports and services) was determined. Secondly, the placement of each child on a continuum of alternative placements, or settings, (again a percentage, indicating the portion of the whole school day in which the child was to be served in a segregated setting) was specified. All the students in the selected classroom (including the child ultimately selected for study) were placed in this ISP setting based on the service and setting needs identified on their IEPs.

Given that I was seeking to study a student with a significant disability, it was important to ensure that the classroom (and ultimately the selected student) demonstrated characteristics and behaviors indicative of significant disability. While more global classifications of specific disabilities is certainly problematic (Connor & Ferri, 2005), it was imperative to this study to operationalize what was meant by "significant" disability. In addition to requiring the intensive supports and services, as previously discussed, the identification of a child with a significant disability required that this child demonstrate considerable delays (well below expected levels of the child's age) in areas of cognition, communication (both expressive and receptive), as well as behavioral and adaptive skill areas. While to varying degrees, all children in the selected classroom demonstrated delays in all skill areas.

The ISP classroom ultimately selected by Ms. Otto had Ms. Cash, newly hired to the school at the beginning of the school year, as the sponsor teacher. The classroom support staff consisted of two women. One of these classroom paraprofessionals, Ms. Lilly, was newly hired to the school. Although the other paraprofessional, Ms. Sandy, had worked at the school for years, I had never worked with her and had had minimal opportunities to interact with her over the years. There were five students in the classroom during the period of research, two boys (Marlon and Dennis) and three girls (Selma, Julia, and Annie). The grade levels of these students ranged from first to third grade (ages 6 to 9 years). The three girls were new to Vista Alta that school year. The two boys had been at the school the previous years, but I had only known them by name, and had never worked them. All students demonstrated significant disabilities correlating with diagnoses of autism, Down syndrome, developmental delays, and physical disability. All students demonstrated not only significant cognitive delays, but also communicative delays, as evidenced through both expressive and receptive language delays.

While Ms. Cash's students spent the larger portion of their day in the special education classroom, they also integrated on a daily basis with Ms. Kay's first grade general education class located directly across the small, grassy courtyard that separated the two rooms – a literal stone's throw between the two classrooms. Work 'buddies' from Ms. Tall's third grade classroom –located adjacent to Ms. Cash's and conveniently joined by a large opening (which was partially obstructed during the period of the research) between the two rooms - also came over to spend time with Ms. Cash's students, however, these visits were infrequent (often less than once per week) and brief (less than 30 minutes, on average).

Before research could commence, consent to participate forms, along with a letter explaining the scope and intent of research, were distributed to all teachers and school staff who regularly worked with Ms. Cash's students. During these preliminary days of "pre" research, I also met with Ms. Cash's, Ms. Kay's and Ms. Tall's classes separately to introduce them to me and my research. This introduction also made clear that no one needed to participate if they did not want to. However, if they *did* want to be a part of the research project, both the students and their parents would have to fill out forms and return them to me. After having spoken with the students, introductory letters and consent/assent to participate forms were sent home with the children. For those students in Ms. Cash's class, who were predominantly picked up and dropped off at school, I was able to meet with and speak with their parents/guardians individually to explain the scope and intent of my research.

Forms were distributed just after the Thanksgiving holiday, and the majority was collected prior to the start of the winter break. Official observations were to begin immediately upon the students' return to school in the New Year.

Preliminary observations began in the second week of January, 2009 and lasted for approximately three weeks. At this time, a focal student had not yet been selected. The intent of these early observations was to narrow down one student from Ms. Cash's class. This observational period also allowed me to familiarize myself with not only the students, teachers and staff across all classrooms, but also with the structure and routine on a daily and weekly basis. By the middle of the third week, and as explained in the next section, it was clear who my focal student would be. At this time, consent and assent forms were sent home

to the family of the potential focal student. These forms were returned by the end of that same week, so focused research could now get under way.

Primary participants. Julia, the focal subject, is a petite six year old girl diagnosed with Down syndrome. The selection criteria for the focal student, Julia, were as follows: a) the student received intensive special education supports and services; b) the student demonstrated significant cognitive impairments; and c) the student demonstrated substantial deficits in communication (both receptive and expressive communication). Julia was selected from an intensive supports classroom containing five students with significant cognitive and/or communicative disabilities. She demonstrated significant cognitive delays (as further corroborated by her teacher, Ms. Cash). Additionally, Julia demonstrated significant communicative delays. Julia was unable to expressively or effectively communicate to others using either spoken language or alternate forms of communication. Additionally, she had significant hearing loss which, combined with her cognitive delays (and concomitant delays in her ability to process and understand language and communication), limited her receptive communication skills. Combined, Julia's cognitive and communicative impairments made her the most suitable subject for this study as compared to all other students in her classroom.

Julia exudes enormous energy and spirit, the likes of which are only dampened by rare illness or fatigue. Her straight mousy hair is frequently coiffed and jeweled with clips, barrettes and bobbles. She is dressed to the nines on a regular basis with clothes and combinations thereof clearly planned with great thought and care. Although she arrives, neat and prim, each morning off the school bus, this often fades in light of the whirlwind of activity and motion she engages in.

Julia bears the evidence a life riddled with medical concern. A scar on her neck is a reminder of a tracheotomy, and a pronounced scar spreading from her belly to chest is a clear reminder of heart problems she faced as an infant and toddler. Julia is almost completely non-verbal, though she makes every effort at verbal approximations and is well-able to get her point and wishes across with her voice – be it a growl or a giggle. She is hard of hearing, and wears light pink hearing aids which – when they haven't been hidden or lost or accidentally broken - hang and dangle from her ear like an errant piece of jewelry.

Julia lives with her mother, her baby sister, and toddler brother. As reported to me by her mother, Julia's biological father moved away from the family when Julia was very young. As Julia's mother explained in her interview with me, she felt that "he took off because of it" – 'it' inferring Julia's disability (JM-17). For the early years of Julia's life, she lived or at the very least spent most of her time with her grandparents (her mother's parents). This period of research occurred during Julia's first year at Vista Alta Elementary school.

During the period of research, Ms. Cash, Julia's special education teacher, was midway through her second year as a teacher and was pursuing her Master of Arts in Special Education. At the time of this research, Ms. Cash was employed under an alternative license, and was in her second year of an internship program for the education of students with significant disabilities. Prior to teaching, she had been a classroom paraprofessional for students with significant disabilities. She demonstrates a real alacrity and compassion - not only as a teacher, but as a supporter and advocate. Her overall style and presentation of self is a clear and honest reflection of her creativity and personality. Ms. Cash has a commanding presence, which for the tiny frames of her young students, must seem imposing upon first meeting. However, her relaxed presence and easy smile are quick to put newcomers at ease –

something I experienced first-hand at our initial introductions. Her commitment to her charge as teacher goes beyond simply teaching, as was duly noted over the course of research. She is a strong advocate for her students with significant disabilities, and insists on their fullest participation across all areas of their life – from school and beyond. She is equally as eager to learn from her students as she is to teach them. Given these characteristics, it is no surprise that Ms. Cash showed no hesitation to participate in this research and was so giving of her time and enthusiasm to help it along as she was able.

Ms. Kay is a young, though nonetheless seasoned, general education teacher who, at the time of the study had been teaching in primary education for fourteen years. Ms. Kay has a substantial history of and solid reputation for her work and collaboration with special education teachers. Her manner towards all students – regardless of ability – is one of kindness, acceptance and no-nonsense. Her love and commitment to teaching is clear, and only superseded by the caring and respect she demonstrates for all those under her tutelage. As with Ms. Cash, Ms. Kay enthusiastically agreed to participate in research, expressing a great curiosity and eagerness to hear what the research would uncover.

Ms. Lilly is a former music teacher whose dedication to children and an apparent love for teaching brought her back to the classroom in the capacity of a paraprofessional. She had repeatedly admitted over the course of research that she missed teaching terribly, but could definitely do without the hassle of the logistics and baggage that seemed increasingly to be piled on the daily chores of the teacher. Ms. Lilly has a soft gentleness about her. She demonstrates no favorites in the classroom, rather is eager and demonstrably excited to work with all students. Rather than hover over the students, she is quick to grab a chair or bend to one knee to look at them, work with and talk with them at their level. She is as quick to help

a child, as she is to play and laugh with them. Towards the end of the school year, Ms. Lilly was called away for a family emergency. She was out of the classroom for close to the entire last month of school. The students from general and special education rooms alike frequently inquired as to her whereabouts and her likely return to school. The frequency and intensity of questioning spoke volumes as to how well Ms. Lilly was liked by those she worked with.

Ms. Sandy has worked at this school as a paraprofessional for well over a decade. She has a quick efficiency about her. Arriving to the classroom early every day, sometimes even before the teacher, she is eager to start organizing for the day. She is quick to take initiative, and had even volunteered to paint one of the classroom walls for Ms. Cash – yellowed and peeling of paint – so that it could be used as a display to showcase student work. Ms. Sandy is soft spoken. She readily works with all the students, and assists students, especially the special education students across all activities, including personal care and daily living activities. Her assistance is quick and often without solicitation. At times she will busy herself in classroom organization and cleaning activities while other activities are taking place in the classroom and she is not needed for assistance.

The total number of participants recruited for this study was 43. Of these 16 were adults, including one male and 15 females. The adults included primarily teachers and classroom support staff and therapists, but also included the school administrator and the focal subject's mother. The remaining participants were all elementary aged children, including 13 boys and 14 girls. The children who participated in this study were from general and special education classrooms. Five participants (including Julia) were classified as special education students and all of them had significant cognitive and/or communicative delays. Only one of these participants, Gary, was not a student in Julia's class. Rather, he was

a peer who Julia regularly encountered and interacted with in the cafeteria and across campus environments. The remaining students were from Ms. Tall's 3rd Grade classroom (N= 9, including four boys and five girls) and Ms. Kay's classroom (N= 12, including 5 boys and 7 girls). For the purposes of this study, only those students who returned both their assent to participate and consent to participate forms were included in observations which comprised data from videos, pictures, and field notes.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Data collection for this research occurred in three discrete stages. Each of these stages introduced a new data collection instrument. These three stages were: (a) Entrance and Introduction (to the field and the focal subject); (b) Observational Immersion; and (c) Closure of Research.

Stage One of data collection: Entrance and introduction. This stage of data collection occurred during the first month of direct, on-site research in January, 2009. During this stage of data collection, it was important to not only find and define my place as a researcher in the classroom, but also to define and understand the structure, function, climate and culture of this place wherein observations would be conducted. In embarking on this project, I knew that given the nature of my research my observations would likely lead me to myopathy as my lenses began to focus more narrowly on my single subject. For this reason, it was critical that I gather as much information and a sense for the larger environments and circumstances of which this single subject certainly and undeniably would be an integral part. In addition to understanding the more global context and conditions of "place" these earliest observations allowed me to identify a child who seemed to best meet my criteria for selection, including special education placement, cognitive and communicative delays, as

previously described. During this period, two separate data collection procedures were used: (a) direct observation; and (b) questionnaires.

Direct observations. Direct observations were conducted at this time as a means of introducing myself to and familiarizing myself with the classrooms and the participants, both teachers and students, therein. Direct observations, which included the collection of extensive field notes, will be discussed more fully in the next section.

Questionnaires. Within the first week of selecting Julia as my subject, and in an effort to inform my early observations of this little girl, I distributed a questionnaire to those who worked regularly and closely with Julia in her immediate home and school environments. The questionnaire was distributed to Julia's mother, her special education teacher, Ms. Cash, her general education teacher, Ms. Kay, and the classroom paraprofessionals, Ms. Lilly and Ms. Sandy.

Questionnaires are recognized as a useful way to collect and compare information from a target audience as a means of uncovering trends, themes or commonalities (Gay & Airasian, 1992). The questionnaire format was that of an open or unstructured item format (Ibid). It consisted of short, open-ended questions which required a very brief response such as a word or phrase, or short sentence. Specifically, the questionnaire asked the respondents to report on what they saw as Julia's likes and dislikes at home, at school and in the community. Additionally, the questionnaire asked the respondents to consider if there were any times during the day that Julia seemed to be more engaged or interested in engaging in activities, objects or people. Finally, a list of fifteen moods, emotions and states of being were listed and the respondents were asked to provide information regarding how Julia

physically appeared and responded relation to these varied states, moods and emotions (the results of the completed questionnaires are summarized in Appendix A).

As the intent of the research was to explore the “voice” and relational worlds of this little girl, it was imperative that preliminary research explore Julia’s modes of communication and expression. Because Julia was basically non-verbal, atypical forms of communication and behavior were her primary means of expression. The questionnaire was instrumental in building a rudimentary ethology (or descriptive catalogue) of Julia’s expressions and behaviors indicative of her likes and dislikes, moods and emotions – such behaviors which, in these early days of observation, might have otherwise evaded me. These questionnaires were reviewed and common themes in responses noted. When responses were not provided or needed clarification, member-checking was conducted and the respondents informally ask to clarify and/or elaborate on their responses to best insure that their responses were accurately and appropriately recorded. The questionnaire results were also later used in the analysis process to compare and contrast with the observational data collected.

Stage Two of data collection: Observational immersion. The bulk of research consisted of 122 hours of direct observations in the classroom(s) and across school environments. Observations were conducted for between two to five and a half hours each visit, with three to five visits per week (with the exception of weeks with holidays, parent conferences, and so forth). Observation times varied from day to day, so as to insure that all activities which occurred during a typical school week were observed repeatedly. Extensive field notes were taken during observation times and were reflected and elaborated on through the on-going process of research memo-ing.

For the purposes of this study, I elected to conduct my research almost exclusively as an "observer" rather than as a "participant-observer". As Wolcott (2008) suggested, in deciding one's role as an ethnographic researcher, it is often important to explore and create an inventory of "the advantages and disadvantages of various levels or participation in terms of the situation, the problem under investigation and his or her own personality or style" (p. 52). The research situation and the problem under investigation were the primary considerations which swayed my position and role in research. With regard to the latter, my research focus was to understand the personal and unique relationships of a child with a significant disability. While I did become included in the peripheral relational worlds of this child, and though I was inadvertently drawn into activities and relationships as a result of Julia's curiosity and social effusiveness, my research was intended to explore the naturally occurring relationships Julia participated in and responded to. My presence in the classroom did not factor into this "naturalness" or the preexistent socio-relational dynamics of Julia's world at school. Additionally, and in relation to the research situation, in no way did I wish to interfere with or alter in any way the teaching and learning that was occurring in the research setting – something that was made clear to all participants, especially the teachers and staff, prior to even beginning research.

The extent to which the role of a strictly passive observer impacts the behaviors of those being observed is cited as a concern to the ethnographic researcher (Wolcott, 2008). The primary concern stemming from the possibility that those being observed may alter their behaviors, and perform in ways they might not otherwise (Ibid). While an initial concern, my presence in the classroom, though never forgotten (I was regularly greeted and drawn in to conversations and asked questions by staff and students alike), ceased to be a distraction very

early in the study, and I soon felt as that proverbial fly on the wall might. As such, I was able to observe interactions and watch relationships naturally unfold and evolve between Julia and her peers.

Classroom observations included documentation of two key features which helped to define social interactions: (a) non-verbal behaviors, including but not limited to proxemics; and (b) language interactions and exchanges.

Non-verbal behavior. Proxemics and other non-verbal behaviors were explored during classroom observations. *Proxemics*, the study of the spatial relationships between individuals (Hall, 1963), were explored in the hope that they would reveal certain clues as to social affinities among individuals. Indeed, proxemics are argued to be strong indicators of an individual's attitudes towards others, and have been considered a key factor affecting classroom climate and expectations (Hughes, 1981). The study of proxemics has been applied from three different vantages or models (Ibid), two of which may be of tremendous value to the study at hand. These are: (a) the Enculturation/Socialization model; and (b) the Situational Resource Model (Gillespie & Leffler, 1983).

The *Enculturation model* supposes that individuals interact with one another based on the extent to which they know themselves (or believe themselves) to be similar to one another. Knowledge and beliefs about similarity are founded on societal norms. "Like norms in general, proxemic norms produce uniform individual behavioral patterns through the socialization process and internalization" (Gillespie & Leffler, 1983, p. 126). Interactional and social behaviors then, are indications of one's culture, or at the very least, of how an individual or group has been socialized.

In relation to friendships in the classroom study at hand, this approach was of merit. Certainly, all children will have brought with them to the classroom certain beliefs and misconceptions which have been instilled in them through their life-history of socialization. What is more, and perhaps more critically, students in a classroom will respond to the "cultural" expectations and attitudes as they are perceived and practiced within that environment. Thus, observing and documenting student *and* teacher interactions in the classroom, especially as related to children with disabilities, could provide certain clues as to the culture-context of the classroom, classroom norms, and classroom based attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

The *Situational Resource model* contends that social relations among individuals are largely influenced by structural factors in the environment. Specifically, the social structure – as determined by differential rank and status within the group – is of critical importance to understanding proxemic interactions. Individuals of perceived higher status (as perceived by the group, *not* by the individual himself), are assumed to have greater access to and control over the social space of which they are apart: "High rank produces more rights to space, a greater right to invade with impunity low-status subject space, and greater ability to protect rights to space than low rank affords" (Gillespie & Leffler, 1983, p. 137).

The implications of such a proxemic model for assessing social interactions of students with disabilities with those around them are clear. Students with disabilities, regardless of the severity the disability, who are newly included in the mainstream classroom, will already be considered "outsiders" to the group, and might automatically be excluded from participation (for reasons given previously). What is more, the student's degree of perceived status within this new environment will also affect the extent to which he

or she is included. Research supports that there may exist a hierarchy of preference towards disability (Tringo, 1970; Strohmer et al., 1984). In general, all individuals with disabilities may tend be lower on this hierarchy as compared individuals without disabilities (Miller et al., 2009). Among individuals with disabilities, those with mental illness or cognitive impairments have been demonstrated to be less accepted/preferred than individuals with more mild disabilities, including physical disabilities, sensory or other health impairments (Gordon et al., 2004; Miller et al. 2009). Given this, exploring proxemics from this vantage, a number of questions may be addressed including: How do adults/teachers respond to differences in disability in the classroom and across contexts? How do children respond to disability in the classroom? Further, and most importantly, how are adults'/teachers' responses to disabilities observed to affect the responses of others?

Additional non-verbal behaviors involved in social interactions were also assessed. A study by Rashotte (2002) substantiated that it is not just what an individual says that specifies a type of interaction or attitude (social vs. asocial or friendly vs. unfriendly), but equally, or more importantly, that it is what the individual does may be more indicative. Rashotte's study revealed that a single non-verbal action can carry with it very distinct messages. Such messages, Rashotte further contended, are potent in their affect and can significantly alter an individual's impression of interactions and events. The research further indicated that the meanings of non-verbal behaviors take on very real cultural value.

While hundreds of non-verbal behaviors are available for assessment (i.e., over 156 studied by Rashotte, 2002), the most important may be the most simple and apparent. From the classroom perspective, these may include postures, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, behavior, and voice (Hughes, 1981). In looking for a climate of acceptance – one

wherein friendships can be forged – one might expect to find positive and desirable nonverbal cues such as those which "express warmth, respect, concern, fairness, and a willingness to listen…[rather than] undesirable behaviors [which] convey coolness, superiority, disinterest and disrespect" (Hughes, 1981, p. 52).

Language exchanges. "Language is more than a means of communicating reality: It is a tool for constructing reality" (Spradley, 1979, p. 17). The classroom is one of the critical areas where children learn about and explore language. Indeed, students use language to communicate about their own realities ("I have a cool X-Box", "Jane is my friend"). But it is also a place where realities are constructed *and* reconstructed – conceived and misconceived ("Well, Jane can't be your friend. She is stupid, you know. She hit Mike yesterday, she'll hit you too!"). What children say, what a teacher says, what they say to each other *and* the messages (overt or subtle) all provide valuable clues to the classroom culture. Perhaps more importantly, how language is learned, altered and how it evolves can provide tremendous insights regarding the situational actions and processes which underlie and affect social interactions (Maynard & Perakyla, 2003) and friendship development.

Language is a central part of culture, it "is the principal medium through which we communicate messages, queries, knowledge and values to each other and pass them on to the next generation. It is the main vehicle of social life, for it mediates social interaction. It can be used creatively and flexibly to communicate nuances and shades of meaning and it can be used to mislead and dissimulate" (Murphy, 1989, p. 33). As interactional events, the documentation of varied forms of language- communication, in general (or the absence thereof) - will be critical sources of information.

Stage Three of data collection: Closure. Observations continued until the final week of school. In addition to these observations, interviews were conducted with select individuals. The interview was designed and implemented following Spradley's guidelines for ethnographic interviews (1979). Although a script of questions (See Appendix A for interview script) was drafted and followed, the ultimate form of the interviews manifest as semi-structured, as defined by their "open-ended", responsive and evolving nature (Wolcott, 2008). For such interviews the resulting information and responses were considered not merely for what they reveal at face value, but for more subtle markers of each responses "essence" and meaning (Gay & Airasian, 1992). As discussed in the previous section, language and discourse is a rich source of cultural data. *How* things are said, what is *not* said, and what is *implied* can be equally as weighty in importance when attempting to understand "culture" in all its complexity.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the last three weeks of field research, and coincided with the last weeks of the school semester. The interviews were conducted near the closing (and not at the beginning or middle) of the research period for the following two reasons: (a) so that discussions would not unwittingly influence or flavor student or teacher interactions during observations; and (b) so that comments made by the respondents would not unwittingly influence my perceptions and interpretations of those interactions I observed. In total, five interviews were conducted with teachers, staff and Julia's mother, and were included in the analysis of this study. These interviews, although the questions were scripted, did ultimately manifest as semi-structured in their presentation so as to best accommodate the varied needs, skills and levels of comfort of each interview participant.

The general and special education teachers and paraprofessionals interviews were conducted during the last week of school and during the summer break, as was most convenient to each of the participants. The primary intentions of the interviews were to: (a) revisit my topic and explain to what research had been conducted; (b) elicit a greater understanding as to what these participants thought about or observed in Julia's relationships; (c) answer any outstanding questions participants had; and (d) provide closure to the research. Interviews were digitally tape recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was on going throughout the research process, but can be distinguished by five principal stages: (a) preliminary analysis and introduction to place, context, culture and character; (b) detailed analysis of the focal child; (c) detailed analysis of the relational domains of the focal child; (d) analysis of differing perspectives regarding the relational worlds of the focal child; and (e) final analysis, bringing it all together. The analytical techniques employed across the research stages will first be described, followed by a brief discussion as to how each stage of analysis influenced the other, and the research as a whole. Figure 3 outlines the stages of the research process in as it paralleled with the stages of data analysis and the analytical methods applied within and across these stages.

Data Collection (Tools & Procedures)	Data Analysis Stages	Analytical Methodologies
Pre-Fieldwork **journaling**	**Pre-field work** **journaling**	Memo-ing
Stage I: **Entrance, Introduction & Becoming Familiar** **Observations** ▪ **Class culture** ▪ **Class dynamic** ▪ **Individuals in context** **Questionnaires**	**Stage I:** **Preliminary Analyses** **Analysis of:** ▪ **Place** ▪ **Context** ▪ **Characters** ▪ **Culture**	Memo-ing; Open-Coding
Stage II: **Observational Immersion** **Observation of:** ▪ **Proxemics** ▪ **Non-verbal behaviors** ▪ **Language**	**Stage II:** **Analysis of Focal Subject**	Memo-ing; Open-Coding
	Stage III: **Analysis of Relational Worlds of Focal Child**	Memo-ing; Open-Coding; Axial-Coding
Stage III: **Closure** **Observations** **Interviews with:** ▪ **Student** ▪ **Teacher** ▪ **Parent**	**Stage IV:** **Analysis of Relational Worlds & Perceptions thereof**	Memo-ing; Open-Coding; Axial-Coding
Post-Fieldwork	**Stage V:** **Final Analysis**	Memo-ing; Open-Coding; Axial-Coding; Selective Coding; Triangulation

Figure 3. **Stages of Data Collection and Data Analysis.**

Analytical approaches and methodology. Methodologies of Grounded Theory were fundamental to the analysis of research data. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) stressed, qualitative analysis is best conceived and applied as a "fluid and dynamic", multi-staged process (p. 101), the end goal of which is theory building – or the establishment of "a set of well-developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant … phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 22). As a qualitative methodology, Grounded Theory allows for empirical data be explored, interpreted and re-interpreted, and ultimately to inform emergent theories. Towards the end of Grounded Theory, and in an effort to draw out maximal meaning and cohesion for the data, this ethnographic research employed a variety of analytic tools and techniques. Techniques and tools were refined in response to the ever-accumulation of data and the cumulative complexity of information and meaning that these data revealed. Over the course of analysis, findings at each stage of analysis served to inform subsequent stages.

Open-coding was employed at all stages of the research (Stages I and II). Open-coding, through the microanalysis of information, allows for data to be separated and sorted into its finest bits of meaning and subsequently, to be sorted into categories defined by aspects of similarity and of difference (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Defined categories ultimately reflect "phenomena" or uniquely identified, defined, significant elements of "a problem, an issue, an event or a happening" (Ibid, p. 124). Because so many discrete data collection tools were employed over the course of this study, this technique was essential to teasing out information, including similarities and differences, from a variety of sources.

Axial coding began during the latter part of the Stage II of research analysis and continued until the end of the research period (Stage IV). As more information was uncovered, and further, as more categories were conceptualized, it became necessary to see how these categories related (or not) to one another and to their sub-categories. The examination of the interplay and interrelations between categories, as done through axial coding, allows for a broader, more comprehensive understanding of how these categories individually and/or collectively impact the larger relational phenomena. In essence, axial coding allowed for disparate and fragmented data to be explored together in light of causal, conditional and contextual conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In light of emergent, dynamic and evolving categories revealed through open coding, axial coding was employed as a means of understanding the interrelations of these categories in regards to the larger concepts or phenomena of "relational worlds". Ultimately, axial coding was integral to the identification and definition of the core categories which helped define and were recognized or observed to be significant to Julia's relational worlds.

The final stage of research analysis (Stage V) involved the application of selective coding techniques and triangulation. These analyses were conducted after field research had been completed and all sources of data had been micro-analyzed and appropriately coded. At this time, an outside reviewer was recruited in to help review the findings and to provide an objective view of the varying bits of data and the extent to which they spoke to (or not) the meaningfulness and clarity of those categories.

Selective coding was also used. With categorical trends, similarities and disparities identified along the various axes of reality (or the conditions of the observed phenomena), it was important to identify a core-category – or the larger phenomena that the summed

categories defined. During this stage of analysis the central theory is strengthened through the "integration and refining" of revealed categories and their interrelations (Ibid). At this stage, categories of the manifestations and perceptions of Julia's relational worlds subsequently helped to inform what exactly these relational worlds were and how they were defined.

Triangulation was an additional measure used. At the end of the field research and data collection period, a number of data sources, including questionnaires, observations and interviews, had to be considered and analyzed each in relation to the other. Triangulation allows for multiple sources of information to be considered simultaneously. Triangulation methodologies have been criticized for their lack of methodological rigor, specifically as relating to validation of research (Mason, 2002). However, and in specific relation to this dissertation research, triangulation methods are appropriate and appealing for two distinct reasons: (a) data manageability and organization; and (b) the need to consider multiple realities.

Regarding the first, the bulk of data analyzed for this study was accumulated from observational field notes. While appreciated as providing a wealth and breadth of relevant data – including a clear insight into the "voice" or voices being studied (Sands & Roer-Strier, 2006) – observational studies are also recognized for their lack of data manageability (Ibid; Mason, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Instead of attempting to tackle all data bits and threads contained in observational field notes, major themes and categories were drawn from more manageable sources (specifically interviews) and used to bring greater understanding and clarity to the more important bits of information already codified.

Regarding the second, triangulation helped in the process of understanding and reconciling what were different sources of data, reflecting different perspectives and voices. In essence, triangulation became "a useful tool for understanding the convergent, complementary and divergent ways in which reality is constructed" (Sands & Roer-Strier, 2006, p. 241). In certain contexts it may not be appropriate, meaningful or sound to compare methodological findings – or apples or oranges – the each to the other. However, in the context of relationships and disability – constructs which are as varied as those who either perceive or experience them – a fuller appreciation may be gained through the exploration of multiple sources, beliefs and perceptions, objective and subjective. Or, as explained by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) the process of triangulation allows for "the display of multiple, refracted realities (to be viewed) simultaneously" (p. 6).

The interplay of data accumulation and data analysis. The previous section explained which data analysis techniques were used and why. It is important to now discuss why these tools were used at the times that they were used. More specifically, in light of data collection and data analysis stages, this section will look at how each analysis stage or technique informed previous and subsequent stages *and* the research as a whole.

During Stage I, observational data and questionnaire data were analyzed. Observational data were used to codify and clarify aspects of the research environments and the dynamics of these environments which where wholly new to me as a researcher. These data also yielded information as to the individuals included in these environments, and hence, facilitated the appropriate selection of my focal student, Julia. During this stage, the identification of the focal student and subsequent data generated from questionnaires provided me valuable knowledge regarding the student, her likes, dislikes, moods and

behaviors – knowledge that may have otherwise taken me weeks to gain. Information gained through analysis in Stage I both led to and informed analysis continuing through Stage II and to the final stage of analysis.

Stage II, consisted of preliminary observations. During this stage, while all data were analyzed, the most crucial data collected and analyzed was that which was specific to the focal subject, Julia. This block of observation amassed a significant amount of descriptive data about Julia, her subtle and unique expressions of self, and her relational worlds. Analysis of this data was pivotal to the enhancement of categories, conceptions and perceptions derived from questionnaires (Stage I). Further, this information was critical to understanding how Julia, in all her uniqueness, factored into relational interactions, as observed in Stage III.

Stage III heavily analyzed data specific to observed interactions of Julia with others in her environment. Expressive responses were considered and analyzed with specific attention to interactions and interactive partners. Analysis of relational dynamics and responses allowed for specific relational patterns and partners to be identified.

Stage IV centered on the analysis of interview data. Microanalysis of these data allowed for the voices and opinions of others to be dissected and considered for possible trends and contradictions. An ethnographic interview is essentially a speech event – an event which is largely defined by cultural norms and rules (Spradley 1979, p. 55). As such, interview data are a reflection of one's own experiences, beliefs, perceptions and assumptions. The analysis of these data served to generate discrete categories of perception and belief regarding Julia's world, both real or assumed. These categories, in turn, proved

logical and central to the ultimate "refinement and integration" of theory during Stage V of analysis.

Stage V drew heavily on the data findings, including trends and categories revealed during Stage IV. Core-categories stemming from interview data allowed for all stages of research data collection and analysis (Stages I to IV) to be organized and considered simultaneously and collectively through triangulation. The phenomena that comprised Julia's relational worlds were further refined during this final stage of research through the application of selective coding techniques.

Reconciling bias and validating research. "Whether it is your personality, your professional training, or something else, you do not go into the field as a passive recorder of objective knowledge" (Agar, 1980, p. 48)

> "This concern with personality and cultural background of the ethnographer becomes even more critical when you consider that the ethnographer's background is the initial framework against which similarities and differences are assessed" (Agar, 1980, p. 43).

The role of the researcher is certainly not one easily defined or assumed. Going into this research project, I was not naïve to the many roles I would necessarily play over the course of research, nor was I unaware of the potential impact that these roles could have on my research. The fact remains that for any research endeavor the roles I will play, or those which will be assumed by or of me, will be great and varied. As such, prior to entering the field, it was necessary for me to make transparent my defined roles and extent of involvement in the field. Further, it was necessary for me to not only define my roles, but also to confront my positional and research biases in an effort to establish a neutral ground on which to meet and understand what was to be studied.

I carried with me into my research a bag of tinted lenses, each of which shaped my perspective of the "realities" I sought to study. Some of these lenses were somewhat more clear, relatively transparent and unobtrusive. Others of these lenses, however, may not have been subtle. These lenses included: (a) those of a researcher; (b) those of a special education teacher; and (c) those of a person with a disability. Though in some ways these lenses are strongly linked to who I am, they are nonetheless inter-changeable. Alone or in combination they are more like accessories to be donned or doffed as necessary and appropriate to the situation. In addition to the potential impact these lenses have on my view and interpretation of the world around me, these lenses also impact how that same world sees me.

As a *researcher*, I entered the field with an established and clear agenda. I sought to explore the relational worlds of a single child through a close examination of her "voice" as inferred through her actions, reactions and interactions. This was perhaps the most explicit and clear-cut role I played. However, I often had to reflect on how my roles as a person with a disability and as a special education teacher potentially could be biasing my interpretation of what I was studying.

As a *special education teacher*, I entered the setting with 6 years of experience as a teacher and a Master's degree in Special Education. My knowledge of disabilities, coupled with my established teaching philosophy (prefaced on the assumption that all students can learn and do have a right to learn) and instructional practices certainly framed a potential bias regarding how students with disabilities can and should be included in the general education setting. As Brueggeman (1996) explained, the experienced researcher is often caught in a constant tug of war – a struggle between the deceptive portrayal of the "novice" and the

reality of the "expert". As the "objective" researcher, it was essential for me to consider the following questions:

1) To what extent can or should my professional experiences be drawn in the research equation?
2) If my background in education is made known, how will this knowledge affect the expectations placed on me in the field?
3) More specifically, how would this affect my relationship with those who I am studying, most notably, the general education teacher?
4) As an insider to the teaching profession, how might my research motive be construed? Would my motivations be interpreted as an attempt to buck the system and make the life of a teacher more complicated with my findings?

As a *person with a disability*, I entered the research field with very strong, personal, deeply rooted biases. My system of beliefs ardently maintained that all individuals with disabilities should be afforded equal opportunities to experience and benefit from all aspects of life - opportunities for education and friendships certainly being among the most important. My frame of reference does not tolerate exclusion through segregation. However, my own experiences had made me aware that others (many others) are not so tolerant and do not necessarily share my perspective or practices. As an insider to disability and participant (witting or not) to a vague "culture of disability", it was important to consider: (a) to what extent would my research be rebuffed as biased, overly subjective; and (b) further, as a person with a disability, to what extent would others question my competence and ability as a researcher.

Reconciling these varied perspectives of the world around me was a challenge, though not an insurmountable task. I reconciled my primary role as necessarily being that of a researcher. With this established, over the course of research, it was imperative that my perspectives remain grounded and objective in light of the other lenses and potential biases that had been identified. In order to retain an objective stance, it was essential that my procedural and analytical approaches – my approach to theory-building in general – maximally ensured trustworthiness and credibility.

To ensure the maximal objectivity of my research, I aligned, and realigned myself and my research to the principal guidelines of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, I ensured that the outcomes of the research were negotiated so as to ensure the *credibility* of the study. The data and information collected were continually revisited so as to ensure that their varied forms remained aligned to the topic of focus – "the relational worlds of a child with a significant disability". I approached the topic of interest from as many different vantages and perspectives as possible so as to construct as rich and as clear a picture and understanding of data as possible. Triangulation, or the simultaneous consideration of multiple sources of data, and member-checking were employed as a means of strengthening the credibility of the findings/study. Member checking was especially critical following the analysis of questionnaire data wherein information which had been provided by participants was lacking, incomplete or unclear. Member checking was also vital to the interviewing process wherein participant perceptions and interpretations were used to corroborate and strengthen (or conversely to help revise and reconsider) how the data were ultimately interpreted. In doing so, I ensured the *transferability* of the study. I aligned all forms of data and methods of data collection (questionnaires, observation, and interviews) to ensure that

information gathered through each technique both informed and reinforced the focus of study. As such, the *dependability* of both the data and methodology was best secured. Finally, all data were collected methodically and purposefully so as to best *confirm*, justify and support the ultimate research findings. Again triangulation and member-checking were key to the establishment of trustworthiness. These techniques helped to ensure that the data reflected “reality”, rather than simply reflecting my own potential biases and predispositions (as previously outlined). The attention to such aspects of trustworthiness across all stages of research, including data collection and analysis, better ensured that the data more honestly and clearly supported to the topic under study, namely the relational worlds of a single child with a significant disability – Julia.

Chapter 4

Exploring the Relational Worlds of a Child with a Significant Disability

As reviewed in Chapter 2, how relationships are defined, in terms of both form and function, is highly variable. Indeed, how relationships evolve, and the forms and functions they assume are as varied as those who directly experience and indirectly perceive these relationships. The first part of this chapter will explore who Julia is, and how her relationships are perceived through the eyes of those around her, or the "other". The second part of this chapter will pay specific attention to Julia as she interacts with others across activities and environments. The range of relationships in which Julia is involved will be explored with an emphasis on her expressive responses and reactions and the roles she plays, or assumes, during different relational contexts. This emphasis on Julia as a specific player in relationships will help clarify not only Julia's role in her engagements but also the impact of these engagements on Julia.

A Child's Relational Worlds from the Eyes of "Other"

As the nexus of the study and as the primary focus of relationships observed, it was essential for me, as the researcher, to understand Julia. Upon beginning the research, Julia was an unknown entity to me. My understanding of her as an individual amounted to little more than the snippets of information that had been given to me by the school principal during our first meeting and conversation. Of course, Julia is far more than what was synopsized to me prior to my initial encounters with her. My preliminary understandings of who Julia were framed by information provided not by Julia, but rather by those around Julia – namely her mother and her classroom teachers. Additionally (and later in the research process) this information was supplemented by information presented through both

observations and interviews. During the earliest stages of research, questionnaires that were distributed to Julia's mother and teachers in her immediate classroom, helped to form the preliminary portal by which I was able to view and understand who Julia was. Clearly, this information represented the ideas, insights – ultimately the voices – of "others". Information culled from these questionnaires provided me with valuable insights regarding what were perceived by others as being Julia's likes and dislikes. Additionally, these questionnaires provided me some clues as to Julia's expressive and behavioral repertoires which were assumed to be indicators of her states of being and emotion. Subsequent interviews and observations served to further develop how others perceived Julia and her relational worlds.

Perspectives on likes and dislikes. In the first section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to provide some indications as to what Julia's likes and dislikes were, both across activities and times of the day. While each respondent provided very different responses, there were some common threads regarding what were noted to be Julia's likes and dislikes. With regard to likes, all respondents were unanimous in stating that Julia liked to play. Interestingly, playing was identified under two separate conditions, playing on her own and playing with others. Additionally, all respondents noted that she enjoyed helping others and being a leader to others. With regard to dislikes, respondents reported that Julia did not like to be told what to do. Such dislikes included being told 'no' or 'stop', being told to hurry up, being told to leave and/or to finish a preferred activity. Similarly, respondents reported that Julia did not like to be told to do something she perceived as "non-preferred", such as cleaning up her own messes or going to bed (especially when she was not ready to).

What is compelling about these identified likes and dislikes is the range of engagement they encompass. At one extreme, there is the indication that Julia enjoys being alone, or in non-engagement. At the other extreme, the responses suggest that Julia enjoys some degree of mutual engagement as would be expected when playing with others. Between these two extremes, a degree of unilateral engagement wherein Julia in effect, exerts (or attempts to exert) control over engagement by being a leader or helper, and by resisting the requests or directions of others. These degrees of engagement, which parallel her range of dislikes and dislikes, segue well with some of the relationships perceived by these same respondents, as will be explored in the subsequent section.

Perspectives on expression, affect and behavior. The second component of the questionnaire asked the same respondents to identify emotional and behavioral responses specifically noted in Julia with regard to her varied states of being and moods. These states or moods included “happy”, “engaged”, “comfortable”, “refreshed/energetic”, “excited”, “does not want something”, “mad”, “sad”, “bored”, “nervous/anxious”, “not feeling well”, “tired”, “wants something”, “afraid” and “confused”. In an effort to more fully capture the range and nuances of responses and states, the respondents were asked to identify notable or common gestures, vocalizations, body posture and facial expressions as typically coincided with Julia’s responses. The respondent information is summarized in Appendix A.

What was revealing and noteworthy, was the amount of information provided through these responses by each respondent. Two of the respondents (Julia’s mother and the classroom assistant, Ms. Lilly) provided information for all of the state and mood areas listed. Ms. Lilly’s comments were comparably extensive, and many of them written in paragraph, rather than point-form, as the other respondents. Julia’s special education teacher

provided information for 10 of the 15 state and mood areas, while the other classroom assistant only provided information for two of the areas. While this information was invaluable to me in providing me a preliminary view as to Julia regarding possible ways of interpreting Julia's expressions and behaviors across activities and interactions, it also provided me a strong insight as to how respondents (ultimately those adults who interacted with Julia regularly) were able to 'read' and interpret Julia and, consequently, how well they would be able to identify Julia's responses to relationships and the meaning, importance, and impact of these relationships to Julia.

Perspectives on relationship types. Interview data from classroom staff also proved valuable in revealing how those around Julia perceived her relational worlds. Specifically, these data provided insight into what type of relationships they felt Julia participated in while at school, the level with which she engaged in relationships, the roles which she frequently played in relationships, and those children with whom Julia interacted, and with whom she had more significant and mutual interactions, or, in other words those with whom she was inferred to have a friendship with.

In identifying types of relationships, one might loosely generalize that they fall along a continuum ranging from friend to foe. Although "friendship" is realized and lived very differently by each person who experiences and participates in it, there are some shared characteristics which may be said to overarch and define what friendship is on a more universal level. For the purposes of this dissertation, and as a reference point by which Julia's relational worlds may be compared, an operational definition of definition (based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2) is here presented.

> Friendships may be defined as individually, situationally, socially and/or culturally moderated relationships rooted by a sense of affinity or kindredness shared between two interacting individuals. Friendships manifest through pro-social, reciprocal engagements which are defined by a shared understanding of and appreciation for compatibility and equity in power. Such relationships are further defined by degrees of mutual attraction, affection and loyalty.

Approaching friendship. In the case of Julia, all interview participants seemed to support that Julia's relationships across school environments were predominantly those which aligned more closely to the "friendship" end of such a continuum. On this end of the continuum, Julia's relationships were differentially viewed as ranging from relationships which were explained as encompassing aspects of acquaintanceship and friendship, as each conceived and separately defined by the interview participants.

Ms. Cash expressed her belief that Julia's relationships, while approaching friendships, were more akin to acquaintances based on her understanding that anything more than that would require a certain degree of differentiation between individuals.

> I see most of them as like acquaintances, and kind of becoming friendships because at this point, she kind of interacts with most of the kids the same way. If she's in a good mood, she hugs everyone in the room. You know, she doesn't have like a favorite friend…. To be a friendship, I think you have to kind of differentiate her levels of people…. She loves her teachers and friends in her room, but again, it's kind of similar interactions with everybody that I see, you know? (MC4)

This notion of differentiation between relational partners as something defining acquaintances was echoed by Ms. Lilly who, although seeing relationships as friendships more so than acquaintanceships, noted Julia's tendency to treat or respond to her peers in much the same manner. As she explained, "I don't think she has formed a consistent friendship/relationship with anybody because I think she thinks that everyone is involved in her circle in one way or the other" (ML1). However, though Ms. Lilly did express that some interactions may not have manifest at much beyond an acquaintance level, she did clarify that

some relationships evidence a greater consistency ("of sweetness") and greater significance which better aligned certain of Julia's certain interactions with friendships. As she explained: "They are friendships for Julia, I believe. They may not be close friendships because it is not a consistent, um, sweetness" (ML1). As she elaborated, in contrasting interactions between peers in Ms. Tall's and Ms. Kay's general education classes, "I think the friendships, the bonds are a little deeper because there is a consistency with her relationships… to her, they have nothing, you know, no significance – there is no significance between Julia and those children" (ML4).

Ms. Kay's perceptions of Julia's relationships further help to define a distinction between friendships, as opposed to acquaintanceships. As Ms. Lilly and Ms. Cash, Ms. Kay also explained that acquaintances embodied a lack of differentiation and demonstrated a certain separation (rather than interaction) between relational partners. In her words, she viewed acquainted individuals as those who are simply "side-by-side" (MK3). Interestingly, this term evokes images and notions of special education service models wherein classrooms for special needs students were located next door to their general education counterparts, but interactions between the classes was infrequent and oft-times planned and choreographed.

By contrast to acquaintances, Ms. Kay explained that friendships were "more voluntary" (MK3). What is more, friendships were not 'expected'. In speaking of her students, and in explaining their relationships with Julia, Ms. Kay expressed, "there was no set expectations of 'this is how you interact with this person (Julia)'. They (figured) it out on their own. They wanted to figure it out on their own, I guess" (MK3). The natural formation of friendships, occurring in the absence of expectations, offers another counter point to

acquaintances, namely their persistence over time and across circumstance. As Ms. Kay explained: "I think in general it's that all of them are more than acquaintances…for most kids, I would say it is a friendship, but I know, like next year, the kids that were in my class, I think they will seek out Julia. Or when they see Julia they will, you know, make a big deal to interact with her" (MK2).

In defining relationships such as those bordering on friendship, the interview participants suggested that Julia and her peers appeared to respond to one another in such a way they interpreted as being "friendly". For Julia, the interviewees reported that her more typically "friendly" responses to peers were often marked by her expressions of concern for others and her eagerness to help others, a proclivity to horse around and tease her peers and, finally, the affectionate and loving nature she expressed towards many of her peers. As Ms. Sandy says of her responses to classmates, "she'll hold hands, and she'll hug them, and really look at them like, you know … like she likes them a lot… you know? She likes to be with the others" (MS 2).

With regard to peer responses to Julia, the interviewees provided very few comments to support or substantiate a reciprocity or mutuality in friendship. Interviewees provided little information regarding how peers were perceived to feel about and respond to Julia. Instead, their responses were focused more closely on Julia's own role and responses in relationships. As such, what was reported regarding the gains (or otherwise) to be had by Julia during peer interactions did not speak to mutual gains (appreciation, enjoyment or otherwise) on the part of her peers. As such, descriptions and perceptions of relationships did not allude to a reciprocity that could better define her interactions as those relating to "friendship". Rather, perspectives on relationships predominantly considered Julia and Julia's enjoyment or the

benefit to Julia of peer interactions. The following quotes help to illustrate this (emphasis added):

> Ms. Cash: "If you see *her face* [Italics added] when she's getting something with another kid, when they're actually interacting and actually enjoying each other's company, *she loves it*, [Italics added] she loves being around other kids…. *She wants to be* [Italics added] around other kids" (MC5).

> Ms. Lilly: "I think that out on the playground *she really enjoys it*, *she loves it* [Italics added] because she is just another kid out there on the playground" (ML 3).

While peer responses to Julia, as specific to possible friendship, were not clearly identified, all interviewees did hint at a certain degree of general acceptance of Julia by her peers. Ms. Lilly commented on the extent to which "acceptance" was demonstrated by peers and teachers: "I think that she walks into Ms. Kay's class feeling accepted. I think that Ms. Kay makes her feel that way. I think that sometimes the circle of children she sits near helps her feel that way" (ML8). Interestingly, Ms. Kay's perspectives of peer acceptance, though hopeful, seem much more reserved and tentative, as she simply states: "But I would hope that she sees herself as being accepted in whatever situation, on whatever level she can understand, kind of thing" (MK 7).

As the interviews revealed a paucity of references to peer reactions and responses to Julia, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which those relationships perceived and interpreted by teachers specifically align with aspects of sharedness and mutuality in the operational definition of friendship. In fact, while teachers did overtly identify Julia's relational worlds as more closely aligned to friendships (or something close to), other more subtle markers of reciprocity, mutuality, equality, and so forth, were not made clear and therefore could not be used to support or strengthen these claims. What was culled from the

information (or lack thereof) brought to light a range of relational interactions not specific to "friendship".

Friendship or something else? Indeed, in the previous section the various perceptions of Julia support an understanding or perception that her relationships were friendship, or something approaching friendship. In many ways, while each interviewee's perceptions do embrace various elements of friendship as operationally defined previously, these perceptions are also a reflection of individual perspectives of and constructions of friendship. Such individual constructs may in fact be specific to or conversely irrelevant to Julia's realized relational worlds. A closer inspection and codification of interview data revealed certain recurrent themes and interviewee perspectives and observations suggestive of relationships divergent from, or even conflicting with "friendship". More specifically, interviewee responses also suggested that Julia's relational worlds may also have been defined by degrees of inequity and isolation.

Together doesn't mean equal (unilateral or inequitable relationships). A closer review and coding of the interview data revealed that, although not overtly stated or identified as such, the interviewees' perceptions of relationships and interactions hinted at a certain hierarchical or unilateral structure prevailing over interactions. To reiterate, all interviewees did support that Julia enjoyed being with and participating with her peers and that, in turn, her peers did accept her as a participant. However, a hierarchical inequity was touched on by interviewees. All teachers recognized that Julia's peers often assumed roles akin to being a teacher, helper or disciplinarian to Julia. Each of these relational roles suggests an inequity in power within the relationship – the implication being that Julia assumed a role subservient to her peers - namely those roles of learner or student, 'helpee' or

helpless person, and wrong-doer, respectively. As the following comments below suggest, the resulting hierarchy may have been influenced by differential perceptions of age and ability.

> Ms. Lilly: "I think that there's children in Ms. Kay's class are realizing that Julia's intellectual skills are not as high as theirs so they're treating her more as a little younger child and wanting to help her, wanting to show her things rather than playing with her. You know? So she has a peer relationship but it is not on the same level" (ML2).

> Ms. Kay: "Sort of like a hierarchy kind of thing, but not manipulative or anything, just being able to show Julia something" MK2.

While not necessarily or uniquely based on any perceived inequity of status or power, other perspectives on relationships seemed to imply a degree of unilateral-ness, or one-sidedness, which again suggested a lack of mutuality. This one-sidedness was expressly noted on Julia's behalf. As stated by Ms. Sandy, in many instances – relational and otherwise – Julia followed her "own agenda". This thought was furthered by Ms. Lilly who explained that in many ways, it was Julia who took control of relationships and peer interactions by "allowing" for friendships to occur, or not. Interviewees repeatedly and strongly voiced this unilateral-ness with specific regards to the ways in which Julia approached and interacted with her peers. The following two quotes illustrate this:

> Ms. Kay: "I think she wants to have the control of the relationship a lot of the time, I think she wants it to be on her terms, yeah, I mean her terms and when she wants to do, when she's okay interacting, she doesn't want to be forced (….) I don't think that the kids saw it as much as I saw it being on her own terms, I don't think they saw it as much as being on her terms. But I think Julia had it on her terms" (MK6).

> Ms. Cash: "At the beginning of the school year she was really, um, the nurse, the teacher, the boss…. (it was) um just a kind of a … less of a relationship of peers and more of a relationship of 'I'm gonna kind of boss you'. Or, you know, 'I'm going to tell you what I want you to do' (and) …she'll still tell them, give them the business and say, you know, 'be quiet, do it'…." (MC1).

Going 'solo'. Interview responses also indicated that there was a separateness of Julia from her peers. Instances of separateness as presented by the interviewees were divisible into two discrete categories: (a) a separateness imposed by self – or, in other words, Julia simply electing to be by herself; and (b) a separateness resulting from rejection by others. With regard to self-imposed separation, Ms. Cash noted that, although Julia typically participated in the same activities with peers, her direct peer interactions were often limited, if present at all:

> It's still a lot of parallel play. There is some play with people, but a lot of the time it is adult facilitated…. But, you know, there's less independence with its play with another student. And when it is working beside other students, you know, she's not typically engaging with them… (MC4).

Ms. Sandy further explained that in some circumstances, Julia's behaviors and responses appeared to suggest to her that she simply preferred to be on her own:

> Again, on the playground, uh, she's a lot of the time, she wants to be by herself (MS4) [and]… outside … she has her own little agenda out there, she'll get on the bars and she will just climb and hang and… that's her own territory, that's her little spot there (MS8).

While some interview responses suggested a desire on Julia's part to be apart and separate from her peers, other responses indicated otherwise. More specifically, these responses suggested that some of Julia's separateness, or lack of peer interaction, may have been, at least in part, the result of peer rejection or disapproval.

> Ms. Lilly: "Some of the children don't actually want to be close to Julia because of some of her behaviors, picking her nose, or her touching them, putting her fingers in her mouth and then touching them. And they don't like this. It is kind of a turn-off" (ML1/2)
>
> Ms. Sandy: "In the cafeteria "They don't invite her… I don't see them inviting her very often, but she'll take it upon herself to pick up her tray from our table and just go right over there on her own…. Until she starts, you know (…) then she'll start picking at their food … and bugging them a bit and they move away" (MS5).

Perspectives on relational partners. Given the above synopsis of teachers' perceptions and perspectives on Julia's relational worlds, although a range of interpersonal dynamics (divergent from 'friendship') were identified, "friendships" themselves (or at least, something approaching friendships) were the pre-eminent relational types overtly identified by the interviewees. With "friendship" as the predominant relational realm identified, it is important to note which peers teachers perceived or identified "friends" (or "acquaintances becoming friends") to Julia.

In general terms, Ms. Lilly reported that she was friends with all the children in both Ms. Cash's and Ms. Kay's classrooms (as opposed to other children, for example from Ms. Tall's classroom, who were of no significance, and more like acquaintances). Ms. Kay said she felt that she seemed to have a stronger bond to boys in her special education classroom because, as she explained, she was at the same level as them in terms of her disabilities. In contrast, in her classroom (general education), she saw that Julia sought out interaction with the girls more frequently. This affinity or attraction to girls Ms. Kay attributed in part to the eagerness and effusiveness with which the girls in her class would invite Julia to come and sit with them.

In the interviews, two adults were identified as friends. Ms. Sandy identified herself as being a friend of Julia's. Ms. Lilly also identified Ms. Kay as being a friend to Julia insofar as she made her feel accepted in the classroom, as did her students in general. In addition to these adults, nine children were specifically named as being relational partners with Julia. Of these nine students, five were girls. They included Aretha from Ms. Kay's class (who was identified by all teachers, or n=4), Annie (from Ms. Cash's class) and

Monique from Ms. Kay's class (n=2 each), as well as Alexis and Polly, both from Ms. Kay's class (n=1 each). The remaining students were boys, and they consisted of Marlon (from Ms. Cash's class), Nate, Eddie and Jackson, from Ms. Kay's class, each of whom was identified by one teacher as being a friend.

Observations of a Child: A Range of Relationships and the Many Faces of Friendship

The interview data presented unique and varied perspectives regarding Julia's relational world. The loose categories which emerged from interview analysis proved to be valuable guides for the review and coding the 122 hours of actual, observed interactions between Julia and those around her across school environments. In this section, observational data will be explored so as to understand how Julia's observed relationships fit within the previously described categories, including "friendship" and "something like friendship", as well as those more loosely conceived relational worlds, including more unilateral or solitary engagements. After repeated reviews and coding, and recoding, of observational data, four general categories emerged. These categories of engagement appeared to fall along a continuum of relational worlds, ranging from complete, voluntary isolation on one extreme to full participation and mutuality at the other extreme. Figure 4 provides a graphic overview of each relational category as constructed from the observational data. In this graphic, Julia is represented by the shaded circle. As each of these identified categories is discussed, specific attention will be given to how Julia responds, both in terms of her behavior and her expressions and affect, to each relational circumstance. Given the scope of research and the wealth of information which presented itself over the course of observations, and the subsequent coding of observations, it was not possible to document all responses and circumstances. In order to capture the essence of and to identify trends in the relational

Solitary – Voluntary	Solitary- Involuntary	"Fringe"	Unilateral- Unreciprocated	Unilateral Hierarchical	Mutual – Changing	Mutual - Static	Friendship
▪ Separate ▪ No interaction	▪ Separate ▪ Involuntary ▪ Attempted interaction by one or both	▪ Together, barely ▪ No interaction ▪ Indirect participation	▪ Together ▪ Interaction unilateral, not mutual	▪ Together ▪ "Larger" indiv. controls interaction ▪ "smaller" indiv. responds	▪ Together ▪ Mutual interaction brief inconsistent ▪ "Larger" indiv. assumes control	▪ Together ▪ Mutual interaction ▪ Brief , inconsistent	▪ Together ▪ Mutual interaction ▪ More prolonged, more consistent

Figure 4. **Continuum of Relational Worlds.**

worlds of Julia, key observations, or vignettes, are used as illustrations. These vignettes do not reflect absolutes; rather they are here used as indications of what were found to be important trends in interactions and relationships as observed over the course of research.

Prior to exploring each relational category, it is important to recognize that none of the identified relational "types" discussed here represent absolute, discrete or static entities or events. The placement of each relational type on a continuum serves to underscore the understanding that each is fluid and changing in nature. In many respects, their very placement on this continuum supports that many of these types may share some characteristics between each other. What is more, insofar as these types are conceived of as fluid and changing, each type may be said to morph. As such, relationships change in their form and function across time, space and across context in general. With regard to change over time, and as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, a relationship may vary from minute to minute to minute, second to second, as well as over more broad expanses of time and personal growth and experience. Environment and ecology (as discussed in Chapter 5) also are of significant impact on how relationships initially form and how they change. As such, in reviewing the observational data, it is critical to understand that what emerges reflects themes and trends in rather than concrete or unchanging manifestations of Julia's relational worlds. Given this, the definitions of relationship types as developed and defined below provide a general, though certainly not absolute, structure to relationship types which were observed over the course of the research.

"Solitary engagement" is defined those situations wherein no interaction or engagement is noted between Julia and another individual. Typically, this category included observations wherein Julia was physically isolated or separate from others. However, this

category also included observations wherein Julia was surrounded by peers, but was completely unaware of or disinterested in those around her, and vice versa. To reiterate, "solo" activity is chiefly defined by a lack of interaction with those around her.

"Fringe participation" ("Fringe-ship") is defined by those situations wherein Julia appeared to be engaged or interested in who was near her and what was happening around her. Unlike the previous category, she was not completely disengaged or isolated. However, for this category, no real interactions with other individuals were observed to occur.

"Unilateral Relationships" are defined as those observed interactions wherein a noted imbalance existed between Julia and her interactive partner(s). What distinguishes this category from the previous two is the observance of (rather than an absence of) social or interpersonal contact and engagement between Julia and another individual. Unilateral relationships consist of either "hierarchical" or "unreciprocated" relationships. For *hierarchical relationships*, interactions observed suggested that interacting partners, including Julia, played very disparate roles in their engagements. What is more, these hierarchical interactions appeared to reflect inequities of power, real or perceived, between individuals. *Unreciprocated relationships* are defined as those unilateral relationships wherein one individual attempted to engage another in an interaction, but these attempts are ignored or rebuffed by that other person. More specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, unreciprocated relationships were identified as being those wherein one individual appeared to want to engage another in positive and mutual interactions.

"Mutual Engagement" is the final category. As with the previous category, mutuality did involve the direct interaction between Julia and another individual. What distinguishes this category from all previous categories, however, is that these interactions appeared to

demonstrate a greater degree of equality and reciprocity. What is more, these interactions were marked by a visible or apparent interest and enjoyment in interaction for each participant individual. This relationship category is the one which, therefore, most closely aligns with the definition of friendship as previously operationalized. As such, "mutual engagement" included those interactions which Julia appeared to be engaged in, or which were approaching friendship, or something like it.

Solitary engagement: Julia on her own. ***Voluntary solitary engagement.*** Over the course of research, Julia was observed to engage in solitary activities. Through the sorting and coding of observations, such solitary activities were categorized into two discrete subgroups. These subgroups were largely defined by how Julia's solitary activity came about; namely, did "solo activity" occur as a result of Julia's choice and preference or, conversely, was "solo activity" determined by someone other than Julia herself.

The majority of solitary activity observed in Julia appeared to be guided by Julia. These solitary activities included self-amusement activities. Working on her own, playing on her own, mimicking activities, and escape behaviors were all observed and seemed to indicate that "being alone" was often a choice for Julia. Each of these activities will be illustrated below.

Frequently, in both the general education and special education classrooms, Julia would effectively separate herself from her peers to do *work activities*. Given the fact that most work or academic activities took place in the company of both peers and adults, her separateness often resulted from Julia physically separating herself from the rest of the class. However, she also appeared to achieve the same result by simply "shutting out the world

around her". The two observations below, demonstrate how "solo engagement" manifests itself very differently in two work activities.

> Ms. Kay's and Ms. Cash's students are gathered on the floor for calendar activities. Julia is smack-dab in the middle, but slightly turned off to one side, of the group. The students, in various states of unrest - it's April, after all, and spring-fever has certainly started to settle in - are mostly looking to the front of the class where Ms. Kay is leading the calendar activities. Julia's head is bent forward as she looks down, inspecting her knees. She stretches backwards, splaying her arms behind her, lifting her bottom up off the carpet. With a sigh, she sits again, and draws her knees up close to her chest. She stares blankly down at the carpet in front of her, her mouth slightly open. She sighs again and pulls the skirt of her dress up tautly over her bent knees. She hits the fabric where it is tented over her legs, then tips her head down and buries it in the cave that forms between her knees. She starts shifting and rocking in her seat and becomes distracted by her hair which begins to fall forward and swing at the sides of her face. For a few quick seconds, she begins to brush her hair forward over the top of her head to cover her face. She shifts in her seat again, and one of her hands goes up under her skirt. From up front, Ms. Kay says, with a questioning look on her face, "Hands on lap. What are you doing?!" Julia looks up, but not immediately to Ms. Kay, with a blank look on her face, almost as if just woken from a deep sleep. Ms. Rosanne approaches and sits next to her, redirecting as the calendar activities continue (4-93).
>
> Calendar activities have just finished, and the students are all standing and scattering to collect their calendar folders to take to their work tables. Julia is one of the first to stand. With calendar folder in hand, she rushes to her seat and immediately opens her book to start coloring. Her head is bent low and her face is inches from the paper she is coloring intently on. Her hair is cascading forward on either side of her face. Her expression is not visible, but it is clear that her jaw is grinding in concentration as the low gnashing sound can be heard from where I sit. After a few minutes alone, the students from her table come to sit down, one by one. Julia does not once look up. As calendar folder time draws to an end, and Ms. Kay beckons the students to regroup at the front of the room, Julia's attention remains focused on her page (1-74).

Julia was also observed to amuse and engage herself during *play activities*. Play opportunities were interwoven throughout the school day. Routinely, recess and self-selection were the most frequently observed play periods. Additionally, however, as the semester progressed and as teachers became preoccupied with testing for all students, play-like activities were introduced with increasing frequency during rotational "committees"

which occurred in Ms. Cash's classroom. Certainly, Julia did not always engage in solitary play activities, however she did tend to engage in these types of more than more social play activities with her peers, especially across the more routine play times such as recess, self-selection and committees.

Recess breaks typically occurred three times each day – once in the morning, once in the afternoon, and once during the lunch period. Recess occurred either outside, or inside depending on the weather and classroom circumstance (as discussed in a subsequent section). During recess periods outdoors, Julia was most frequently observed on the swings, but also was often on the monkey bars or wandering around the playground briefly visiting any number of play structures. As will be discussed in a later section (Mutual Relationships), Julia did increasingly engage with other students when outside, however, more often than not, she was observed playing on her own. The following observation illustrates Julia's typical solitary play as observed during recess:

> The recess bell rings. Julia's head springs up at the shrill sound. It takes a quick second for the noise to register, but when it does, a smile spreads across her face. She drops the marker she has been coloring with, and dashes to the back door. Once outside, she heads straight for the swing set. She approaches the closest one to her, and attempts to climb up. The ground beneath has been excavated into a deep well – the result of many little feet having swung back and forth over the spot. With a sigh and furrowed brow, Julia lays herself stomach down over the swing, her arms and head hanging loosely over the other side, in a posture of near-defeat. Seeming to regain her strength, Julia rights herself and firmly grabs the chains on either side, and with a determined effort succeeds in pulling her tiny frame up. She lets out a loud squeal of pleasure and a huge grin – screaming of pride and accomplishment – spreads across her face. She begins pumping her legs forcefully back and forth. I note that this is the first time I've ever seen her swing without being pushed. The look of pleasure and accomplishment only slowly fades as one of determination and focus sets in. Her eyes are glued to her white stockings and black boots as her legs pump faster and faster. Her eyes are soon distracted by the shadow that moves and swings beneath her. The relaxed smile on her mouth speaks to her comfort and contentment as she swings higher and higher. Another student (unfamiliar to either Julia or I) begins swinging next to her, but Julia seems not to have noticed. After a few minutes,

> she begins to slow herself. As the swing nears a stop, she leaps to the ground. Her hands quickly brush down the sides of her pink dress as if to straighten it, and then fall to her side, fists clenched. Her head is slightly tipped with an air of determination as she marches sure-footedly away from the swings. For what remains of recess Julia wanders, seemingly without specific aim or destination, around the playground. She appears to neither seek out, nor engage any of her peers. For all appearance, she is content to be exploring and playing on her own (4-62).

Indoor recess also found Julia frequently amusing herself. Typically during indoor recess, the students in Ms. Cash's class self-selected toys or games to play with. During indoor recess, Julia's favorite toys seemed to include an over-sized Pirate Mr. Potato Head and magnetic letters located on the main white board in Ms. Cash's classroom. Very infrequently, a handful of students from Ms. Kay's class would sneak into the back door of the classroom, and play with (or at least among) Ms. Cash's children. Typically, however, Ms. Cash's students, including Julia, would be on their own for recess during which time they usually dispersed throughout the classroom and each engaged in separate activities.

> It is a beautiful, sunny day. Ms. Lilly is absent today, however, so Ms. Cash's students are staying inside. Julia is wandering around the classroom, arms hanging limply by her side. Her eyes are scan the room, but seem not really to be looking for anything in particular. Her mouth is slightly open. Her posture is relaxed and her movements slow. Eventually, she walks to the toy shelf and selects a book. Book in hand, she drops to the floor. As she presses the various buttons on the book, voices and music can be faintly heard. Julia having detected and curious about the sounds, holds the book to her right ear. A faint smile finds her lips, and she lays, stomach-first, on the floor the book under her ear as a pillow. Her eyes are half-closed and mouth partially open as she continues to poke and listen to the book. Ms. Sandy is sitting on the floor a few feet away from her feet. Julia seems unaware, or uninterested in her presence. After a few minutes, Ms. Sandy gets up and walks to another student. Julia looks up with wide eyes and a half-hearted growl as she leaves (4-148).

While Ms. Kay's students did not join Ms. Cash's students for play during indoor recess regularly, they did join Ms. Cash's students in their special education classroom for committee work activities. While there was typically an academic component to committees,

namely a read and color book, with the activity complete the students were timed and allowed to rotate through a variety of activities (computers, painting, puzzles, and so forth). Very often during committee rotations, Julia, while she would wander and approach her peers and their activities with some curiosity, more often than not, she would not typically engage with her peers.

> A handful of students are in Ms. Cash's class for committees and rotations. Julia has selected to work first on the computer, but soon gets up from her seat and wanders to where students are playing with large, colorful Styrofoam shapes on the table. Just as she approaches, the timer rings, indicating it is time for everyone to switch stations. Julia sits at the table alone for a few seconds, looking mildly at the blocks and around her, before she walks over to the white board where she begins to play with the magnetic letters by herself. As she plays, Maureen from Ms. Kay's class approaches the white board and begins coloring and writing on the white board beside her. Maureen does not look at or say anything to Julia as she works. Julia looks over with mild-curiosity, but turns back to the magnetic letters, signing the letters to herself as she moves each letter, one at a time, off to one side. Ms. Rosanne approaches Julia and moves the letters to the top of the board where they are out of reach. Julia looks at her, brow slightly furrowed, but moves on to start coloring over Maureen's. After a mild protest, Maureen moves away. Julia continues to color by herself, seeming not to have noticed that Maureen had left. After a few minutes of this, she caps her pen and wanders to where Nate and Eddy are sitting on the floor in the middle of the classroom with bins of toys in front of them. She plops herself on the floor next to the boys, and pulls a bin of Legos towards her. With a calm and contented look on her face, she dumps the contents on the floor, and starts sorting through the pile in front of her, randomly tossing some of the pieces back into the bin. Although the boys are playing and giggling loudly right next to her, Julia seems oblivious to them as she engrosses herself in her own play activity (1-141/143).

In addition to solitary play and work, Julia also engaged herself in *mimicking behaviors*. This behavior has been included as a solo activity here for a number of reasons. First, this behavior rarely involved any sort of interaction with other individuals and in fact, with a few exceptions (touched on in "Inappropriate Mutual Engagement"), involved only Julia. Second, this solitary activity was observed throughout the course of the research and observations and did not seem to alter in its frequency or in the way it was carried out. In

many ways, it appeared to be one of Julia's more favorite means of self-amusement and engagement, insofar as the regularity and consistency of the behaviors. Julia appeared only to engage in mimicking for her own amusement, and rarely did anyone pay attention to or interfere with her mimicking, except to correct the behavior (which occurred very infrequently). Finally, this behavior as a solo-activity was intriguing because of the way it seemed to reinforce itself overtime insofar as it was rarely corrected by others.

When Julia engaged in mimicking, she copied the behaviors of both adults and peers. Some mimicked behaviors seemed comparably appropriate in terms of Julia's age, cognitive and ability level. Specifically, and as would be appropriate behavior for a typical child her age, she very frequently pretended to be teacher by using the classroom pointer at the white board. Most other mimicking behaviors, however, appeared inappropriate for Julia, regardless of age. The predominant mimicking that Julia engaged in was that of mimicking Annie, a peer in her special education classroom. Annie used a wheelchair, but frequently would leave her wheelchair to sit on a classroom seat or to get on the floor. At least once a day, and typically much more often than that, Julia would drop herself to the floor. She would then crawl to a chair and, with facial expressions and body movements suggestive of mock-effort, would pull herself up onto the chair in a manner like Annie. Interestingly, for the tens of such observations of self-amusement through mimicking, only three times was Julia ever observed to be corrected for this behavior, and then mildly so.

> Ms. Cash's students have just returned back to their own classroom after morning literacy activities in Ms. Kay's. The students are all washing up and getting ready to sit down for snack. In hearing that it is time for snack, and in seeing that there are no more chairs at the snack table, Julia walks across the classroom. She grabs ahold of the chair from Annie's desk and drags it over to the snack table. Once the chair is properly situated, Julia drops to the floor beside the chair and proceeds to pull herself up on the chair, hands grabbing the seat and legs dangling limply as she does so. The

> students all gather around the table. Seeing that they are still missing one chair – one for Annie - Julia is asked to switch chairs with Annie. Julia willingly obliges and slides off her chair, onto the floor. This time, she crawls across the room to collect another chair. With great difficulty, all the while on hands and knees, Julia drags the chair back to her snack space. Again, with great labor, she pulls herself up onto the chair. Once she is seated Ms. Cash directs her to please go and wash her hands (4-88).

Involuntary solitary engagement. Up to this point, the discussion and description of Julia's solo-engagement has focused on those activities wherein Julia has had some choice and direct control over her situation. However, in addition to these solo-engagements, Julia was also frequently engaged in solo activities which were not necessarily within her control or of her choice. Compared to voluntary instances of solo-engagement and activity, the occurrence of more "forced" solo activity was far less frequent. However, the circumstances and conditions of such isolation is intriguing and informative to Julia's relational worlds, none-the-less. Three key circumstances where noted over the course of this study which suggested that Julia did face a certain degree of non-voluntary isolation. These circumstances included morning meal time, time-out and separation from peers.

As the semester progressed, morning *mealtime* became increasingly problematic. Specifically, Julia had started bringing her breakfast to school more regularly, and given her slow eating rate, her breakfast made the class late to arrive in Ms. Kay's for morning literacy activities. Ms. Cash decided that rather than stay in class, Julia would take her meal over to Ms. Kay's and finish it up in the back of the classroom each morning. Julia would take her breakfast, usually a pop tart or oatmeal, to a table towards the back of the class from where the students assembled each morning. Julia would sit by herself, munching away steadily, nonetheless slowly, as morning activities took place. During these periods, very infrequently if ever, did Julia engage with peers or attend to the activities taking place at the front of the

room. What is more, by the time she had finished eating her food, the morning routines were complete and Ms. Cash's students were ready to go back to their own classroom.

Time outs were also circumstances of involuntary separation from peers and classroom activities. Over the period of research, Julia was observed in time out on 10 separate occasions, each for various infractions. The most frequent reasons for a placement in time out included classroom misbehavior and issues occurring during outdoor recess – specifically, inappropriate behaviors including aggression, but most often non-responsiveness and escape. The time out did not consist of a specific place or circumstance. Typically, the "place" of time-out was simply on the floor away from peers and on-going classroom activities (all of which were still readily within Julia's view). The time spent in time out was variable, but age appropriate as well as "appropriate to Julia" as Ms. Cash explained. A timer was usually always set for a very short period of time.

> The students have just returned from recess. Ms. Cash is asked by Ms. Sandy to come outside to assist in bringing Julia in, as she had refused to do so when the bell had rung. A few minutes later, Ms. Cash marches back in, her hand on Julia's shoulder as she guides her into the classroom. Julia shrugs off her jacket to the floor. Without a word, Ms. Cash again places her hand on Julia's shoulder and guides to an open space on the floor. With a single motion, she points to the ground. Julia sits, looking up, wide-eyed as Ms. Cash walks away to join the rest of the class where they have gathered to finish the craft activities they had begun before recess. Julia, seeming to realize that she is no longer under direct radar appears to relax. With a sigh, she spreads herself out on the carpet, burying her head in her arms. From the other side of the room, Ms. Lilly approaches her saying, "No, you are in time out. You need to sit up properly". Julia looks up and over her shoulder seemingly both concerned and curious at who was speaking to her and what they were saying. Ms. Lilly physically assists her to sit up and cross her legs, and then leaves, without another word, to join the rest of the class at the table. Julia's face contorts in anger. Her brow furrows and she looks out from under them with a seething expression – anger mixed with disbelief and disdain. Her cheeks puff out and her face begins to turn red as she seems to be holding her breath. She lays out belly-first on the floor again, this time with exaggerated movements. She hides her face in her arms and begins a very brief bout of fake-crying. Then with a dramatic flourish, she throws her head up and back. Her eyes now wide, not so much with anger now, but with curiosity to see who might be

> paying attention to her. She sees that no one has seen her plight, so rests her head back on her arm and stays there quietly until Ms. Cash escorts her to the table where she is told to apologize for her behavior (4-23).

Often, Julia was physically separated from her peers because of *inappropriate behaviors*, but not necessarily which resulted in time-out. While the actions noted prior to peers separation did certainly involve some degree of social interaction (see later section Unilateral – Unreciprocated), very frequently they resulted in a solitary outcome for Julia. In many such instances, Julia's forced removal from peers, while immediately resulting in anger or frustration, also seemed to result in a certain degree of confusion stemming from Julia who often appeared to not quite understanding the rhyme and reason for her removal.

> It is a warm and sunny afternoon in late April. Julia rushes without hesitation to the playground when Ms. Cash announces that it is time for afternoon recess. Julia is wearing shorts today, and as she runs towards the swings her legs are all but a pale white blur. Julia goes to what seems to be her favorite swing, only to find it occupied. She begins to vocalize angrily - growls punctuated by forceful "No!"s - at the person seated on her swing. She steps behind the interloper and starts trying to push the individual off the swing. Ms. Sandy, seeing this, walks to Julia and starts to pull her away from the child. Julia resists. Her face is scrunched and her jaw clenched. Her eyes are barely slits as she attempts to pull away from Ms. Sandy. Once they are a far distance from the swings, Ms. Sandy leans to Julia and explains that she needs to play nice. Julia appears not to be listening to Ms. Sandy. With one final glance toward the swings, Julia wanders away. Her head is low and her arms are hanging limply at her side. She walks with heavy, dragging foot steps towards the track, where she spends the remainder of recess walking by herself around and around the crumbling path (4-144).

While *recess* was often a time of voluntary solitary engagement, it was also observed as a time for involuntary solitary engagement. Of note during these recess periods is the fact that isolation was *not* perceived to occur as a result of Julia's volition, rather it was a result of the actions/decisions of others and of circumstance. More specifically, the frequency and regularity with which Julia was able to participate in recesses was moderated by three factors, which were fundamentally beyond her control or which determined/facilitated by

those around her: (a) the slowness with which she ate her lunch (which often had her going through and beyond the lunch period); (b) the weather and perceptions thereof; and (c) staff absences.

Regarding the first, Julia was never observed to finish her lunch with enough time to join her peers for lunch recess, and was kept in until she had finished. With regard to the weather, Ms. Cash frequently kept the children in from recess when the weather was cold or inclement. This decision to keep students in when the weather was cool, was often compounded by the third factor. Absences of classroom staff were frequent over the course of research, and became increasingly more frequent towards the end of the semester when Ms. Lilly was called away on a family emergency. While substitutes were often available, the unfamiliarity of the substitute with the students in Ms. Cash's class appeared to make Ms. Cash wary of sending the students out. In the instance when a substitute was *not* available, a shortage in staff made monitoring children across settings difficult, and as a result, the students were often kept indoors. Certainly, these absences of recess invariably kept Julia apart from the larger population of her peers, and as a result may have significantly reduced Julia's opportunities for engagement with her peers across a variety of what were arguably more natural play settings.

"Fringe"-ship: Participation from the periphery. A substantial part of Julia's school day was often spent with her peers, both general and special education peers together. As developed previously, and in spite of the presence of peers around her, Julia was observed to engage in solitary activities. However, this solitary engagement reflected only a very small portion of all observations. By comparison, a much larger portion of observations saw Julia in the midst of her peers, intrigued and interested in who was around her and what those

around her were doing. These same observations frequently saw Julia as not directly interacting with her peers or with those activities around her. As such, Julia was often an on-looker, rather than a participant. She was on the fringe of interactions very often - fascinated and curious as she observed the situations around her.

> Julia and her general and special education classmates are in the gymnasium. They have just completed warm-up stretches with partners. Julia had been working with Annie on the mats, sitting facing each other. With feet braced sole to sole, they had been pulling each other's torsos up off the mat in an alternating, rocking motion, all the while giggling and smiling. A new activity of tag has been introduced. As the students all begin to reorganize, there are shrieks of delight, and a scurry of confusion. Students begin to run wildly around the gym. Julia, still on the floor, perches herself up on her knees for a better view. Her head is tipped slightly back and her eyes are wide with excitement and wonderment. Her head swivels from side to side as her peers rush by her. Her mouth is slightly open giving her an appearance of stunned silence. She continues watching for a minute more. A second tag game begins, and a smile slowly spreads across Julia's face. Eyes squinting with pleasure, she rises from her knees and begins chasing her peers around the gym (2-28/29).

Observations of Julia "on the fringe" were noted across peer groups, across settings and across activities. However, as demonstrated in the above vignette, there were two significant trends observed among "fringe"-ships. These trends suggested that fringe participation occurred at higher frequencies when a larger number of peers were around Julia and that there was greater tendency for fringe participation when Julia was in the general education setting.

Instances of "fringe" participation occurred very frequently over the course of observations. During such engagements, especially those involving more structured group learning, Julia only rarely and sporadically seemed to attend to the activity happening in class. In fact, when not "going solo" during these activities, she was more often than not attending to her peers with an affect which suggested genuine curiosity and interest in her peers. Interestingly, during our interview Ms. Cash had commented that she believed that in

many ways Julia was learning more during academics from her peers than on the actual activities. As she explained, " [W]ait! She should be paying attention. But in another way, she's getting as much out of that interaction as you know, as she would be sitting there listening to calendar. To be honest, she's getting more out of that interaction" (MC1). It is interesting to note, however, how Ms. Cash was observed to intercept such interactions.

> Ms. Cash's students are over in Ms. Kay's room for morning literacy activities. Ms. Kay has just finished an activity called "be my echo" wherein the students repeat phrases that she has read and tapped out on the oversized book in front of the class. All the while, Julia sits quietly, leaning forward slightly, with her elbow resting on her crossed legs as she presses her hearing aids and stares blankly ahead. Ms. Kay shifts to a new activity and the students begin to sing loudly. Apparently startled by the loud singing and change in student movements, Julia begins looking around her with a wide-eyed confusion. She turns completely in her seat and looks at her peers behind her with an intense curiosity. Her eyes shift between the students around her, and her gaze is intense as she appears to focus on their mouths. It is evident that Julia is not simply distracted from the activity happening up front and around her, but that she is trying to figure out what her peers are doing. Ms. Cash, seeing her turned around and not following the activity approaches and physically assists her to face the front of the classroom. As soon as Ms. Cash has left her, Julia again swivels in her seat with an even greater look of wide-eyed curiosity to inspect what the students around her are doing (3-72).

Repeated observations of similar instances of "fringe" participation do seem to suggest that these engagements were real and significant learning times for Julia. Indeed, for Julia who was relatively new to an integrated setting and to participation with her general education peers, these close observations would have provided her with models for participation and interaction in what was uncharted or unknown territory. However, and as discussed in the next section (Unilateral –Unreciprocated) the transference and application of skills, especially as related to social interactions were sometimes awkward and ill perceived/received.

Unilateral relationships: Unrequited and unequal. Unlike the two previous categories of engagement (solitary and fringe) which were typified by minimal, if any, interaction, unilateral relationships do reflect a greater degree of interaction. Unlike friendships, as operationally defined, unilateral relationships as presented here were noted to lack those critical aspects of mutuality, reciprocity and equality which underscore true friendships. In general, these relationships reflect significant directionality and imbalance in terms of responsiveness, roles and power demonstrated between interactional partners.

Unreciprocated engagements. Reciprocity is founded on mutuality and a sharing of affection, interests, caring, and so forth. For Julia, the majority of her interactions were those which seemed to lack the reciprocity which defined real friendships. On the one hand, Julia was frequently observed to offer affection to her peers, and frequently demonstrated real interest, concern and caring for individuals around her. However, her gestures were often rebuffed or completely ignored. Conversely, peer intent to engage and friendly solicitations for interaction with Julia were also documented in their attempts engage Julia, but similarly ignored or dismissed in their overtures. Very often, the latter interactions were influenced by a real intransigence noted in Julia, and what others defined as her proclivity to wanting things "on her own terms".

Often Julia's overtures for engagement went unrequited. Julia is a very caring and sensitive little girl. Her affection and concern for others was duly noted from the beginning to the end of the research period. As will be elaborated on in a later section (Unilateral – Hierarchical Relationships), Julia's care for and concern for others often was unsolicited, and demonstrated a marked element of Julia "being in control". Yet, many of her affectionate and caring gestures also reflected a keen interest in engaging with others. As demonstrated in

these vignettes below, often such attempts at friendly engagement were quietly ignored or overtly negated by avoidance and/or dismissal. Additionally, and fortunately with much less frequency, Julia's attempts were met with ridicule and teasing. Consequently, and as illustrated below, many friendly encounters initiated by Julia appeared one-sided and unrequited. In this observation, Julia's attempts to engage her peers in a friendly manner were ignored and/or avoided.

> Julia rushes out to recess. She charges down the stairs to the tarmac below. At the bottom, she comes to a dead halt, as students weave around to pass her. Julia looks briefly to the ground, then turns to look back up the stairs she has just come down. A broad smile lights up her face and her eyes have a twinkle to them. Her face crinkles as she giggles and vocalizes to the descending students. She steps to one side, holding tightly to the railing with one hand, and with the other she waves frenetically at the students as they pass by her. "Hi!" she calls loudly to some students. To others she lifts her hand in a gesture suggestive of a high-five. Some students look at her with expressions of wide-eye surprise. Some students walk past, in clusters of chatter, seeming not to notice her as they pass by. Others take deliberate side steps trying to move away from Julia. Others still throw cautious (fearful?) glances back over their shoulder after they have gone by. No student stops or returns her greetings. Julia appears to lose interest after a few more seconds, and as the students begin to dwindle and the smile still bright on her face, she makes a dash towards the playground (4-29).

There are two items of note relating to this observation. Curiously, Julia seems completely (or nearly so) unaffected or unconcerned by the lack of response she is getting from the peers who are passing by her. In many respects, from the beginning to the end of this observation, Julia appeared almost as if she had not expected any peer responses. What was as equally as interesting was what was observed to happen after this event. After leaving the stairs, Julia was observed to wander around the playground on her own, first from her favorite swings then to the monkey bars. She did not seek out peers, but rather engaged in solitary play activities for the duration of recess. When the bell rang for the students to come

in, Julia appeared to want to prolong her "solo" time by running away from Ms. Sandy who attempted to coax her back to the class.

As with the previous, this next observation demonstrates an overt and friendly gesture by Julia towards a peer. Unlike the previous observation wherein Julia's gestures were ignored, her gestures described here were overtly rebuffed.

> A handful of students arrive to Ms. Cash's class to work on a read and color book. A lot of giggling and flourish of activity fills the room as the students sit down at the table and begin coloring. Among these students is Alexis who sits down on the empty chair next to Julia. Julia is immediately distracted from her bout of dramatic crying, and lifts up her head of the table to look at Alexis. A smile appears on her face as she reaches towards Alexis. With a tight fist she starts to rub Alexis shoulder in a circular motion, all the while cooing softly what sounds like "Hi! How are you?" Alexis turns to look at Julia, with a look of something close to alarm as she leans dramatically away, out of Julia's reach. Her alarm quickly appears to shift into something closer to disbelief – her expression seeming to demand "What are you doing?!?!" Julia looks to Alexis with wide-eyed wonderment before she turns her attention back to her paper, and bows her head in deep concentration as she continues to color the mitten on the page in front of her (2-115).

In the above vignette, the blunt rejection of her friendly overture seemed clearly to confuse Julia, whose intentions were certainly well-meaning. Unlike Julia's random greeting of peers at recess, as discussed prior, where it appeared that Julia had not anticipated a peer response, here she was clearly puzzled by Alexis' reaction. Given the fact that Julia and Alexis are in regular contact with each other each school day, it is not surprising that Julia would be somewhat taken aback by this reaction.

This next observation demonstrates a very different manifestation of unreciprocated friendly engagement. Here Julia attempts to engage two friends in play-like, fun interactions. Her attempts are not met in kind (not even remotely). Rather, they are met with teasing.

> It is calendar time in Ms. Kay's classroom, and Julia is sitting towards the back of the group of students gathered on the floor. Behind her, at the very back of the group, Mandy and Alexis are sitting on two therapy balls. The girls are smiling and

> whispering to each other as they bounce. Julia, noticing the movement and noise behind her turns to look over her shoulder. In seeing the girls smiling and giggling, she turns to fully face them. Her eyes squint as a broad smile covers her face. With the girls' attention on her, Julia puckers out her lips and begins flapping her finger over them, making a loud blubbery sound. The girls look at her with what at first seems puzzlement. After exchanging meaningful glances between them, their eyes appearing to roll as if saying, "So silly!" the two girls giggle amongst themselves. Seeming very amused by the girls' attention and responses, her face begins to contort. Julia begins to twist her mouth and squint her eyes as she starts making funny faces at the girls. Looking at Julia, Alexis begins to flap her lips and make faces back at Julia, all the while Alexis and Mandy passing knowing looks and giggles back and forth among themselves. Ms. Cash sees what is happening, and physically assists Julia so that she is facing forward once more. Julia repeatedly turns back to face the girls with a smile of apparent joy on her face. Finally, Ms. Cash physically lifts Julia and carries her to the front of the classroom. Julia looks to Ms. Cash with wide-eyed confusion and surprise (3-111).

A number of features of this observation should be drawn to the fore. First to be noted is the unilateral quality of this interaction. While all girls were "participants" in this exchange, what was being 'exchanged' was by no means equal. Julia's gestures of fun and play were met with what appeared to be almost spiteful teasing – ultimately leading to Julia's physical rejection. Secondly, while in this observation, Julia's behaviors may be interpreted as 'inappropriate' especially insofar as they are not behaviors expected from children during instructional time, it must be noted that her behaviors were not all that discrepant from those that she had just witnessed from her peers – the very behaviors that had led her to turn to attend to her peers in the first place. What is different about Julia's behaviors is that she appears not to understand how or when it is appropriate to engage (or avoid) in such interactions. Julia's peers knew how to stay "under the radar" in their play engagement. Julia did not. Finally, and ironically, while all girls engaged in this playful behavior (intentions aside) Julia, for her lack of situational awareness, was the only one subsequently punished for the impropriety by being moved away from her peers.

As noted previously in the discussion of "fringe" relationships, a great deal of Julia's participation during classroom activities (especially activities in the general education setting) was observed involved a significant amount of close study by Julia of her peers and their behaviors. This observation demonstrates how Julia's attempts to engage her peers were often very similar to those behaviors and interactions she had witnessed among her peers. However, unlike similar behaviors among her peers, Julia's attempts were often rebuffed or ignored and, consequently, Julia was frequently and involuntarily left alone.

> Julia has just finished playing with Mr. Pirate Potato Head on the floor when she hears loud giggles and noises erupt next to her. Jackson, Heath and Dennis are playing together on the floor, building tall structures out of multi-colored, multi-shaped form blocks. As quickly as the structures are built, they are destroyed, amid much laughter and the sounds of explosions and fireworks. Julia looks over curiously, eyes wide and mouth open, to where the boys are sitting. As another round of structures is being built, a smile spreads across her face. She stands up and moves quickly to sit down next to the boys. Her eyes are squinted in an expression of pure enjoyment as she watches the boys enthusiastically smack down the newly built structures with their palms. She laughs along with the boys, who immediately have begun to start the re-building process. Amid protests, Julia attempts to knock down each block as it added. The boys try to deflect her attempts, but with little success. "Julia! No!" Julia continues in this manner for a couple more seconds, laughing and smiling all the while, before Ms. Sandy and Ms. Cash intervene (5-12).

Hierarchical relationships: Who's really in control? As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, all of Julia's teachers had felt that in many instances Julia's interactions with others were defined by Julia taking control and having it on her own terms. This section will explore those interactions observed to occur which demonstrated a certain degree of unilateralism based on a power differential or inequity between relational participants. While a large portion of observations do suggest interactions on Julia's terms, an even larger portion of observations also suggest that many interactions reflected power inequities which were not necessarily controlled by or in the favor of Julia.

Relationships discussed in this section are different from those discussed in previous sections for a number of reasons. First and foremost, while still reflecting a degree of unilateral participation, they tend to exhibit more dynamic and interactional qualities. Unlike previous relationships wherein interactions were absent or wholly unilateral (unreciprocated), in these observed interactions each participant plays a defined role in these interactions. Secondly, while there may have been greater interaction in these relationships and interactions, there is also a pronounced expression of inequity and/or of power imbalance. Finally, unlike previous relationships where -because of a lack of interactions and direct interactive partners -Julia's roles were defined in terms of "herself", in these hierarchical relationships, we see Julia shifting and evolving within and response to the partners and interactive situations.

The first part of this section will focus on observations of Julia, on her own terms, and as being in control, on general terms. The next part will look at specific relational dynamics which were repeatedly observed, and the roles that Julia and other participants played in these relationships. Specifically, three hierarchical trends or role distinctions were noted to occur in greatest frequency. Those were: (a) the teacher-student/learner relationship; (b) the disciplinarian-disciplined relationship; and (c) the helper-helpless/'helpee' relationship. For these hierarchical relationships, Julia did not always fall on the higher end of the power spectrum, nor was she always to be "in control" or the boss of these relationships.

I'm the boss of you - Julia in control. Instances of Julia behaving and interacting on her own terms were common in the research. In most instances, it was unclear what, if any role was played by Julia or the person with whom she interacted. In essence, these interactions seemed to be motivated by nothing more than Julia simply wanting things on her

own terms. As these two vignettes demonstrate, a great many interactions also demonstrated a real peer acceptance, acquiescence, or at the very least tolerance, of Julia being in control.

These observations were conducted on two separate days. Maria, a student from Ms. Tall's class, was certainly not a particular target of Julia's control. In fact, at one point or another during the research, her attempts to exert control over almost all peers and teachers were noted. Maria is used here as an example simply to demonstrate how Julia exerted control over others and how others often responded to her.

> It is early afternoon, and a few students have come over to Ms. Cash's room from Ms. Tall's class. Maria is among these students. The students gather around the table to begin a coloring activity. Julia quite deliberately sits herself next to Maria, giving her a quick tap on the shoulder and a faint smile as she sits down. After a minute or so, Julia selects a crayon from the coloring bowl and passes it over to Maria who accepts it and begins coloring with it. With a serious and focused expression, Julia places one hand over Maria's hand and with her other hand reaching awkwardly across she holds tightly on to Maria's arm. With aggressive motions, Julia begins moving Maria's hand rapidly, up and down, side-to-side as she 'assists' Maria in coloring her page. Periodically, Julia looks up, mouth set with a faint smile seeming to twitch just under the surface. Maria returns her glances, with an unreadable expression, and continues to let Julia move her hand over the page. A short time later, Julia releases Maria's hand. She then picks up a crayon for herself and her focus shifts to the coloring book in front of her (2-77).
>
> Ms. Cash announces that they are going to move on to another activity. The students put their coloring books away and gather on the floor in a large circle. Today they are going to be reading a book called "Monkey in the Tub". As she reads, Ms. Cash repeatedly signs the word 'monkey' by drawing her arms up and scratching the sides of her chest. The students begin to wiggle and giggle in their places. A huge smile of delight spreads across Julia's face, her eyes are shining and wide and she, as the students around her, begins to vocalize in excitement. She begins to bounce and rock excitedly on her bottom, throwing frequent glances at Maria who is sitting next to her. The students start to mimic Ms. Cash's movements. As they do so, Julia grabs ahold of Maria's right hand, and starts tugging at it, first raising it in the air above Maria's head, then back down – forcibly having Maria tap her head, rub her own tummy, and then to scratch under her arms. Next, Julia draws Maria's hand over to her. With the same actions, Julia has Maria carry out the same actions on Julia's head and belly. Maria, who resists only slightly – and it seems only in response to the uncomfortable tugs, rather than Julia's behaviors in general – continues to smile as she watches Ms. Cash finish reading the story (2-133).

This next vignette is very similar to the two previous in so far as it demonstrates a more sustained interaction between Julia and another interactional partner, Monique. Additionally, this observation also supports the notion that interactions with others were "on her own terms". The fact that the interaction is sustained over a comparably longer period of time, without obvious distress exhibited by either participant suggests a certain degree of acceptance and tolerance. However, Julia's clear control over Monique does not suggest a recognition of an equality or mutuality that might otherwise distinguish this interaction as one more akin to friendship.

> Ms. Cash's class has just arrived to Ms. Kay's room for morning activities. There is a slight schedule change today as the students are going to take a quick "fieldtrip" to the cafeteria to look at an art exhibit the art teacher has assembled to showcase student work. In the cafeteria, the students stay together as a class by forming a loose, discontinuous line as they mill through the displays. Julia, however, wanders around and among her peers as she periodically greets the students she recognizes. Suddenly, as if some light bulb has gone off or flag lifted in her head, she makes a beeline towards Monique. She grabs hold of Monique, and with great consternation, physically guides/moves/forces? Monique's arm so that it links with hers. Arms linked, Julia walks beside Monique as they tour the rest of the exhibit. Julia's expression is not one of any notable happiness, just determination and concentration as she walks arm in arm with Monique. Occasionally, Julia seems to yank at Monique in an effort to either guide her where she wants and/or to redirect her attention. Monique does not seem upset about Julia's behavior, mostly indifferent. Julia, similarly, seems indifferent to Monique and aside from pulling her along, seems more interested in keeping their arms together then she is in any real interaction with Monique. Their arms remain linked until they return back to Ms. Kay's room for morning literacy and reading (4-71).

Julia's other roles in hierarchical relationships. As related to the above discussion, overwhelming documentation through observations did support hierarchical relationships loosely defined by Julia appearing to be in control or having relationships on her own terms. In addition to these loosely defined, hierarchical relationships, interactions were also observed wherein Julia and those with whom she interacted played more specific roles –

roles which demonstrated an imbalance of power within the interactions. Certainly, Julia's roles within these relationships were observed at both extremes of the 'power' spectrum. Interestingly, however, the majority of Julia's interactions appeared to find her at the lower end of the spectrum falling into relational roles wherein she was often "less powerful" than those she was interacting with.

Teacher/student. Julia loved to assume the role of *teacher*. In fact, and as previously discussed, 'playing teacher' was one of most frequent activities she engaged in during 'solo' activities. During active learning periods such as calendar activities in Ms. Kay's classroom, she seemed to genuinely thrive on being the student chosen to 'instruct' her peers. In such instances, her peers responded positively to both her performance in general, and to her interactions with them specifically.

> Julia is selected by a peer to be the next person up as "Calendar Kid". Julia's role today is to add one straw to the pouch and count the sum of straws to determine how many days the class has been at school. As Ms. Kay beckons her to come up to the front of the class, a smile spreads across her face. She slowly gets up off the floor, and makes her way up to the calendar, barefooted and still bundled in her pink winter jacket. She grabs at the bundle of straws being held out to her by Ms. Kay, and with open mouth and expectant eyes, she looks carefully at Ms. Kay. Enthusiastically, with exaggerated movement and voice, Ms. Kay asks her how many straws. Julia smiles but does not respond. Ms. Kay then asks her to pick a student to help her figure it out. With a gentle nudge on the shoulder, Julia turns to face the class. Seeing the students with their hands raised to volunteer, the smile fades somewhat from her face. A look of mild confusion replaces it, and she raises her hand to mirror the children in front of her. "Who do you want to answer?" Julia points to a child in front of her with the smile returning to her face. Together the volunteer and Julia count how many bundles. Julia then, with great concentration, counts the remaining 10 straws on her own. As she finishes counting, the students begin to clap and cheer. Julia's face lights up completely – her eyes are wide and sparkling as she begins to hop up and down. She leans forward with gusto, and raises up her hand to give the students right in front of her Hi-Fives before she hands the straws back to Ms. Kay and sits back down on the floor next to Jackson (2-104).

Julia also very often seemed eager to share information with her peers in more unstructured settings. However, the outcomes of such teaching quite frequently were observed to be less predictable and often led to some degree of the frustration on the part of Julia and/or the person with whom she was attempting to interact and teach.

> The students have just returned to Ms. Cash's class from lunch. Aretha is among them. The students are scattered around the room coloring and playing at various desks as a "Signing Time" video plays on the television. They are waiting for lunch recess to end, so that they can go to Ms. Kay's for calendar activities. Julia is waving a piece of paper in the air. She is wandering around the room vocalizing and bringing her fists together repeatedly. Ms. Cash explains to me that Julia has just learned the sign for the word "shoe" and has drawn a picture of it on her paper. Julia continues to chant an approximation of word "shoe" and signs it as she goes to put on her jacket. As the children line up at the door to go to Ms. Kay's Julia walks up to each child and lifts up her hands to show them her new sign. Aretha looks at her with a look of confusion, and a hint of concern. She walks away from Julia and asks Ms. Cash what Julia was doing. Julia's expression turns to one of mild anger – her brow slightly furrowed and her jaw set slightly forward – as Aretha walks away. The students then leave to go to Ms. Kay's. Those students who have gone slightly ahead of the group, of which Aretha is one, line up with their backs against the wall waiting for the rest to catch up. Julia marches past the waiting student, face still set in mild anger and determination. As she passes Aretha, she lifts her face up and growls. In one fluid motion, she lifts her hands and shoves Aretha aggressively against the wall, before she pushes past the rest of her peers through the classroom door (2-69).

Interestingly, Julia's efforts to teach other students her new word continued for several minutes in Ms. Kay's class as Julia attempted to teach Jackson what she had learned. Jackson, as Aretha, appeared somewhat confused at her actions. Not understanding her intentions, he desperately sought to get Julia to quiet down and focus on calendar activities.

By contrast to Julia acting as a teacher to those around her, the number of observations wherein Julia was the *"learner"* or *"student"* rather than the teacher was considerably more. Clearly, as a student, it would be expected for Julia to assume the role of learner throughout the school day. During more formal and structured learning activities, especially those led by actual teachers, Julia typically responded favorably and with interest

to both her teacher and what she was being taught. In fact, when activities were predictable and clearly defined in terms of expectations, she demonstrated very little resistance and easily assumed the role of “student”. With Ms. Cash functioning as teacher, she demonstrated the greatest degree of compliance, something likely strongly correlated with Ms. Cash’s no nonsense way of approaching Julia and work periods with her. Ms. Kay similarly was very clear in her role as teacher, especially in those instances when she worked one on one with Julia. Ms. Lilly also had positive effects on Julia as a teacher, however, she frequently acquiesced to Julia in many instances when Julia refused to assume her role as a student, and in many ways appeared to reinforce or enable certain behaviors and responses in Julia. Ms. Sandy seemed to have the greatest difficulty enforcing her role as teacher. On numerous occasions in working with Julia, she would simply give up and walk away.

> Julia is seated at her desk in her special education classroom. Each of Julia’s classmates, and Julia herself, has been given a worksheet activity to complete. Ms. Sandy has pulled up a chair next to Julia so as to work with her. Julia’s activity requires that she cuts out a variety of colored shapes for a color sorting/gluing activity. With scissors in hand, she begins cutting. Her eyes are focused on the paper which she holds inches from her face. Her mouth is closed, with the small tip of her tongue peeking out at the corner – the affect one of great concentration. Ms. Sandy, seeing that she is not cutting along the lines and is rendering her shapes unrecognizable, reaches over to Julia to take the scissors away. Julia looks at her, wide eyed. Her brow furrows and she begins waving the scissors at Ms. Sandy. “Mine. Mine. Mine.” she says, over and over. Ms. Sandy, flustered, raises up her hand in the air in a gesture of resignation. She stands and leaves Julia saying simply “she won’t work with me, she won’t work with me”. Ms. Cash takes over where Ms. Sandy had left off (2-1).

Julia’s peers, especially those in Ms. Kay’s class, were often very intrigued by and curious with Ms. Cash and other adults’ interactions with Julia. They would often look upon adult interactions with Julia with mouths agape - with a certain demonstration of awe, and rapt attention. It is not surprising, given the students’ fascination with how adults sought to

teach Julia, that the students themselves make regular efforts to emulate teacher responses and interactions with Julia. While the majority of instances wherein Julia assumed the role of learner were more pronounced and frequent during interactions with adults, it is not surprising given the children's interest and intrigue that they, too, frequently assumed the role of Julia's teacher (i.e., Aretha 3-87). As with the adults, Julia seemed deliberate and selective in whom she chose respond appropriately to as "teacher". Often student attempts to instruct her were met with a growl, if not altogether completely ignored. However, some students also met little resistance and were the source of interest when they assumed the role as Julia's teacher. In fact, Aretha was one such "teacher". Her air and responses to Julia were very matter of fact – almost a reflection of Ms. Cash's.

> The students are gathered on the floor in front of Ms. Kay for calendar activities. Julia is sitting thigh to thigh next to Aretha. The students around her are counting as they follow along on the number line. Julia's eyes are focused intently on Aretha. She repeatedly presses her hearing aid until it hums. Aretha seeing that Julia is not attending to the activity, motions for Julia to face forward. Julia responds briefly, but is quickly distracted back to Aretha. Aretha begins to sign along as Ms. Kay continues to count. Julia reaches for her Aretha's hand and begins to lift it up and down in time to the chants of the student counting. Aretha continues to sign in spite of Julia's grip. Julia looks with wide-eyed wonderment at Aretha's hand as she continues to count. She soon releases her grip and begins to do slow, crude approximations of the signs Aretha is creating. Her attention remains high and focused – more so than has been observed previously – for the remainder of this counting activity. Her eyes lift and follow along as the numbers are tapped out on the number line (2-88).

Helper/'helpee'. Julia frequently assumed the role of *helper* or caregiver to everyone around her and with little discrimination. One of Julia's most common expressions of concern was to ask "You 'kay?" which she did any time anyone around her coughed, sneezed, or vocalized any other form of distress or discomfort. While Julia was prone to care for everyone around her, she showed somewhat less of an interest in helping the children in

the general education classrooms, and more in caring for and helping those with obvious disabilities, including certain students within her own classroom. More frequently than not, Julia's helping of others was unsolicited. Her assistance also seemed to frequently go unnoticed, unappreciated or ignored, among general education *and* special education peers.

Julia seemed more prone to want to help those with obvious physical limitations. Her classmate, Annie, received the greatest amount of helping attention and assistance on a daily basis. Julia would approach her with a soft expression, eyes curious and questioning, mouth in a soft pout. She would readily pick up things Annie had dropped, with little to no recognition from Annie, and would be left standing alone, arms hanging at her side and eyes wide with a mix of confusion and dejection, as if asking: "Why didn't you acknowledge me? Why didn't you thank me?" Julia would also frequently, and without solicitation, push her way between teachers and Annie in an effort to help get Annie situated and safely buckled into her wheelchair. Again, these gestures typically went unnoticed by Annie, and were frequently intercepted by teachers.

Julia also was regularly seen to help care for a child with a significant disability from another class, Gary, who she would see daily in the cafeteria during the lunch hour. Without fail, she would rush to where Gary sat in his wheel chair, and would fuss at straightening his washcloth bib, wiping his chin, and helping him lift up his bottle to his mouth. Like a little mother, with a pleased smile and great concentration, she would attend to him with apparent interest and caring. She would tickle his belly or adjust his bib, giggle and wave good-bye before she finally would trot off to get her own lunch.

While Julia was frequently a helper to her peers, she rarely assumed the role of *'helpee'* or helpless among her peers. In large part, this is likely attributable to Julia's great

independence and her clear resistance to relinquish "control" to others. Among peers, help from others commonly took the form of redirection to the task at hand or to the teacher, and as such, may be more aptly classified as Julia being given the role of "learner" during these instances. On a few occasions, peers were observed to help Julia on the playground to both assist her in getting up on the swing and/or to push her on the swing.

Unlike her peers, adults seemed much more prone to help Julia, whether it was needed or solicited, or not. The large majority of observations wherein Julia was treated as the "'helpee'" or "helpless" were noted among classroom educational assistants. During classroom work tasks, as in the previous vignette with Ms. Sandy attempting to help Julia with a cutting activity, Julia would respond to unwanted or unsolicited help with a stubborn, forceful resistance and/or a general show of disapproval. Help from educational assistants, however, occurred not just in the classroom, but across all school environments. The cafeteria was a place where Julia received, and responded consistently with resistance and disapproval to unwanted help. Very often, such instances of help were immediately countered by a show of independence, if not defiance.

> Julia is sitting at the cafeteria table. She has not touched the food on the tray for quite a few minutes. Ms. Sandy reaches over her and starts to lift up the tray, saying that it is time to go back to class. Julia shakes her head furiously, saying "NO!" Her jaw is set and her eyes narrowed to slits as she aggressively pulls the tray back with a clatter down on the table. Ms. Sandy sighs with clear frustration, and moves away. Julia looks over her shoulder at Ms. Sandy whose back is turned. Julia's face relaxes. She turns her trunk and lifts one leg at a time over to the other side of the lunch bench. She picks up her tray and quickly goes to dump it in the trash (2-118).

Many observations of adults helping Julia did not meet resistance from Julia, however. Simple actions such as opening Julia's milk and other containers, cleaning her mouth, taking the 'spork' out of its plastic wrap and unfolding her napkin, were completed

for Julia on a daily basis. Those assisting her seemed rarely if ever to hesitate or think about their actions. Julia, in most instances, accepted their help without reaction. What is most intriguing about help in such situations is the fact that the adults were helping Julia do tasks that she herself had been observed many times to be able to do independently. Further, and perhaps more importantly, these were tasks that children Julia's age were expected to do on their own. In many respects, though well intentioned, these acts may have at once instilled a certain degree of learned helplessness in Julia, but also may have confirmed or reinforced others' perceptions regarding Julia's helplessness.

Disciplinarian/disciplined. Julia was frequently observed to be the *disciplinarian* to peers and adults alike. Her discipline frequently involved a firm wag of her index finger in the face of the person being disciplined, a furrowed brow and mouth narrowed into a long O shape as she released an aggressive "No!", "Stop!", or low growl of disapproval. Most of her roles as disciplinarian were observed in interactions with her special education peers. Peers were generally mostly passive in their responses to Julia's disciplinary behaviors, but on occasion retaliatory.

> Ms. Cash's students are in the classroom for lunch today, they are gathered around the snack table quietly eating as they watch a "Signing Time" video that has been put on the television. Julia sits, quite subdued, her head is slightly lowered as she attends to her lunch. Her eyes periodically look up, and opening wide to take in snippets of the video playing before her. She tips back her head to take a long sip of her drink. Her eyes scan the students gathered around the table. Directly across from her sits Selma, who is distracted from her lunch and fidgeting with her necklace. Julia puts down her milk and looks sternly across the table at Selma. She raises her hand and points her index finger in Selma's direction. Selma looks briefly to Julia but is quickly distracted back to her necklace. Julia's brows furrow, and her eyes narrow. Her mouth takes the shape of a narrow oval as a staccato set of firm "No!"s emerge. Ms. Lilly, hearing this walks over and calmly asks her to keep eating her lunch. Julia's attention returns to her lunch, though her face still hints at mild perturbation (4-49).

Of note in this observation is the fact that Julia's disciplinary reprimands of Selma closely mirrored those reprimands she herself had received in attempts to engage peers in standard play (see Unilateral - Unreciprocated section). For example, on a previous occasion, Julia had witnessed a peer (Polly) playing with her bracelet instead of attending to the activity. On another occasion, Julia had observed two girls playing with each other's hair during group activities in Ms. Kay's class. Neither of these behaviors observed by Julia was necessarily inappropriate for the ages of the girls. Julia's efforts to similarly engage in such amusement were, however, typically met with swift reprimands, both by peers and teachers. As such, Julia may have come to believe and understand, through direct consequence and experience of her own, that these were inappropriate behaviors. In essence, her manner and timing of discipline with regard to those around her may be said to be a product or outcome of situational learning through personal experience and observation.

While Julia was often observed to be the disciplinarian, this relational role was observed far less frequently than the role she assumed as the one being *disciplined*. In fact, of all the defined hierarchical roles identified in this study, that of disciplined was observed with the greatest frequency as compared to all other hierarchical roles. Discipline was delivered most frequently from adults across environments. In many respects, discipline may be envisioned as a form of teaching, so it is not surprising that among all adults, Julia's teachers were the most commonly observed disciplinarians.

Julia's responses to discipline from teachers, while they reflected differing levels of resistance, did result in fairly predictable and consistent outcomes. Instances of discipline, or more specifically, instances wherein Julia was corrected, was told to do something, told not to do something, told to stop, and so forth, frequently led to bouts of what I eventually

simply identified as “fake crying”. During instances of fake crying, which were great and many over the course of research, a smile would often be instantly replaced by a look of complete and utter despair, bordering on devastation. Julia would drop her hands dramatically to her sides where they would hang limply. If standing, her head would be bowed as she watched her feet drag heavily across the floor. If sitting, she would bury her face in her arms or hands. Frequently, she would look up with wide, expectant eyes to scan those around her. Her mouth would be curved severely downward and partially open as she would let out mournful wails and vocalizations. If anyone approached to console (or, usually just to redirect) her, she would often turn her head away and dramatically hold up her palm towards the individual, as if saying “Not now! I simply can’t bear it!” Bouts of fake crying could last for seconds, up to hours, but could be easily teased away with a quick tickle, or a distraction from around her. Her despair was just as quick to transform back into utter delight.

Peers also were frequently observed to discipline Julia. Just as peers were quick to play the part of Julia’s teacher, they were also as quick and eager (if not more so) to serve as disciplinarian to Julia. Their reactions to and behaviors towards Julia, on most occasions, were strikingly similar to those same disciplinary responses observed in teachers. Julia’s responses to peer discipline were varied, but did often result in a display of defiance, in the forms of a smirk, a kick, increased noise, or increased touching for example. While Julia did demonstrate a resistance to peer discipline, she seemed to differentially respond to peers. The following two vignettes illustrate the variability in responses, and may seem to suggest differential treatment, receptiveness and preference (deference or respect?) towards certain individuals over others.

> Julia has selected a seat next to Sasha in the cafeteria. She has just asked one of the educational assistants to open her milk for her. Turning herself to face her tray again, she looks to Sasha out of the corner of her eye. With a grin on her face, her arm darts over as she tries to grab Sasha's milk. Sasha turns towards her with surprise. She loudly tells Julia "No" and grabs back her milk. "Don't do that, Julia!" Sasha pulls her tray slightly farther away as she scoots herself a little further down the bench. Julia looks back at her with wide eyes, her mouth is agape. She leans deeply and aggressively towards Sasha, attempting to snatch the milk. Sasha protests again, and Ms. Lilly approaches to intercept by moving Julia back down the bench. Julia looks up to Ms. Lilly and back to Sasha, her playful look appears as if to cloud over. Her jaw is set. As soon as Ms. Lilly's back is turned to leave, she reaches again to grab Sasha's milk, this time much more forcefully. The carton crushes under Julia's grip and milk splashes on the table and lunch trays. Seeing the mess, Julia's eyes widen in either surprise or fear? And she lets go of the milk (3-53).

This next observation, also conducted during the lunch hour, presents an interesting contrast in Julia's responses towards peer redirection and correction. As opposed to the previous observation, here Julia appears as more responsive to and accepting of peer discipline.

> Julia and Aretha are sitting together at one of the large round tables in the cafeteria. Julia has just started eating her pudding. With her 'spork', she starts stirring the pudding aggressively. She then begins to start spinning her pudding cup on the table. She is watching the cup spin with a blind expression hinting at nothing more than mild interest. Aretha is watching her as she continues to spin the cup. Julia's head is slightly lowered to the table. She tips her head up slightly to look at Aretha. Aretha motions with her hands for Julia to stop. Julia sits up straighter as she watches Aretha more intently. Aretha then signs "eat". Julia looks at Aretha for a few seconds more and then turns her attention back to her pudding cup. Under the table, Julia's feet start loudly kicking the crossbars. However, this lasts only a moment before she again begins to eat her pudding (2-108).

Mutual Engagement. As the previous sections seem to indicate, a great many of Julia's interactions as observed over the course of research appeared to lack many of the key, defining features that would indicate them to be friendship or anything like friendship. However, while the preponderance of observational data is indicative of relational worlds founded on something other than friendship, it is crucial to note that interactions suggestive

of friendships for Julia (or something like) were demonstrated to exist. To reiterate, unlike the previous relational worlds discussed, friendships are operationally defined as pro-social and reciprocal interactions and engagements which are founded on a mutual sense of affinity and kindred-ness. In further contrast to those relationships previously defined, participants in friendship demonstrate a mutual recognition of compatibility and participant equity. This section will explore those interactions between Julia and her peers which demonstrate features more akin to "friendship".

Engagement with special education peers. A great many interactions suggestive of friendships were observed among Julia and her special education classmates. In fact, more "friendly" interactions were observed to take place with special education peers than general education peers. As will be elaborated on in Chapter 5, this should not be surprising given that the majority of Julia's school day was spent with only her special education peers. Although Julia spent the majority of her day in the company of her special education peers, it is interesting to note that comparably few mutual interactions were observed to occur between Julia and her special education peers. As such, a great deal of Julia's time was spend in solitary, or occasionally unilateral engagements

"Friendly" interactions, when they did occur, were observed across school environments. Coding of the data seemed to indicate two specific interactional types of mutual or friendly engagement, namely inappropriate and appropriate engagement with peers. Appropriate engagement involved the mutual engagement of Julia and her classmate(s) in ways which indicated mutual enjoyment and which were fitting to both the situation and to her age. Inappropriate engagement by contrast, while it too appeared to result in mutual

enjoyment, frequently involved behavior and interaction that appeared not to be acceptable or appropriate to the situation.

Appropriate and mutual interactions. With regard to appropriate and mutual interactions with special education peers, it is interesting to note that their high rate of occurrence appeared to correlate somewhat with the number of students in the class. For example, when there were fewer students in the classroom, there were more frequent and consistently appropriate interactions, not just involving Julia, but all of her special education peers. Indeed, one can speculate that more appropriate interactions were likely moderated by lower student-teacher ratios, more individualized attention, structure and consistency in the environment and the activity, and less noise and confusion.

> It is later on a Friday afternoon. Julia and her special education classmates are gathered around the snack table doing a craft activity. They have been working at this activity for nearly an hour, and it is clear that Julia's interest is fading. With a big yawn, Julia briefly stands up and hugs Ms. Lilly who is sitting next to her. She then sits back down and slides off the chair to the floor. At that moment, Ms. Cash approaches the table with her camera in hand. She moves around the table, and starts taking snapshots of each student. Julia, in seeing the camera and the excitement and enthusiasm of her peers jumps up from where she'd been sitting on the floor. "Say Cheese!" Ms. Cash says loudly as she snaps a shot of Julia. Julia's face scrunches into a mass of wrinkles as she grins at the camera. Behind her Dennis approaches and touches her shoulder. Julia turns and smiles at him, eyes twinkling. Julia invites him forward. He drapes his arm over her shoulder as they wait for Ms. Cash to take their picture. With the blaze of the flash, Julia and Dennis blink in unison and then turn to each other. Julia opens her mouth widely and starts to laugh at Dennis in loud, jerky breaths. Dennis looks back at her, a broad smile on his face. Dennis reaches towards Ms. Cash to take the camera. He walks away, camera in hand, towards Marlon. Julia follows quick at his heals, her arms swinging and waving excitedly at her side. As Dennis snaps a picture (with Ms. Cash's help), and all three students begin to giggle, wiggle and jump with excitement. Julia takes Dennis by the elbow to get his attention. She vocalizes something to him and points to where Annie is sitting at the table. Together they approach Annie, each holding on to the camera to take a picture. Together, they travel the room, giggling with each other and taking turns between posing and clicking. The merriment continues for almost ten more minutes. Julia's face is red with excitement. She and Dennis follow each other around and around the

> room until they have made sure that everyone in the class has had their picture taken – including me! (4-77)

Inappropriate, mutual interactions. With regard to inappropriate interactions with special education peers, they seemed to be correlated, though not exclusively so, with larger numbers of students and the corresponding higher ratio of students to teachers. A higher rate of inappropriate interaction was noted during, although not exclusive to, art and physical education classes. While it was beyond the immediate scope of this dissertation, the experience and training of pull-out teachers with students with disabilities may have also been influential with regard to how students, including Julia behaved during these pull-out activities.

During these activities, Julia and her peers participated regularly in groupings separate from their general educations peers. In some respects, classroom activities involving both general and special education students together (for example, during academic math and literacy activities in Ms. Kay's room) were much more structured than those activities involving fewer students (read and color activities in Ms. Cash's room). In spite of overarching structure, student participation in larger-scale, more academic activities were in many respects inaccessible to Julia and her special education peers. What is more, Julia and her peers had less individualized attention or guidance during these periods. This "inaccessibility" to and lack of guidance during activities may in some way have contributed to increases in inappropriate interactions among Julia and her special education peers under these circumstances.

> Julia and her special education classmates are over in Ms. Kay's class for morning literacy. Today they are doing something different. It is Dr. Seuss week, so to celebrate the students are watching a Dr. Seuss cartoon on one of the classroom computers. The desktop computer that the video is being shown on is at the very far

> wall of the classroom. Julia is sitting to the very back of the group of the students who are huddled together so as to get as close to the computer screen as possible. Julia seems unaware as to what the students are looking at and has turned in her seat to face Selma. Selma's back is completely turned to the computer and, with her thumb in her mouth, she gazes blankly at Julia. A sweet, but faint smile appears on Julia's face as she looks at Selma. Her eyes seem to soften as she, too, puts her thumb in her mouth. As Julia does this, a broad smile appears on Selma's face, and she begins to giggle. Ms. Lilly, hearing the noise comes and moves the girls slightly apart. Once Ms. Lilly has moved away, Julia smiles again, her eyes bright, as she looks at Selma. She bends deeply over her crossed legs and puts her face as close to Selma as she can. "Hi!" she says, and waves her hand at Selma. Thumb still in mouth, Selma says something sounding faintly like "Hi" in return. Julia's smile broadens, and her eyes crinkle into mere slits as she reaches her hands forward to give Selma a hug. The two girls giggle again. From across the room, Ms. Cash approaches and, without a word, turns Selma to face the computer. With a swift and definitive point of the finger, she directs Julia to turn herself around to watch the movie (3-69).

This inappropriate, but mutual interaction is one of *few* such interactions between Julia and her special education peers that went noticed, intercepted and/or corrected by a teacher. In fact, while I observed many inappropriate interactions between Julia and all of her special education peers, only four such interactions were noted to have been corrected. This lack of intervention is curious for two reasons. First, it suggests a tolerance for inappropriate behavior. Second, and perhaps more importantly, such a lack of intervention may have unwittingly created mixed messages and division. For Julia and her special education peers, such a response (or lack thereof) by adults might support and reinforce an understanding that their inappropriate interactions are indeed acceptable. What is more, for the general education students, the fact that these interactions were not intercepted or corrected may unwittingly have suggested to general education peers that students such as Julia were held to a different standards and rules for behavior. As such, students who act differently and who are treated different may ultimately have been *realized* as different.

Mutual engagement with special education teachers. As discussed in the previous sections, the majority of interactions observed between Julia and adults frequently took the form of unilateral, hierarchical interactions. Certainly, this is to be expected given the fact that all adults around Julia were "teachers" to some capacity. In many instances, engagement with adults did embody a degree of reciprocity and mutuality, but there always appeared to be an over-arching element of power or hierarchical difference as would be expected between student and teacher. For example, frequently during earned free time, Ms. Cash was observed to "play" with Julia. More often than not, this play involved Julia working with letter magnets, letter tiles or number tiles – something which Julia definitely enjoyed. During such "play" activities, Ms. Cash always sought to teach Julia something, such as learning the letters in signed language, or equating numbers with values, and so forth.

By contrast with these typical 'play' engagements, only on a very few occasions were more relaxed, spontaneous, mutually fun and friendly engagements observed to occur between Julia and adults. Of all the adults with whom Julia was in contact on a regular basis, Ms. Lilly was the one who was observed to interact most frequently with Julia in such a manner, as the following two vignettes demonstrate.

> Julia and her peers have just returned from morning activities in Ms. Kay's class and are gathered around the table for snack. Ms. Cash has turned on the radio as they munch away. As soon as the music starts, Ms. Lilly gets a silly grin on her face and starts moving to the music. Julia, with wide-eyes looks up from the table. Her eyes narrow and she thrusts her finger forcefully towards Ms. Lilly. As she does this, she lets out a guttural sound, almost as if telling Ms. Lilly to stop what she is doing. Seeing Julia's response, Ms. Lilly starts dancing and jumping with more gusto, her arms raised and her hands waving over her head. Julia's fierce look quickly changes. Her face scrunches up into a huge grin and she starts pointing and laughing at Ms. Lilly's silliness. She quickly finishes her snack and throws her trash away. As she returns to the table, she sees that Ms. Lilly is still dancing. Her grin returns and deepens as she begins to jump up and down next to Ms. Lilly, keeping time to the

> beat. The two dance together for another minute more, before Julia rushes across the room – jacket trailing like a streamer behind her – still laughing and smiling (2-7).
>
> It is recess time and the students are staying in because of the cold. Julia, Marlon and Ms. Lilly are sitting around the snack table. The various bits and pieces of Pirate Mr. Potato Head are spread out on the table in front of them. Julia selects a shock of pink hair to put on the doll. She starts vocalizing excitedly, holding up Mr. Potato Head for everyone to see. Ms. Lilly smiles and comments on Julia's wonderful hair selection. Julia smiles back. She reaches forward and selects a large, yellow plastic hoop earring. She then leans towards Ms. Lilly in an effort to hook it onto her ear. Ms. Lilly assists her, and with a pleased look says to Julia. "Oh, how pretty!" Julia then stands, waves to Ms. Cash and points to Ms. Lilly's ear. "Oh! I like your earring, Ms. Lilly!" Ms. Cash says enthusiastically before she walks away and back to her desk. For the next few minutes, Julia continues to select items to decorate Ms. Lilly with. From time to time, Ms. Lilly herself picks up a colorful piece of something plastic, holds it to Julia and asks "What about this one, Julia?" The two continue to play until the recess bell rings (2-62).

What is noteworthy, and in some ways unfortunate with regard to these interactions, is the fact that during both of the previous observations only special education students were in the classroom. As previous discussion has suggested, general education students were noted to be very receptive to and interested in adult behaviors and interactions with Julia. In addition, they were often very quick and accurate in their emulation of these interactions. Had students from Ms. Kay's or another general education class been present to observe such interaction, they may have been more prone to interact with Julia in more "friendly", natural and mutually agreeable ways. Indeed, seeing a teacher really relax and have fun with Julia might have dispelled reluctance or apprehension about engaging with Julia as they would another peer.

Mutual engagement with general education peers. Julia's interactions with general education peers were marked by change and inconsistency. As the semester progressed, it appeared that Julia's mutual interactions with peers became more frequent and involved. Not only did Julia seek out, play and work more frequently with her peers, but her peers also

appeared seek her out somewhat more frequently. While interactions evidencing friendly and mutual engagement did seem to increase over time, the majority of mutual relationships seemed to be characterized by three distinct features. The first feature of these interactions was that they were typically not sustained, but brief in duration. Student greetings are one example of reciprocated, friendly interactions between Julia and her peers. Typically, Julia would effusively greet her peers, give them a big smile, a “Hi” and occasionally a hug. Her peers were almost always positively responsive and mutual in the interest and affection that they gave to Julia in return. While by no means insignificant, again these interactions were brief.

The brevity of interactions was also frequently determined by teachers and other adults around Julia. It was interesting to note over the course of research how teachers inadvertently intercepted friendly interactions, or at least the potential for friendly interactions. On numerous occasions, Julia was observed to seek out peers for engagement. On many such occasions, teachers were observed to separate her from these peers before any interactions could actually take place. As an example, one morning upon entering Ms. Kay’s class for literacy activities, Julia, spotting Aretha from across the room, made a beeline towards her. Her interest and intents were clear from the smile and determined look on her face. Just as she was about to sit, Ms. Cash approached her from behind and physically lifted her back into standing position. She then escorted Julia to the chair where she (Ms. Cash) had been sitting off to the side of the class. It was not clear why Ms. Cash had decided to move Julia, nor was it in any way clear that she had intentionally intercepted their interaction. However, what was clear was that Julia was kept from a peer who she obviously wanted to be with (4-117).

Julia's mutual engagements were also inconsistent over time (from day to day, minute to minute). In some ways, this characteristic of the relationships is a result of Julia's proclivity to want things on her own terms, as previously discussed. Although Julia appeared to have certain students who she seemed to favor more, and who in turn favored her (as will be discussed in a subsequent section), she did not consistently seek out or respond affectionately to any single child. Julia's mood, hearing, and communication all seemed to influence her willingness and desire to engage with her peers – and further, these same characteristics of Julia certainly impacted the extent to which Julia's peers wanted to engage with her.

Next, Julia's mutual interactions were also internally inconsistent. As above, Julia's quixotic nature certainly played a role in how she interacted with her peers during any given interaction. Additionally, however, Julia's peers were also observed to change insofar as their roles and responses to Julia. For example, while peer engagement may have started as mutually "friendly" and reciprocal, a shift in roles and dynamics was often observed mid-way through an interaction. The following vignette demonstrates the shifting and changing roles and responses of Julia's peers towards her during a single interaction. Here Aretha appears to switch from friend to teacher within the same short interaction.

> Julia has arrived late to Ms. Kay's class for morning literacy after an unscheduled trip to the bathroom. Julia weaves her way through the group of students seated on the floor and plops herself down in the middle of the floor. She sees Maureen sitting to her side, and gives her a broad smile and quick wave, which Maureen returns. Behind her, she notices Aretha sitting. She leans backwards towards Aretha and says a quiet, but squeaky "Hi" to her friend. Aretha returns her smile. Julia turns a bit more and holds out her hand to Aretha as if to give her a high five. Aretha looks pleased, and holds up her hand to gently hit Julia's palm in return. Ms. Kay calls to Julia for her to turn around, which she immediately does. However, she clearly has not forgotten about Aretha sitting beside her, and with wide eyed excitement/anticipation she turns back around and says "Hi" to Aretha. Aretha shakes her head, and motions for Julia

> to turn to face the front again. Julia's smile fades, though only slightly, as she turns again to face Ms. Kay (3-11).

Blooming friendships. Over the course of research instances of mutual engagement which embodied all aspects of true friendship (as previously defined) were definitely observed, however were few and far between. In spite of their infrequency, the meaning and significance of these interactions were of monumental proportion and importance as compared to all other interactions observed between Julia and her peers. These interactions appeared to truly represent the gems of friendship. The following vignette clearly demonstrates all elements of friendship, including mutuality, reciprocity, shared interest, equity in roles and power and, most importantly, the pure joy that comes from the giving and the receiving - the *sharing* - of friendship. These two observations were conducted at different times on the same day towards the end of the research period.

> It is recess, and Julia is sitting by herself on her usual swing. She is lazily pumping her legs and only barely moving back and forth. As she swings, faint sounds – almost like fake-crying – can be heard coming from her. At times, it almost sounds as if she is singing to herself. Occasionally, she kicks her feet forward forcefully, almost angrily, rattling the chains as she does so. She continues in this fashion for a number of minutes before Monique dashes enthusiastically from across the playground and jumps onto the swing next to Julia. She gives Julia a quick wave and a hearty "Hi" and starts pumping her legs back and forth. Julia looks up, her face brightening as she watches Monique. After a few seconds, she begins to move pump her legs more quickly and forcefully. As she does so, she looks over to Monique with an open mouth and bright, curious eyes. Monique looks back to her and smiles more broadly. Julia's expression changes instantly and completely. A smile spreads across her face. Her eye brows arch over her wide eyes and she begins to giggle. She pumps her legs faster and faster. Monique beside her lets out a gleeful shriek as she smiles back at Julia. Julia returns the shriek with equal gusto. "Higher, Julia! Higher!" The girls continue side by side like this for some minutes. Then they begin to slow. Monique looks towards Julia and stretches her arm across the space between them. Julia reaches her arm towards Monique. Their hands meet, and fingers intertwine as the girls swing, hand in hand, for the remaining minutes until the bell rings (4-114).
>
> Later that same day, Julia again goes to her favorite swing for afternoon recess. She sees Maureen playing at the monkey bars close by, and dismounts her

> swing to join her. After a few minutes of swinging side by side, Maureen hops down and sprints off. Julia watches her leave with no apparent interest or concern as she continues to swing on the bars. Within minutes, Mandy comes to join her followed closely by Monique. As her peers mount the structure next to her, a smile spreads on her face. I cannot hear what is being said, but it is clear that Monique and Mandy are both talking with Julia. Together they are smiling and their laughter and giggles can be clearly heard. Still smiling Julia drops to the ground and standing beneath Monique starts to tug at her leg to pull her off the bars. Monique wiggles from her grip and drops down beside Julia, giggling and smiling at Julia. Together, the three girls wander to the monkey bar dome at the other side of the playground. Their smiles still clearly visible (4-116).

Identifying friends. Clearly the identification of friends and the definition of friendship are things which are guided by very personal feelings, values, and perceptions of each individual and participant of friendship. Julia does not pose an exception to this. Given her communicative and cognitive limitations, I was not able to directly ask her who her friends were, and why, from her perspective they were friends. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Julia was just beginning to learn alternate forms of communication, including signed language (for which she had a handful of isolated words, and even fewer phrases to use) and picture exchange systems. While I had picked up and self-taught myself many of the signed words Julia had available to her, and while picture symbols were used in a later meeting I had with Julia (discussed below), cognitive and expressive skills continued to present real limitations to direct communication. I was able, however, to catch glimpses and clues regarding Julia's friendships by piecing together interview and observational data.

While Julia was never able to directly tell me who her friends were, during my weeks of school I was able to meet with Julia individually in a quiet classroom. During this meeting, I showed pictures of all her general and special education classmates (those who were participants of the study), as well as other pictures (in familiar picture exchange format) to Julia. Repeatedly, she lifted up a picture of her special education classmate, Annie, and held

close to her face for close study. Upon first seeing the picture of Annie, her delight had been clear. She grabbed the photo and held it up, smiling and saying Annie's name over and over again. Certainly, this did not directly indicate friendship, but it did seem to indicate a keen interest in Annie on Julia's behalf. In addition to this indication of friendship, friend identification was also culled from observational data, as the following vignette demonstrates.

> Julia is sitting on the floor next to Aretha for calendar activities in Ms. Kay's classroom. She seems distracted from the activity happening in front and around her. She looks over to Aretha and pokes her in the shoulder. She keeps poking until Aretha finally shifts her attention to her. Julia smiles and rests her head briefly against Aretha's shoulder. She lifts her face up to Aretha who is smiling back at her. As Julia sits up again, Aretha begins using her hands to sign friend to her (the rotational linking of index fingers). Julia's eyes sparkle, and she copies the sign - repeating it again and again as she holds her hands towards Aretha. Aretha turns her attention back to the class activity. Julia wraps her arms around Aretha's arm and hugs it, then reaches to touch Aretha's braided hair. A short time later, as the students collectively shift in their seats, Julia wiggles slightly to one side where she sits next to Monique. Monique is engrossed in the class activity. She does not see Julia sitting next to her, looking up with wide, expectant eyes as she signs 'friend' (2-128/129).

Trends regarding friends and interactions in general also emerged through observational data. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, during teacher interviews, the adults had identified a handful of students who they felt to be friends with Julia. Some of the observational data collected over the course of research seems to support a number of these friend identifications. However, observational data also provides some very strong and interesting contrasts to these identifications.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, with regard to the nomination/identification of girls as friends, Aretha was noted by all respondents to be Julia's friend. Indeed observations solidly supported this contention. Of all Julia's general education peers, Aretha was the one with whom Julia was noted to interact with most frequently. As

previous vignettes have demonstrated, there was definitely a mutual acceptance and shared understanding of some level of friendship between these girls. Interestingly, however, next to Julia's teachers Aretha was also one of the students observed to most frequently discipline and teach Julia. As Ms. Lilly had suggested in her interview, Julia appeared to look up to Aretha more as an adult or as a leader, because of her tall stature and clear speech. Observations do seem to support this, especially when one considers how receptive and positively responsive Julia was when engaging with Aretha.

Annie and Monique were also identified by those adults interviewed as friends to Julia. Interestingly, observations of Julia interacting with Annie, while they do support mutual engagement, suggest that there was a tendency for such engagements to be inappropriate in nature. What is more, Annie very frequently was noted to be non-responsive to many of Julia's friendly overtures or attempts to engage. In contrast to Annie's and even Aretha's responses and interactions, Monique's engagements with Julia were observed to be the most relaxed and unconditional of all interactions observed. In fact, Monique was never seen to deliberately rebuff Julia, or to overtly discipline Julia. As such, and as illustrated in a previous vignettes, Julia's relationship with Monique seemed to one most closely aligned to something like friendship.

Polly and Alexis, while they did not receive unanimous nominations, were still identified as friends to Julia by at least one person. Interestingly, both these girls were observed to rebuff, ignore or tease Julia more often than almost all other children included in this study. With regard to Polly, she was frequently observed to sit next to Julia across different activities and environments. However, when she did she was scarcely observed to interact with her. Any interactions observed were often noted to be of a negative, disciplinary

or corrective nature. Alexis's interactions with Julia seemed to involve rejection or disapproval of Julia, and on occasion, even mockery and teasing of her. Of all the girls, Sasha was the one observed to rebuff and discipline Julia with the greatest frequency. Given these findings, it is difficult to say that these girls were "friends" to Julia.

Regarding the boys, Nate, Marlon, Eddie and Jackson were all identified as friends to Julia. Marlon, as Julia's special education classmate, was in frequent contact with and in proximity to Julia. However, he was rarely observed to directly interact with Julia. As a boy with many characteristics of Autism, this was not surprising. As with Marlon, Nate was infrequently seen to engage with Julia. By contrast, both Jackson and Eddie were much more frequently observed to engage with Julia. With both boys, all interactions appeared as positive, although certainly not all were mutual engagements aligned with friendship. Eddy did express a keen interest in Julia. Eddy, however, was also a very focused boy who was not easily swayed or distracted from activities. This focus, while it limited interactions with Julia, was in no way observed to parallel any underlying disapproval or distain for Julia. Jackson, like Eddie, was a very serious and focused little boy. He did demonstrate a real affection and caring for Julia, and frequently acknowledged her attempts to interact with him. Jackson, however, was only infrequently observed to willingly engage with Julia for extended periods. Given these findings, none of these boys, nor any other boy included in this research, appeared to engage in anything quite like a friendship with Julia.

Summary and Conclusion

As the findings of this research have revealed, Julia is a complex little girl. Her likes, dislikes, affect and behavior exemplify this complexity. Observational data showed that the range and diversity of Julia's relational worlds were equally as complex as Julia herself.

Appendix B summarizes the trends in affect, expression and/or behavior which were observed (and as illustrated through the vignettes of) in Julia. These trends will be further developed in Chapter 6, but will be briefly summarized here.

There was a great range observed in Julia's responses within and across each relational realm. It should be noted, however, that at either extreme (Solitary/Voluntary and Mutual) there seemed to be a greater consistency and predictability in Julia's responses. For example, when engaged in voluntary, solitary activities, Julia often seemed content, if not happy in what she was doing. The same holds true at the opposite extreme of mutual engagement. When interacting with peers and adults in a "friendly" and playful manner, Julia also appeared to be happy with her engagement.

Between these two extremes, however, there is a great variability in Julia's responses. Within these "middle areas" of interaction, there are also certain trends to be noted. Specifically, while Julia's relational worlds and experiences ranged from those of a solitary nature, all the way to mutual and prolonged engagements (much like friendships), a great many of her interactions with others fell within the area of "fringe", and more still fell within the area of "unilateral" engagement. Within these relational realms, there is a huge range in responses, ranging from anger to happiness, from confusion to focused interest, from oblivion to rapt curiosity, and from distant lethargy to drama and excitement. One explanation for this greater variability in Julia's responses may be correlated to a greater variability in the relational partners, relational roles, relational settings and relational circumstances which Julia encountered in these realms. This variability cannot be overlooked in its importance to and impact on Julia's relational worlds and her responses to them.

To conclude, it is important to recognize that, in spite of Julia's noted proclivity towards 'having things on her own terms', the kinds and qualities of relationships she was observed to experience were not exclusively determined by Julia. As will be explored in the next chapter, relationships of any kind are not born in isolation. Rather, they are both products and processes born of many contributing factors. To best understand Julia's relational worlds, and to arrive at a clearer understanding as to how these relational worlds may be and *can be* changed – changed in a way that benefits all those who participate in these relationships - it is important to understand what these factors are. The next chapter will look at how Julia's relationships are influenced, both directly and indirectly, by the socio-ecological context(s) of her relational experiences.

Chapter 5

Relationships in Context: An Ecosystems Perspective

The aim of this research and the ultimate goal of data collection and subsequent data analysis were to explore and better understand the relational worlds of a child with a significant disability. As discussed in the previous chapters, while there exists a considerable body of research to date regarding relationships among individuals with disabilities, this research has tended to focus more heavily on "measures" of friendship and the hearable voices of relationship participants and observers. Unlike previous research, the previous chapter sought to present the relational worlds in such a way as to more closely view and understand these relational worlds from the vantage of the focal subject, Julia.

It is important to reiterate that, by their very nature, social interactions and relationships do not exist in isolation. While they are lived and shared between specific individuals, the varied forms, functions and meanings of relationships are significantly impacted by the worlds and experiences which surround these individuals. Relationships are fluid, flexible and responsive to the both the participant individuals and the varied context in which and through which they take shape. For this reason, it is important to explore those variables which influence Julia and the relational worlds in which she participates. Ultimately, it is essential that Julia's relational worlds be explored in context and not as singular or isolated phenomena. While Julia and the varied meanings, importance, forms and functions of her relationships is the ultimate focus of research, the relational contexts – contexts which she both helps form and is formed by – are critical to this study. This chapter will explore how and to what extent the concentric spheres of Julia's 'ecosystem' may be

said to influence the formation and functions of the relationships she experienced and participated within.

Ecosystematics: Exploring the Varied Contexts of Relational Worlds

As above, Julia and her relational interactions are not discrete, static entities; rather they are fluid and changing experiences. In light of this, to most fully understand the relational worlds and experiences of Julia, it is important to acknowledge and consider how aspects of context and condition may be of impact on Julia's relational worlds. More specifically, it is important to explore the socio-ecology of relational worlds. Following Bronfenbrenner's (1977) traditional model, the influence of socio-ecology as specific to Julia and her social worlds are explored here. As was depicted in Figure 2 (Chapter 2) the ecological system(s) of which individuals are a part are conceived of as concentric spheres of influence. This section will explore each of these spheres as they specifically relate to Julia within the contexts of education and school. Specific attention given to how each level of the ecosystem may be said to be of impact to Julia and her relational worlds and experiences.

The Macrosystem: Policy and practice in education and disability. The outer sphere if the model is the Macrosystem, which according to Bronfenbrenner's model includes, among other things, the educational and legal patterns exhibited, practiced and enforced by the larger culture of which the individual is a part. As a student and participant in the public school systems, aspects of educational law and policy contribute to the definition and structure of what is conceived of as Julia's Macrosystem. While the impact of educational law and policy may not be of direct influence on Julia herself, the effects of law and practice trickle down and are of repercussive influence on all other levels of the ecosystem. For example, Federal legislation directly informs State legislation, which in turn

informs local (civic and school district) legislation. As such, although somewhat diffuse, the impact of the Macrosystem on Julia and her relational worlds cannot be overlooked.

The outer reaches of the Macrosystem as developed here may be said to be largely defined by IDEA (PL 108-446, 2004). This educational law upholds that all children, regardless of ability, are to have access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in an context which is least restrictive (Least Restrictive Environment, LRE) to the them. What is more, the law maintains that to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities must be educated along with their general education peers. The framework of federal legislation, then, certainly lays the foundation upon which social participation as well as academic participation of a child is made possible. Julia is not an exception. The provisions of this law make Julia's maximal and appropriate participation with general education peers not only possible, but legally required.

Closely aligned to Federal IDEA, and slightly more centrally located (closer to the core of Julia) are state laws and regulations regarding the education and participation of students with disabilities. As stipulated by the overarching laws of IDEA, it is in each state's jurisdiction to formulate the methods and means by which FAPE is assured for all student with disabilities. Federal law provides only loose guidelines as to what FAPE means, and essentially leaves it to the state educational agency (SEA) to determine how FAPE is to be achieved and implemented for each student with a disability (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000; Crockett, 1999; Osborne, 1992). The state wherein this research was conducted has closely aligned its special education laws to those stipulated under IDEA, and therefore, on paper, similarly protects the requirements of FAPE, LRE and inclusion to the maximum extent possible.

The most centrally located component of the Macrosystem as conceived here is the local school district, or Local Education Agency (LEA). Policy and procedures – and ultimately funding – at this level are closely moderated by the mandates of higher level State and Federal requirements and procedures. Given the close alignment of local agencies with state and federal agencies, it is not surprising that at the local level considerations regarding the maximal and appropriate participation of students with disabilities within and across school environments plays a prominent role in the implementation of educational policy and practice. The local school district under whose auspice Julia's school fell specifically identified the mission of its Special Education Department's mission as simply being the provision of "support and technical assistance to schools regarding special education students and programs".

With regard to the Macrosystem, the percolation of policy and procedure from the Federal to State and to local levels certainly impacted the extent to which Julia had access to and participated within and across varied environments and activities at her school. Specifically, Julia's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (as Federally mandated and locally implemented) would have stipulated the amount of time Julia was to spend in the company of her general education peers and in the general education environment. Additionally, her IEP would have specified the level or intensity, and kinds of special education supports and services she was to receive across all school learning, and other, environments. Given the nature and scope of the research, and also because of confidentiality issues, I did not require or request direct access to Julia's IEP and therefore did not have specific information regarding the times and conditions Julia's participation at school, as stipulated on her

individual plan. Observations and information provided to be by Julia's teachers provided some insight regarding the general structure and stipulations of Julia's IEP

Julia was at school for just over 30 hours each week. Of these hours, Julia's IEP recognized 27.5 hours as direct, instructional time, as was the case for all students attending that school. Within these actual in-class, instructional hours, observations revealed that Julia spent between 30 (minimum) and 120 (maximum) minutes a day in the company of her general education peers, either within or outside of her special education classroom. Daily, on average 35 minutes was spent in the general education classroom. For an additional 20 minutes each day (again on average) general education peers joined Julia in her special education classroom, although this was inconsistent and highly variable (range from zero to 60 minutes). In addition to classroom time and contact, Julia spent 30 minutes with her peers for pull-out, or elective activities, including art, physical education, and library, four times weekly.

Outside of 27.5 hours of instructional time, Julia also was to have spent her recesses (15 minutes, two times daily) and lunch time (one half hour, daily) with her general education peers. However, and as discussed in the previous chapter, during periods of inclement weather (and/or in the absence of an educational assistant or the teacher herself), Ms. Cash's often elected to keep her students inside. The students in Ms. Cash's class began to stay in from recesses more frequently (sometimes missing one or more recesses per day) towards the latter half of the semester due in part to both the extended absence of one of the classroom assistants (Ms. Lilly) and inclement weather. As such, the students did not always participate in indoor recesses with their general education peers. Consequently, a large

portion of recesses and/or lunches did not directly contribute to the legally mandated time the students with disabilities, such as Julia, were to spend with their general education peers.

In light of the above discussion, policy and procedure – specifically the IEP as discussed here – while they were in place and served to govern and guide the educational process as experienced by Julia, did not appear to be consistently followed. What is more, it may be argued that a lack of adherence to and consistency within policy and procedure may have impacted, even impeded, the extent to which Julia was included, and participated with the larger population of her school peers.

The Exosystem: School culture and climate. The Exosystem exists more proximal to the individual nested in the center of the model. For this study, the Exosystem is considered as the school where Julia is registered and which she attends daily. Indeed, given its proximity to the Macrosystem, the Exosystem is strongly impacted by the Macrosystem, especially (and as discussed previously) insofar as the school is directly impacted by policies and practice and influenced by overarching laws, provisions and supports. However, how policy is honored and applied within the school itself is of more defined and direct impact to Julia herself, and her peers with disabilities being served at the school. At this level of the Exosystem, is possible to better discern how policy and procedure impacts the individual. However, and perhaps more importantly, at this level a clearer understanding of school-specific approaches to and applications of the law, policy and practice also helps to construct and conceive of the culture (values, beliefs and artifacts) that defines the purpose and functioning of the school itself. This culture, in turn, impacts each participant individual.

My understanding of the school and its 'culture' was developed primarily through information gathered during my initial, introductory conversations with the school principal,

Ms. Otto, conversations with teacher and staff (all participants to the study), and through general observations of the school's common spaces and activities. In addition to general observations and data gathering, observations specific to Julia provided insight as to how certain aspects of the Exosystem's cultural nuances affected Julia's access to and participation in relational arenas. To refer back to the definition presented in Chapter 3, culture is generally conceived of as a shared system of meanings, values, and behaviors which are observed to be exhibited by a population. Much of what culture is, manifests through the physical artifacts created by the cultural participants. Given these aspects of culture, this exploration of the Exosystem (the school) will focus on both the concrete manifestations of culture (specifically environments and activities) and more abstract, subtle characteristics of culture, namely shared (and changing) values and beliefs evidenced through expression and an behaviors.

Vista Alta: Considering space and place as cultural artifacts. Certainly how a space is structured and how it is used may reflect certain values and behaviors of those who occupy and use the space. For this reason, in understanding the culture of the school, it is important to understand the space that the school occupies from the vantage of a cultural artifact.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 Vista Alta is a relatively old school, built in the 1950s. Renovations occurring during the period of observations sought to bring much needed up-dates and space in response to the quickly growing student population. The school is an open-air structure with nine separate buildings laid out in a "tick-tack-toe" orientation. Three larger buildings (running from north to south) occupy the center row, and three classroom wings extend to the right (or west), and three to the left (or east). Wide covered walkways and grassy, tree-shaded courtyards separate each building from the others.

Many elements of the school structure and layout indicate an appreciation of campus accessibility to all students. The center row of buildings, consisting of the cafeteria, administration and staffing, and the school library had main entrances outfitted with automatic door opening buttons. With the exception of the cafeteria door for which the button was broken for the majority of my observations, all functioned properly and efficiently.

Special Education classrooms were interspersed throughout the school, with only one classroom located in one of the farthest portable buildings. Of the eleven total special education classrooms, seven of them housed students with more significant learning, behavioral and physical needs, such as those students assigned to autism specific programs or to an intensive support program (ISP). None of the special education classrooms were outfitted with an automatic door opener. However, each autism and intensive support classroom did have direct (although sometimes shared) access to an in-room, large and fully accessible bathrooms with changing tables. Additionally, of these seven classrooms, four of them had a large opening in the wall which allowed ready access to the room next door. Ms. Sandy, who had worked at the school for many years, had explained to me that when she had first started working at Vista Alta, it had been a “side-by-side” school. This, she explained, meant that special education classrooms were deliberately located next door to the general education classrooms so that access between the general education and special education students and environments was easy and fluid. During my initial tour of the school, I had noted these rooms with the pass through walls. More specifically, I had noted the fact that each pass through was in various stages of closure or blockage (from closed accordion doors, to large storage closets strategically placed in front).

The distribution of special education classrooms throughout the school appeared to speak in favor of the inclusion, rather than exclusion of students with disabilities within the larger school environment. The many (though not all) aspects of individual classroom set-up and accessibility similarly appeared to indicate a certain appreciation of individual student needs, especially for those students with significant needs. The presence of openings between classrooms also suggested a recognition of, though not necessarily the actualization of a need for easy and regular access between classrooms. While on the whole, the school presented itself as one which included and valued students with disabilities, some details or attributes (i.e., blocked passages and absent door openers, to name the two most apparent) hinted at inconsistencies with regard to how the participation of students with disabilities was realized across the school environment.

Beyond the school buildings, the school playground space revealed insights regarding culture (as an assumed cultural artifact). As previously mentioned, a massive construction project was underway during the course of this research. As a result, the school playground areas were significantly encroached upon. The playground areas (which included a play structure area, a tarmac area, a woodchip area with a variety of swings, slides and climbing bars, and a large grassy field and crumbling track) were located down a sharp embankment. Because of the construction, access down to this area was limited to a steep, temporary steel ramp buttressed on each side by two flights of stairs. To access the play areas, students had to weave their way between and around four relocated portables which appeared to have been randomly placed.

All areas of the playground were, to varying degrees, accessible to all students. The large play structure area appeared to be relatively new and consisted of a brightly colored

contraption of ramps, forts, climbers, slides, and twirling bars. A large ramp which allowed students with mobility issues access to the lower portions of the structure seemed to indicate that this structure had been installed with children with disabilities in mind. The tarmac area was flat with a considerable amount of open space and a large shelter to offer protection from the elements. The wood-chipped area, although sunken behind a low cement wall, did have an entry ramp for all students to pass down. Within this play area, a variety of play equipment was available, including large, plastic adapted swings for children with mobility and other gross motor issues. With monitoring and guidance, the large grassy field and track were also accessible to all students.

Given the above descriptions and observations of the space of Vista Alta Elementary, there were many indications that, in terms of spatial planning and structure, the school (as cultural artifact) reflected an appreciation of students with disabilities and their participation across the school environments.

Vista Alta: A system of behavior, values and beliefs. During my initial meeting with Ms. Otto the school principal, two elements of the over-arching school expectations and values were made clear: (a) the participation and inclusion of the special education students in and across school activities was expected, and (b) the teaching staff were valued for their teaching skills and commitment to the inclusion and education of all students.

Regarding the participation of students with disabilities, my preliminary weeks of observation showed that students did participate in a variety of activities with their general education peers across the school day. Not just Ms. Cash's class, but most other special education classes joined their general education peers for all elective, or pull-out, activities including art, physical education, and library. Students with disabilities also joined their

grade level peers at recess (2 or 3 times a day, depending on the grade level), and in the cafeteria for lunch. And, depending on each classroom and the needs of the students therein, most classes participated in more academic activities with their general education peers.

Preliminary and on-going observations allowed me to see "participation" in action across school environments. Observations, while they revealed the participation of students with disabilities across a wide range of activities and environments, also revealed that student participation was not always direct or inclusive. Rather, student participation was observed to take many forms , ranging from separateness and marginalization to partial inclusion and integration. Observations of different common activities will be described with discussion as to what these activities may be said to reveal about the overarching beliefs and values demonstrated at the school, or Exosystem, level.

Assembly – A time to gather and listen. An observation conducted during the second week of the study demonstrated at once not only the inclusion of students with disabilities, including Julia, during a school-wide activity, but also a certain element of marginalization of these same (though not all) students. The following excerpt describes this observation.

> It is a Friday morning, and I am making my way down the breezeway towards Ms. Cash's classroom. Just as I approach the classroom door, it swings open with a flourish of swirling jackets and squeals. Ms. Cash informs me that they are on their way to a school-wide assembly in the cafeteria. As she tells me this, she seems rolls her eyes slightly, almost as a suggestion of frustration. She further explains that she had not been aware of this. It had just been announced on the intercom and now they were late. She and the classroom assistants usher the students quickly down the sidewalk as they simultaneously assist a few of the children in adjusting jackets and doing up zippers.
>
> When we arrive to the main doors cafeteria Ms. Cash, seeing that the cafeteria is already packed full and that the Ms. Otto has already started to speak, suggests they go in through the side door. One of the students has already opened the door to enter and is gently pulled back by his coat sleeve.

The students enter the side door and are directed to sit down on the floor by the teacher to the side and at the very back of the assembled children. At the front of the room, Ms. Otto is speaking to the students through a small portable microphone/PA system. What she is saying is barely audible through the squeals and buzzes of the microphone. The drone of words and noise reverberates on the cinderblock walls and is lost up among the high rafters of the cafeteria. Selma is sitting with her legs bent and splayed to the side. Her thumb is in her mouth. She is turned sideways towards the teacher with a wide-eyed look of confusion. Soon, she is distracted and starts spinning herself in a slow circle to inspect those around her. Julia is seated next to her, also sideways, her head bowed as she inspects and pulls a thread from the leggings she is wearing. Next she starts kicking off her shoes and putting them back on. She does not look up once except to glare at Selma who has accidentally bumped her, and again later to wag her finger at Selma. Marlon is sitting quietly, turned slightly to the side. His eyes are wide as he stares intermittently up at the ceiling and then down to stare blankly at the back of the student's jacket in front of him. Ms. Cash makes frequent attempts to direct the distracted students' attention back to Ms. Otto. Dennis and Annie both are fidgeting, but periodically seem to attend to what is happening up front.

As I scan the cafeteria I see our 1st grade peers across the room sitting in a two short rows. Along the far wall of the cafeteria and towards the back, I note a large number of the special education teachers and classroom assistants clustered, - some standing, some sitting on the floor with their students. As with Ms. Cash's class, most of these classes appear to be sitting away from their general education peers and on the periphery.

As the assembly concludes, Ms. Otto starts releasing classes by grade. The cafeteria begins to bubble with the noise and the confusion of student's being beckoned and herded to the appropriate doors. Noticing the students around them beginning to stand, Ms. Cash's students slowly start to rise. Ms. Cash calls them to her, explaining to the classroom assistants that they will wait until the cafeteria has cleared. Once the cafeteria has cleared out Ms. Cash and her students walk back to the classroom (1-64).

While this is only one short observation, it does suggest while the participation – integration or inclusion - of students with disabilities is expected at the school, it may not always be facilitated. What is more, this observation provides some indication as to the discord between the stated and observed behaviors and values within the school, or Exosystem. The inclusion of students in this activity was marginal as evidenced by large number of special education students and staff situated at the margins of the cafeteria. For

Ms. Cash's class, their inclusion in this assembly had been restricted even *before* they had entered the cafeteria – this due to the fact that they had not been aware of that there was to be an assembly. Finally, the actual participation of all students with disabilities during the assembly was apparently minimized not only by their physical placement, but also by the means (and confusion) by which the assembly was delivered.

Lunch – A time to eat. Ms. Cash's students regularly ate their lunches in the cafeteria along with grade level (and higher) peers. While the focus was primarily on Ms. Cash's students, my earliest observations in the cafeteria proved invaluable in better understanding the dynamics and underlying 'culture' of the greater school, specifically as relating to the participation of children with disabilities. Again, as with the previously discussed assembly, students with disabilities were expected to eat in the cafeteria with their peers. The participation of special education students during lunch was observed to be variable, and ranged from full exclusion to partial inclusion. Each will be outlined, with specific observations noted from Ms. Cash's classroom.

One extreme of these lunch time observations suggested full physical and spatial separation of special needs students from their general education peers. On repeated occasions, educational assistants/teachers (typically the same each time) were observed to come to the cafeteria with large trays which they would pile up with Styrofoam trays of food and would leave, presumably to take to their students in another location. Similar instances were noted on a number of occasions for Ms. Cash's class on days when the students took their lunches back to the classroom (or on one special spring occasion, took them to a picnic table just outside their classroom). During all of these lunch periods Ms. Cash's students were not joined by their peers, but rather ate in the company of the classroom assistants

and/or Ms. Cash. Typically, for these lunch breaks, the students watched a video (a series of sign language learning videos for children) as they ate (2-1; 3-85; 4-45; 4-52; 4-69; 4-75; 4-103; 4-120; 4-150; 5-7; 5-20).

Students with disabilities also frequently ate in the cafeteria with their general education peers, but very often, though they were all in the same space, there remained an apparent spatial separation between the general and special education students. An early observation of Julia's interactions with a boy with significant disabilities from another class first drew my attention to this separateness. This little boy sat in his wheelchair at the end of one of the large cafeteria tables. His special education classmates and classroom assistants sat close by at his end of the table. During these observations, general education peers while they occasionally sat at the far end of the same table, rarely were observed to sit close to or intermingled with their special education peers. Observations such as this were repeatedly noted, and seemed to suggest that, more frequently than not, students with disabilities remained spatially separate from their general education peers. This excerpt demonstrates this separateness.

> Today the students arrive in the cafeteria directly from PE class. Julia, who had just tried to escape from the educational assistants in the gymnasium, has pushed ahead of the group through the cafeteria door and runs, arms flailing, to the cafeteria line. Ms. Sandy follows behind Julia with Marlon and Selma close at her side. Ms. Lilly pushes Annie's wheelchair up to the end of one of the long tables, the same table and placement where the previous two lunch observations had taken place. Ms. Kay's students sit at the opposite end of this table. With the exception of Dennis, who has spotted his friend Nate at the other end of the table and elects to sit with him, all other of Ms. Cash's students cluster around Annie. Julia plops her tray down next to Annie and sits. Across the table from Julia, and next to Annie, Marlon sits quietly. Ms. Sandy, carrying Selma's tray, beckons her to sit next to Ms. Lilly, who is sitting on the bench next to Julia. Ms. Lilly busies herself opening milk cartons, plastic wrapped sporks, and milk cartons for Annie, Julia and Selma. Ms. Sandy walks back and forth around Annie looking casually down at the students before she finds a seat on the bench between Marlon and one of the students from Ms. Kay's classroom (1-42).

A number of recurrent adult behaviors highlighted in this vignette, may have reinforced this separateness. First, the educational assistants appeared to be largely responsible for where students sat. For example, although Ms. Sandy and Ms. Lilly had their students sit near their general education cohort, they may have inadvertently limited student seating choice by simply "parking" Annie's wheelchair in the same spot on numerous occasions. After repeated observations of the same seating arrangements, it seemed that all students, special education and general education alike, accepted these arrangements as the norm. Second, the physical presence (and assistance) of these assistants, often appeared to create physical blocks, whether intentional or not, between the special needs students and their peers. Finally, even in the absence of educational assistants, there was frequently noted a physical, empty space between the two groups of students. Again, and as relating to the first point, through repetition and habit, this space may well have become the accepted norm (1-42; 1-53; 1-70; 1-80; 2-1; 2-13; 4-18)

As the next vignette highlights, the interception of interactions between students with special needs and their general education peers was not exclusive to classroom assistants and the students and classrooms with which they were directly affiliated. While this observation was specific to Julia, what is important to note is that a teacher, unknown to Julia (and likely vice versa) intercepted what may have been perceived or assumed to have been an inappropriate interaction.

> Having just finished her lunch, Julia gathers up the remains of her lunch and carries her tray to the garbage area. On her way back to where she had been sitting with her special education classmates and assistants, she spots her peers, Eddy, Aretha and Maureen from Ms. Kay's classroom. She stops behind Eddy and touches him on the back in greeting. As Eddy turns to respond to Julia, a duty teacher approaches and

gently pushes Julia towards her own table, saying firmly “go back to your seat” (4-138).

Pull-outs – A time for interactive learning and fun. Teachers who taught pull-out classes and activities served the entire student population. In fact, almost all students with disabilities at Vista Alta were expected to be included in all pull-out activities with their grade-level education peers, which they were expected to attend in the general education setting (or specific pull-out environment, or classroom). Because pull-out activities and environments were intended for the entire school population, for the purposes of this research, they are here considered to reflect elements of the larger school culture, expectations, and so forth. As such, they are considered here as part of the Exosystem. Interestingly, the circumstance and setting of each pull-out indicated a range of participation for students with disabilities.

Separateness seemed to define one extreme of participation during pull-out activities. As Ms. Sandy had explained to me, she believed that there were many special education classes in the school that did not join their general education peers for pull-outs simply because it was easier not to – something, she further explained, was based on her own past experiences. I was never able to verify this claim on a school-wide basis, however my observations of Ms. Cash’s students corroborate a certain degree of separateness, although not absolute in terms of complete spatial or locational separation, as alluded to by Ms. Sandy. One pull-out in particular, art, hinted at a separation or exclusion of students with disabilities within a shared space.

Art class presented a physical separation of students with disabilities from their general education peers. It must be stressed that this physical separateness was never

observed to result from a direct or explicit statement or directive coming from the art teacher, herself. While the art teacher did explain to me that many special education classes did not join their general education peers in her room, she herself had not scheduled these arrangements; rather she had simply complied with individual teacher requests. Again, this implied that, in fact, such an arrangement may have been perceived as easier by the teachers.

Ms. Cash's class did join Ms. Kay's students in the art portable on a weekly basis. While in the same space as Ms. Kay's class, Ms. Cash's students sat together in a small cluster at the end of a long lunch table, along with Ms. Lilly, Ms. Sandy, and the classroom speech therapist. A small group of Ms. Kay's students would typically sit, a stone's throw away, at the opposite end of the table. The classroom assistants and therapist sat strategically interspersed between the students, supposedly so as to offer the students help with their projects. While, help and guidance (and therapy) was needed on occasion by each student, the placement of Ms. Cash's students within the classroom created a feeling of separateness and distance. This separateness did little to facilitate students' engagement. What is more, it did little to facilitate natural meaningful learning and sharing interactions between the special education students and their general education peers.

In contrast to the former pull-out, library was consistently marked by the full participation and inclusion of all students. During the library time, all students would gather in a loose and random group on the floor in front of the librarian. After a group Read-Aloud by the librarian, the students dispersed to select and check out library books. During this period, while the classroom assistants did periodically assist and redirect, all students, including Ms. Cash's, wandered the room independently, perusing the shelves alongside their general education peers. Students would then take their books and sit quietly at their assigned

library tables – where the special and general education students sat intermingled - to read. Unlike the previously discussed pull-outs library appeared to provide the opportunity for very fluid and natural interactions between all students. While inappropriate behaviors and interactions were observed over the course of library observations, these were far fewer than similar behaviors observed during other pull-outs.

Recess – A time to play. School recess periods, as lunch, were times where large portions of the student population convened in a common arena. Generally, all students from the same grade level, including both general and special education, were outside for the same recess period. As would be expected, recesses were indeed a time wherein a greater degree intermingling and mutual participation was observed among all students. However, as with lunch, there was a great range in what was observed, including full separation and exclusion to full participation and inclusion.

Overwhelmingly, a large portion of recess observations evidenced a large degree of *separateness*. Two principal themes or trends seemed to define this separateness: (a) teachers' decisions to keep students indoors; and (b) adult behaviors which, intentionally or not, reinforced this separateness.

Regarding teachers' decisions to keep students in doors, Ms. Sandy had explained that, based on her experiences in special education both in general and at that school teachers often chose not to take students out because 'it was too hard'. General observations conducted during recess seemed to corroborate that often times students with disabilities from across the school were kept indoors. As discussed in Chapter 4, Ms. Cash often elected to keep her students indoors during recess for a variety of reasons. Many of these reasons may have similarly factored into why other special needs students from other classes did not

attend recess. In specific regard to Ms. Cash's class, only infrequently did students from the general education classroom join them for play activities. As a result, Ms. Cash's students were kept apart from potential interactions – interactions of a more natural and fluid nature.

Regarding the second contributing factor to separateness during recess, certain adult behaviors appeared to reinforce separateness. Such behaviors may also have contributed to and flavored a broader school culture and climate. Specifically, during recess teachers (predominantly, though not exclusively special education teachers) were often noted to cluster together and talk amongst themselves. The observed (or perceived) outcomes of this behavior were manifold and interrelated. To begin, very often students with disabilities, especially those with more significant disabilities, remained close to the teacher. Often this was because the students could not physically leave. Many times, this also appeared to be because the student did not want to leave (or, possibly, did not know how to leave). In essence, the students seemed to be anchored to the teachers, and as such, their exposure to and opportunities for interactions with others were limited or circumscribed. These realized and observable outcomes of separateness may have not only maintained the students in one teacher-based space, but also directly impacted how others perceived these individuals with disabilities (as discussed in the next section) and, as importantly, may have impacted how these students with disabilities came to see themselves.

A great deal of parallel (not mutual) engagement between general and special education children was observed across all students from all classrooms during recess periods. During such engagements, students with special needs were observed to tag along with their general education peers, and only rarely observed to directly engage with their peers or a shared activity. For example, on one occasion, Selma was observed to tag along

with a small group of girls from Ms. Kay's class. While the girls encouraged Selma to keep up with them, they did not directly engage Selma in any aspect of their interactions. A number of observations of Julia showed similar aspects of parallel play, which, oftentimes were short lived, and quickly followed by abandonment such as demonstrated in this vignette:

> Julia has just dismounted the arch shaped monkey bars and is wandering the playground with her arms swinging by her side, and her head slightly bowed in a manner almost suggesting dejectedness. She wanders over to the parallel bars on the far end of the wood chipped area and perks up when she sees a group of boys climbing up and rough-housing on and around the bars. She approaches the bars and pulls herself up alongside two of the dangling boys, smiling broadly as she does so. Seeing her on the bars, one boy releases his grip and falls to the ground. The other boy continues to swing back and forth, paying little attention to Julia. Another boy climbs back up on the bars next to his peer, and starts swinging rapidly and forcefully sideways, attempting to knock into his friend and bring him to the ground. On the ground another boy pulls at his friend's feet. Julia watches silently and with great interest as she hangs unmoving from the bars. She starts to giggle and swing as she watches. One of the boys falls/is successfully knocked/pulled down, and Julia seems to wiggle with excitement for what she has witnessed. With strong, solid movements Julia works her way across the bar towards the boy still hanging. She too starts to swing herself sideways, and makes an effort to grab at the boys arm. The boy who had previously seemed unaware if not disinterested in Julia's presence on the bars looks at her with wide, surprised eyes. He releases his grip on the bars and drops to the ground. He and his friends move quickly away from the bars where Julia continues to giggle and swing raucously (4-17).

The Mesosystem: Classroom culture and climate. The Mesosystem is embedded within the Exosystem and rests next to the core of the Microsystem (or individual). As described previously (Chapter 2), the Mesosystem consists of those settings and circumstances within which the individual regularly frequents and participates. Within the school (or Exosystem) the specific classrooms wherein Julia participated most frequently and spent the majority of her school day constitute the Mesosystem. Because the individual is much more intimately nested within the Mesosystem, it is important to recognize and

understand this sphere and the real, more direct impact it has on the individual. This section explores the culture of Julia's classrooms, both with regard to shared values, beliefs and cultural artifacts. Data collected through teacher interviews and observations will be used to draw together the many aspects of classroom culture.

Classroom values and beliefs - Perceptions of inclusion and its importance. Both Ms. Cash and Ms. Kay were critical players in forming the classroom culture and climate. Specifically, both expressed support for the fullest, most appropriate participation of students with disabilities along with their general education peers. Ms. Cash, at the time of this study, was pursuing her Master's degree in special education. Her enthusiasm and commitment to inclusion was evident, both in conversations and interviews, and as observed. As she explained of her current teaching position, "I've always tried to do inclusion, but this is a school where it's actually been a team effort [with Ms. Kay] towards it….and it's been great" (MC 3). Her perceptions of inclusion seemed to embrace the participation of special education peers as something logical, normal and *real*:

> Do most people work without working with other people? Do most people do anything without being involved with other people? I mean, you go to the grocery store, you go to whatever, you have to have … skills otherwise you are either going to be at home with your family, not knowing anything, not going anywhere, or you are going to be institutionalized. And if you are going to be in an institution, let's have an institution that takes you out somewhere and you can be (a part of) the community, 'cuz that's the real world (MC 6).

While she recognized why others may perceive inclusion as cumbersome or difficult to carry out, she also recognized the importance of it. "[So] there are drawbacks [to inclusion] and there is the excuse that, oh, well, that makes it harder to teach general ed.. Well, you know what? I think the benefits outweigh any possible drawbacks" (MC6). Among the benefits to special education students she included "getting more out of

interactions" when participating with general education peers, as opposed to strictly learning from teachers, and a greater "maturity" through more inclusion. For all children, she noted the importance of inclusion in affording more opportunity for more natural and reciprocal learning.

Ms. Kay, too, was clearly supportive of the integration of special education students with her general education students. Many years previous, she had participated in training for teachers and schools hoping to start up fully-inclusive, collaborative education classrooms at their school site. In fact, for two years, she had helped in the establishment of a successful, inclusive classroom setting wherein she worked with general education students alongside students with intensive learning and other support needs (ISP students). In spite of her training and experience, or perhaps *because* of it, she did express some reservations as to the appropriateness and benefits to all participants, teachers and students alike.

> I do think that if at each grade level there was the expectation of some form of integration, I mean, 'cuz I go back and forth on the whole least restrictive environment, I get it, I understand it for kids like Julia, and even kids with learning disabilities, and things like that, but at the same time those can also restrict the learning environment of the general ed., kind of thing, so I don't know. I have this whole philosophical debate in my head of 100% inclusion versus integration, you know, what truly is the benefit to everybody, teachers included, and what's the benefit to the kids (MK15).

As with Ms. Cash, Ms. Kay recognized one of the benefits of inclusion as being opportunities to learn. As she stated, specifically in relation to Julia but certainly as applicable to all her students, students with special needs "[need] just the exposure and experience to learn, to start to learn to generalize in [their] own way" (MK 14). In addition, she also addressed the important role that inclusion plays in a more mutual and reciprocal teaching and learning for all students (in this case Julia and her peers), especially as relating

to the appropriate interactions and acceptance: " I think she's learning… and I think she's teaching too, the ways of appropriate interactions…. The [other] kids have to learn to be more patient … they've been able to see how they may have to maybe be patient with different people just in general" (MK 10).

Setting expectations and rules for inclusion. Both teachers pinpoint a primary, shared expectation of the classroom as being that of the acceptance of others, or more specifically an acceptance of differences in others:

> Ms. Kay: "[At] the beginning of the year it was, we had to learn that we were all in the same community, and that there were differences, but it didn't take them long to realize that they were all there for the same purpose" (MK 1).
> Ms. Cash: "And…. And look, we're all hanging out, we're all the same, this is the way it's going to be, you know?... We all do sort of like the same thing even though we do it differently. So that's it, that's going to be the philosophy for our whole school year" (MC9).

While this underlying expectation of acceptance is shared between these teachers, how this expectation is passed to students was conceived and presented differently by Ms. Cash and Ms. Kay. For Ms. Cash, these expectations were thought to be more or less directly taught to students: "We need to teach peers what we expect of them by treating everybody the same way" (MC 9). By contrast, Ms. Kay sees acceptance as a simple expectation which cannot be directly taught, but has to be individually learned and appreciated:

> I think it has to be expected, I don't think it has to be taught… I mean, it's just like my own [sons], I expect them to interact with all the kids at their school and in their class. I don't expect them to like everybody or to get along with everybody. I expect them to get along but not like everybody and their behaviors and attitudes and whatever. But I think they know the expectation is that I at least have to be nice (MK 4).

Further, Ms. Kay explained that acceptance is not directly, but rather inadvertently learned through experience and example, and ultimately the set expectation:

> I think [acceptance] well, I think it's back to the expectations that interactions will happen and I think, I do think how kids are inadvertently taught, like the hidden curriculum, like how to interact based on what they view and I think that influences, because I know… I know if I was more leery, or if I was more protective or guarded or something that would show the kids they needed to be protective or guarded, kind of thing, and so I think it depends on what the student's view, what they see, I think, expectations (MK 11).

A tale of two classrooms cultures - A contrast of environments and activities. While both Ms. Cash and Ms. Kay expressed very similar perspectives, expectations, values and beliefs regarding inclusion, the physical environments and behaviors and activities wherein integration took place were markedly different. In many respects, each classroom was both an expression of the individual teacher as well as the perceived learning needs and expectations espoused by that teacher. Each classroom will be described physically, and the activities which typically took place in each classroom will be outlined.

Ms. Cash's classroom.

> As I enter Ms. Cash's room for the first time, the space is quiet and empty of occupants, save me. A preliminary scan of the room reveals an open, somewhat empty room. There appears to be very little in the way of furniture. What little furniture there is seems to be randomly and sporadically placed throughout the classroom. As I wait for the class to return, I situate myself just inside the front door, underneath a large bank of windows which span across the entire north facing wall of the class. The windows look out over a small grassy space, dotted with trees, and across to another wing of classrooms (as I later learn to be the building where Ms. Kay's classroom is). Under these windows sits a single, neat, seemingly little used teacher's desk and chair. Looking around the room counter clock-wise, I see a teetering computer table pushed into the corner. Along the wall perpendicular to the windows, a cluster of furniture is visible. A bookshelf and two file cabinets are place against the wall. In front, a desk faces out towards the center of the room. At least, I think it is a desk, though it is mostly hidden under a clutter of paper and books, and is partially walled-off (barricaded?) by a high metal TV cart on wheels. Next to this desk is a very large wooden cabinet on casters. This cabinet is lined up along the wall next to the file cabinets. I later learn that this cabinet has been pushed there to help cover the large doorway between this space and the classroom next door. In the corner of the room kitty-corner and opposite to the door I have entered, another door leads out to the south side of the school property where the playground areas are

found. Next to this door, bulletin board and large white board span the wall. In front of this board a handful of student desks – I count 6 in total - of various sizes have been placed in a seeming random fashion – some facing the white board, some facing back towards the window wall, and still some off-kilter and seeming facing nowhere in particular. The south-east corner of the classroom is dominated by two walls (those of the classroom bathroom) which project into the room. Just outside the bathroom door, along the eastern wall of the room, a row of computers (4) is crammed in the corner. Further along this wall, a bank of cupboards housing a refrigerator, microwave and sink is found. Finally, in the middle of the room, just off center, a large kidney-shaped table is awkwardly placed.

The classroom is meagerly decorated with a handful of colorful and educational posters. Student art – snowmen constructed of construction paper, cotton and glitter – are taped to the front bank of windows. The doors of the large wooden cabinet and “kitchen area” cabinets have been decorated with craft paper and decorative boarders. Taped to the white board, is a large paper stop-light with student pictures attached (I later learn this to be the classroom behavior monitoring tool). Finally, student schedule, consisting of large, laminated computer generated drawings of student activities is posted on the blank side of a cabinet. In one corner, a single low book shelf is overflowing with a handful of books, toys, puzzles and other games. Aside from papers stacked on the teacher’s desk, this seems to be the only readily accessible/visible materials for student learning (and fun).

***Ms. Kay’s classroom*.**

Ms. Kay’s classroom is difficult to take in at once. It is crowded with furniture, indeed, so crowded I can hardly make my way much past the threshold where we have entered the classroom from the back door which faces the shared courtyard. The room is buzzing with noise and energy as the students bustle back and forth getting ready to gather on the floor for morning literacy activities. The back entrance is a narrow entrance path lined with shelves filled with bins of math manipulatives, boxes of crayons, pencils, glue, and stacks of colorful construction paper. A low plastic cart immediately in front of me is piled high with carpet squares and now, with the arrival of Ms. Cash’s students, a stack of winter coats. The students, one-by-one, are approaching the cart to grab a square which they take to their chosen sitting spot on the floor. The students have all gathered, sitting with legs criss-crossed, on the floor in front of a large white board flanked by two bulletin boards. This whole wall where the students face, and in front of which Ms. Kay has perched herself on a chair, is covered with colorful posters and learning materials. To the left of the white board, an elaborate calendar display has been set up, displaying months, weeks, money, place-value straws, and a handful of other calendar activity materials. The white board to the right of the calendar has very little “white” showing. It is covered with charts (of student birthday months and teeth lost) and maps (to which are taped postcards from around the world). The far bulletin board numerous informational/learning posters are displayed. Across the room from where I sit, I see a cove of computers nestled

between bookshelves filled with books, large and small. Kitty-corner, is another entrance to the room which leads out to a shady courtyard. Just inside this door, to the right and under a long, low bank of windows, mesh crates are stacked in two low rows. Jackets, backpacks, lunch bags and miscellaneous books and scrunched-up pieces of paper spill from these crates. A kidney table sits just beside the crates and is stacked with neat piles of what appear to be basal readers. Tucked in the corner, and hardly visible to me, is Ms. Kay's desk.

In the center of the room, six long, rectangular tables are crowded into two tight rows. Each table has on top a metal basket of papers and cans covered in different colored craft paper filled with pencils. Six rectangular tables fill the large space in the center of the classroom. Each table is stocked with metal baskets of paper and color-coded cans containing pencils. I came to understand later that Ms. Kay used this color system as an alternative to name tags. She could easily move students around, either for behavioral or learning reasons, by simply having them move to a different color-table and not have to worry about having specific name tags follow with them. Between 4 and 6 chairs are stationed around each table, with the exception of two tables which have exchanged a chair for a therapy ball – ball seats which help overly energetic children 'get their wiggles out'.

Classroom activities. As with the classroom spaces themselves, the activities which occur within each are equally as defined and distinct. Again, as with classroom spaces, activities appeared to be a reflection of each teacher's character and creativity. Classroom activities were also a reflection of student learning needs. Within and across these classroom settings, Ms. Cash's students participated in a variety of activities with their general education peers. The levels of interaction varied greatly within and between classes, and ranged from students working independently to students working in pairs or groups. The activities themselves ranged from strict, independently completed academic activities to more unstructured, non-academic group oriented activities. The following overview and examples of activities offers some insights as to how classroom cultures (and expectations) were differentially manifest within these separate classrooms.

For Ms. Cash's students, the day began in the special education classroom. The students typically arrived, one-by-one, completed their morning routine (unloading

backpacks, lunches, communication books and toileting) as they listened to the morning announcements. With the morning routine completed, the students then got ready to travel across the courtyard for morning literacy activities in Ms. Kay's classroom. Literacy with Ms. Kay's class had only just started prior to my research beginning, so it was relatively new and novel in the student's daily routine.

Morning literacy occurred daily for the duration of my research period. Literacy activities typically lasted for 15 to 20 minutes. As part of a literacy program, the activities that took place were relatively predictable and routine in nature, and they all had clear instructional and academic content. For literacy, the students from both classrooms would gather in a large group on the floor in front of Ms. Kay. All students were expected to attend to the activity, as all students were required to participate at some point during the morning activities. The following observation reflects the various components of the morning literacy routine, with examples of Julia's participation.

> When Ms. Cash's students arrive to Ms. Kay's classroom, the students have all gathered on the floor in front of Ms. Kay. Ms. Cash's students are quickly ushered in and intersperse among the seated students. Ms. Kay is turned slightly in her chair and holding up an oversized book "Chicken Soup with Rice" which she is reading aloud to the class. Her students chant along with her as she reads, clearly they have read this book before. Selma and Julia are seated up front, and very close to Ms. Cash. Selma is turned slightly away, thumb in mouth. She is not attending to the teacher but is wide-eyed as she inspects the students sitting around her. Julia is sitting two students down. Her legs are drawn up tightly to her chest and she is rocking slightly as she gazes intermittently between the book and Ms. Cash's shoes. Her mouth is open, and her eyes look glazed and tired.
>
> With the book finished, Ms. Kay turns towards a low easel beside her where a large poster of a poem (of the sea shore) is displayed. As Ms. Kay shifts towards this new activity, her students turn with her and wiggle on their bottoms to get a better look at the poster. Julia looks up and around her mouth open and eyes wide. She seems to have noticed the shift in the crowd around her, but seems unaware, though curious, about what is has happened and looks expectantly to the students seated around her. Neither the students, nor the teachers seem to have noticed her eager glances. Each is focused on the activity in front of them. Following their gaze, Julia

looks briefly to the poster, but soon shifts her seat on the floor as she looks with rapt attention to the student next to her who is quietly echoing the words of the poem as the teacher read it aloud. The poem is finished, and Ms. Kay removes the poster from the easel to display a large note pad on which she has pre-written a sentence/question. Again, the students wiggle and begin to chatter as Ms. Kay shifts to this new activity. Julia seems unaware and uninterested in the shift, and instead is looking down with great focus at her legs stretched in front of her, pulling at the wool stockings she is wearing. One-by-one Ms. Kay asks the students to read and answer the question " What would you like to do at the shore? Tell me I would like to _____ because _____". With prompts, each of Ms. Cash's students answer the question. When it is Julia's turn, Ms. Cash crouches down in front of her. Julia looks up with surprise, almost as if she thinks she has done something wrong and is in trouble. Ms. Cash says loudly to her "What do you like to do at the shore?". Julia looks up at her with wide questioning eyes. Ms. Cash continues, as she signs "Do you like to play? Or do you like to swim?" Seeing the signs, Julia's shoulders relax and a broad smile spreads across her face. She signs "play". "Oh! You like to play? Gooood!" Ms Cash moves away as the other students continue to answer the questions. Julia sits happily rocking and smiling to those sitting around her, clearly pleased to have been able to answer the question.

Toward the end of the literacy activities on this day, Ms. Kay picks up and cradles on her lap a large, spiraled teacher instructional manual. She reads/sings from it a song to the tune of "If you're happy and you know it". As they listen, they are to replace certain letter sounds in words with others to make rhymes. Ms. Cash's student's smile as they attempt to sing along, all except Julia who has returned to study her stockings (1-33).

With morning literacy activities completed, and after having received a coin (or not) for good behavior, the Ms. Cash's students returned to class for a quick morning snack before they began their morning work activities. There was considerable variability in the kinds of activities the students would do during this time, but typically activities were linked to math or literacy. General education students were never observed to come over during this work time. During these activities there was also some observed variability with regard to how these activities were delivered and completed – for example, whether individually or in a group, at their desks or together at the table. Regardless, and given the absence of general education peers, there was always a very low student to teacher ratio. As a result, direct

student support, redirection and assistance were readily available. Ms. Cash's students would engage in these work activities for approximately one hour or until it was time for recess.

At least one time each week during this morning work period, the students would be separated into two groups. During this time, half of the students would work with the speech and occupational therapists on a group craft or other project while the remaining students, with the necessary assistance from classroom assistants or teachers, would move to their desks to complete individual activities or worksheets. The following vignettes compare each activity, as observed during Julia's participation.

> *Independent work:* Snack is over and Julia is sitting at her desk with Ms. Lilly. Ms. Lilly has just switched places with Ms. Sandy, whose frustration had appeared to be rising. A worksheet is on the desk in front of Julia, and Ms. Lilly is holding the pencil towards her and asking her to write her name. Julia's face scrunches up angrily, as she attempts to pull the sheet away from Ms. Lilly. After a few seconds of angry growling in Ms. Lilly's general direction, Julia climbs up onto her knees and leans her chest on the desk. Her eyes are focused on the sheet in front of her as she writes her name. With expectant eyes, she looks up at Ms. Lilly who begins shifting small counting blocks across the desk top as she begins to count aloud. Julia continues to look at Ms. Lilly, pressing her hand and the pencil she is still holding up against her ear. Her look is one of mild interest mixed with confusion. After counting the blocks twice, Ms. Lilly announces "Okay, we've done this twice. Let's move on to something else." Julia sits back in her chair, eyes wide. "Okay, you're not working. Let's go to time out". Julia, somewhat reluctantly, gets up and follows Ms. Lilly to a spot on the floor. (1-38).
>
> *Group Therapy:* Julia has just thrown away the last bit of her orange, and eagerly joins the speech therapist and her peers at the snack table. Today they are going to be making walruses out of paper plates. As Julia sits, a big grin spreads over her face. Each child is given a paper plate to start with and then, one-by-one, is directed to ask for the next items they will need, paint and a paint brush. As Julia's turn approaches, she reaches enthusiastically across the table to grab the picture communication board on the table. With quick and sure hand movements, she constructs the necessary picture sentence to request what she needs. With a smile on her face, and wide bright eyes, she thrusts the communication board back to the SLP. With tools in hand, the next few minutes find her enthralled with the painting task at hand. With the plate fully painted, she briefly gets up to wash her hands. Sitting back down again, she reaches for the communication board and independently constructs another sentence, this time requesting scissors and construction paper for the walrus' mouth. With a

> pleased look, she once again holds up the communication board and points, one by one, to each picture she has laid out. With a little help from the therapist, the mouth is cut out. Eager to begin the next step, she leans over the table. With a crayon in hand, she begins to intently color whiskers on her paper plate. Julia remains focused and attentive for the remaining 15 minutes of the activity (4-7).

In comparing these two vignettes, it is important to note the extent to which each activity engaged (or not) the student, in this case Julia. As with any student, an unfamiliar task can certainly lead to distraction. For Julia, it was clear during her work task with Ms. Lilly that she was uncertain, and to some extent frustrated, in not knowing what expected of her. Her repeated touching of her ears and hearing aids seemed to support that she did not hear or understand what she was to do. By contrast, during her group craft activity Julia was clearly far less confused and far more focused for the duration of the activity. Generally, for any child a craft activity is infinitely more engaging than a worksheet. However, for Julia it may, in fact, have been that, because she was able to be an active participant (both in terms of the completing the activity itself and in terms of communication), she was the more interested, involved and cooperative from start to finish of this activity.

Following morning recess, the students returned to class and engaged in "committee" activities with their peers from Ms. Kay's class. During the first weeks of observations, committees had taken place in Ms. Kay's room. However, as Ms. Cash informed me, because of regular testing which was taking place in the general education classroom (and to some extent in an effort to make transitions easier for her students) the majority of "committee" periods were held in Ms. Cash's room. During committee periods, which lasted between 15 to 30 minutes, a handful of three to five students from Ms. Kay's class came to work with Ms. Cash's students. In both classroom settings, the activities were routine, and typically

consisted of a read and color activity. How activity played out in each classroom setting provides and interesting contrast between these two "cultural" settings.

> *Committees in Ms. Kay's Room:* On leaving the classroom to walk over to Ms. Kay's room, Julia drops to her knees on the sidewalk, ignoring the assistant's requests to get up. As the students begin to exit the room and step around her, Julia jumps up and bounds ahead of the small group. She first appears intent on going to Ms. Kay's door, but then, on approach, makes a hairpin turn and dashes towards a picnic table, where she lays herself out prostrate, tightly hugging the bench beneath her. Ms. Lilly follows quickly behind her, and after a bit of a struggle, leads Julia to Ms. Kay's door. Waiting for the door to be opened, she grunts and flaps her hands angrily. As the door opens, she rushes over the threshold, shrugs her jacket off and onto the floor and flies to her assigned table to work on the activity waiting there for her. The students are sitting coloring, quietly talking to each other as they work on another page for the mitten booklet they have been assembling over the course of the week. She reaches out and strokes Jackson's hair, almost as in greeting him. He looks up and says "No". Julia sits down heavily and begins to immediately make loud grunts, growls, and weeping sounds. All the while, she peers around her with wide eyes, as if to solicit attention and confirm that others are witness to her state of unhappiness (2-56).

> *Committees in Ms. Cash's Room:* Ms. Cash's students arrive through the back door, back from morning recess. As they enter, they seem quick and eager to hang up their jackets and participate in the next activity. The television has been set up in the middle of the classroom. Ms. Cash has arranged a row of desks in front of the television. She tells the students that some of Ms. Kay's students will be coming over for committees, and that today, as they work, they will get to watch a video ("The WonderPets", Annie's favorite program). Heath, Mandy and Eddie arrive and, upon seeing the television, are eager and quick to find a place to sit. Marlon is adamant about sitting next to his general education peer, Eddie. The other students, after some minimal deliberation decide where they are each going to sit. Ms. Cash hands out a poetry coloring sheet. Julia colors intently as she periodically looks up at the television. She seems lost in her own world, completely contented with the current activity and situation, and seemingly oblivious to those around her (1-68).

The contrast between how the same activities were structured and carried out is clear between these two environments. In both environments, the students were engaged in very similar activities – activities which were accessible to or "do-able" by all students present. These activities involved very little in the way of academic skill or understanding on the part of the students as they predominantly involved coloring. However, the expectations as to

how and the conditions under which these coloring activities were to be carried out were markedly different. For example, in Ms. Kay's classroom, student placement is prearranged and clearly structured. The students knew their places and readily sat where expected. Additionally, as the students worked, they did so in relative quietness. Jackson's rejection and reprimand of Julia's greeting seemed to confirm that there are real and shared expectations among the general education students regarding just how activities, even relatively simple academic activities, should be carried out. These expectations appeared to be unclear to, if recognized at all by Julia.

By contrast, in Ms. Cash's classroom, the coloring activity embodied a less structured, almost party-like atmosphere. The students were not told where to sit, or with whom to sit, rather they were allowed to determine amongst themselves the seating arrangement. What is more, the more non-academic quality of the coloring activity seemed to be heightened in with the presence of the television and the child-oriented cartoon that they watched. Ms. Cash's classroom and activity, in contrast to Ms. Kay's, was one of more unstructured, fun time, rather than one of serious work time.

As the typical day progressed, immediately after committees each day both Ms. Cash's and Ms. Kay's students joined each other outside of their classrooms for pull-out activities, such as art, library and physical education, followed immediately by lunch (as discussed in previous "Exosystem" section). In many respects, the afternoon routines and activities were very similar to those occurring in the morning. Immediately after returning from lunch, Ms. Cash's students would join Ms. Kay's students for Calendar activities (for approximately 15 to 25 minutes). The format of calendar activities was consistent in terms of routines and, in many respects, was very similar to the morning literacy routine, as discussed

above. The primary difference between calendar and morning literacy was that these afternoon activities focused on a routine set of math related activities that the students took turns participating in.

Following calendar activities, upon returning to class, instead of morning snack, students would engage in 10 to 15 minutes of earned (or not) free time. Those who had earned time were able to entertain themselves as they chose, and typically the majority of Ms. Cash's students, including Julia, selected the computer to play on. Those students who did not earn free time, were instead directed to work at their desk with a teacher. Following free time, students moved onto group or individual work activities. During these times, as in the morning, students from Ms. Kay's and/or Ms. Tall's class would occasionally (inconsistently) come over to join them in work, followed by play activities. The students would go out for the final recess of the day, followed by a quick snack and/or read aloud before they would get ready to go home for the day.

As overviewed previously, while there was a certain consistency in terms of classroom cultures (i.e., beliefs expressed by teachers), this overview of classroom cultural artifacts (as represented in the structure and use of classroom space and activities) demonstrates that there was also a considerable amount of variability between these classrooms. These observed differences suggest wide-ranging, and often discrepant, realities. Each of these realities, in turn, may differentially support (or not) both the opportunities for and expectations of relationships within these same classroom cultures.

The Microsystem: Peers, family and the nested individual. The Microsystem is the most intimate, and perhaps most influential sphere, with regard to the individual nested within the larger socio-ecological system. For the purposes of this research, in viewing Julia

at the core of this socio-ecological system, those people (and associated activities) most immediate to Julia are those who influence, inform and ultimately define the Microsystem. Julia's Microsystem level is considered from the vantage of two separate Microsystems, that of school and that of home. Each of these spheres may be argued to have a significant effect on Julia and her relational worlds.

At school - Teacher and peer relationships. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, Julia was observed to interact with many individuals, both adults and children alike, over the course of the research. As also discussed, the kinds and qualities of interactions were considerable. Within the Microsystem at school, those individuals closest to Julia and most influential were certainly her teachers, as well as a handful of students, as identified in the previous chapter. What is interesting about those relationships and interactions within the Microsystem is that there was no preeminent, specific relational type observed over the course of research. In fact, interactions reflected a range and inconsistency, both in terms of the kinds of the relationships observed and in the roles assumed by those individuals. What is more, relationships varied within and across time and space. Some trends were, however, noted.

Among the teachers, the predominant role they appeared to assume was that of teacher. While, Ms. Lilly was observed to interact with Julia in a more playful almost friend like way (as discussed in previous chapter), she was the only teacher observed to interact with Julia in this way. Unfortunately, and as previously discussed, such playful engagement typically occurred in the absence of general education peers who might have then modeled this play interaction. Of all the adults with whom Julia interacted, Ms. Lilly was the one observed to interact with her the most frequently. Her relational roles were observed to run

the gamut from helper, to teacher, to friend. Ms. Cash most frequently assumed the role of teacher and disciplinarian. However, and somewhat surprisingly, her contact and interactions with Julia was considerably more limited than that of Ms. Lilly. Ms. Sandy and Ms. Kay were observed to interact with Julia the least frequently. Their relational roles with respect to Julia were predominantly those of teacher and disciplinarian.

With regard to Julia's peers, there was also a considerable range in relational types, relational roles, and frequency of interactions. Additionally, a great many inconsistencies were observed in Julia's interactions with her closest peers. In many ways, it was not surprising to observe such inconsistencies in these relational worlds, especially when one considers the age of the peers with whom Julia was in regular contact. As explained in Chapter 2, in the early years of schooling, children are just beginning to explore, experience and understand relationships (Doll, 1996). They may be said to be essentially in a stage of social/relational learning, and much of what is learned comes from what is directly observed. Interestingly, both Ms. Kay and Ms. Cash noted the critical role teacher modeling of behavior and of interactions was to their young students. Both Ms. Kay and Ms. Cash also explained in their interviews the importance of setting up expectations for acceptance and relationships, in general. Both teachers mentioned how important group learning and sharing activity had been for all students in terms of learning about and accepting disability, or difference in general.

> I did this lesson with slinkies at the beginning of the year, got all different kinds of slinkies, we did all kinds of things with them…. I did that and then I read this book, it's this cool book about like people with disabilities, so I asked them at random, "So like what do you like to do?" And then we found people doing that in the book….And [it was not to] make this huge focus, like look everybody loves everybody, and we're all different, yeah! But just, just do it. Just do it, and do it through modeling, do it through behavior and how you treat everybody, you know? (MC9)

Ironically, those behaviors learned from teachers and consequently most frequently practiced by the students were predominantly those wherein Julia's peers assumed the roles of teacher or disciplinarian, rather than as friend or companion.

A great many of the interactions observed between Julia and her peers at school also demonstrated elements of confusion, both on the part of Julia and those peers with whom she was in contact. Such confusion may be linked to two contributing factors: (a) a disconnect between learning and the actual application of what is learned; and (b) communication. With regard to the first, while the slinky activity may have been intended to teach students to recognize and accept difference, it may not have necessarily taught the students how to directly deal with or respond to such differences. In the case of interactions with Julia, even her closest peers (those approaching 'friends') often seemed at a loss of how to interact with her. More often than not, during friendly encounters these same peers would often return to the default (perhaps what was best understood, or most frequently modeled?) role of teacher or disciplinarian. For Julia, such peer responses often appeared to leave her confused, frustrated, and occasionally even angry. For other students, there was a marked reluctance to interact with Julia, again very likely because of a certain degree of uncertainty or fear. Such peer reactions often included rejection, avoidance, and sometimes ridicule or teasing. Again, such peer reactions often appeared to leave Julia surprised, confused and/or in a state of wonderment.

With regard to the second, communication was observed (and directly addressed by all teachers) to be of direct impact on relationships. Julia's closest peers were the most frequently observed to try to engage Julia in communication, specifically through sign

language. However, neither Julia, nor her communication partners had a solid grasp of this form of communication – in essence, they were all at a very nascent stage of learning this mode of communication. As a result, many attempts at communication were abandoned and/or ended in confusion and frustration. Julia's hearing deficits also had a critical impact on her ability to actively and appropriately participate in peer interactions (and in all school activities). Julia's curiosity and interest in her peers was evident over the course of the research. She would strain to watch and *hear* peers around her and those who interacted with her. The frequency with which she pressed her hearing aids corroborates this interest. However, her tendencies to revert to "solo" engagement and her participation on the "fringe" demonstrate how in certain circumstances her hearing deficits may have led to her exclusion, unintentional though it may have been.

It is important to note, with regard to Julia and her participation and interaction with her peers, that the semester wherein research was conducted was also the first semester that Julia had been more consistently and regularly integrated with her general education peers across all settings. As Ms. Cash had explained to me, she was of the understanding that this had been the first year of schooling where she had had any sort of experience or exposure to general education students and the general education environment. So, while Julia, like her general education peers was struggling to learn and understand the basic nuances, rhymes and reasons of peer relationships, she also had to learn about and adjust to completely different environments/cultures and settings of relational worlds. As such, all elements of newness invariably, and doubly, may have confounded and confused her perceptions of relationships and her role and participation therein.

In spite of noted aspects of confusion, uncertainty, and some degree of separation, it must be recognized that Julia did have peer interactions which were in line with friendships, or something approaching friendships. As discussed in the previous chapter, Monique, Aretha, and Jackson were those students identified, both through observations and interviews, as being Julia's closest relations. It cannot be said for certain how these relationships were perceived by Julia or her peers. Further, the meaning or importance of these relationships to these same individuals cannot be ascertained. As aptly stated by Ms. Sandy, "I see that she feels (them)… I can just see it in her" (MS4).

At home - Friends, family, mom and Julia. Who Julia is and how she conceives of and participates in relationships is also linked to the influences outside of school. My closing interview with Julia's mother provided some insights as to Julia's relational worlds outside of school, specifically as relating to friends and family – ultimately, the Microsystem of home. Julia's relational experiences, as lived with and through her family, may certainly be argued to have repercussive effects outside of her immediate home (i.e., school).

Friends. Julia's mother explained that Julia's circle of friends beyond her family was limited. She identified two children, a little boy at church and a close family friend's son ('nephew'), as being the only two children with whom Julia interacted outside of the family. Of the little boy at church she explained "he is her friend, they have this connection and you can tell there's love there" (JM11). However, she admitted that this relationship was not pursued much beyond church activities. With regard to Julia's 'nephew', she explained that he was very much a teacher or role model to Julia: " [He's] really taught her how to be patient and share, and it's, you know, how to be friends with someone" (JM23). However,

she clarified, that when the two were together, Julia often responded to him with little more than a hello and often avoided this little boy.

Julia's mother spoke, with what almost seemed pain in her voice, of peers at previous schools and of her perceptions of how Julia had been treated and accepted by peers and teachers at these schools. "[A previous school] was the worst I've ever seen. It was higher functioning kids and we would go in and the kids would be playing and they had their own little cliques already, there was like six in the class, and then there was Julia off in the corner" (JM9). She further explained of the teacher, that she sensed a lack of compassion for Julia on the part of her previous teacher, and ultimately that she "felt like there wasn't enough love" (JM7).

Family. Julia's family consisted of her mother, a toddler brother and a baby sister. Julia's father moved out shortly after Julia was born. As Julia's mother explained of this, "it was hard. And then her dad, with her not being perfect, I think that had a lot to do with it. 'She has Down syndrome, she's obviously not mine'. He did not understand that it is not hereditary, so that was what made it harder, he took off because of it…" (JM17). As a result, Julia's grandparents became (and continued to be) key supporters of Julia and her mother in the absence of the father. As Julia's mother explained, Julia's family was essentially the core of her relational worlds outside of school.

Within her family, Julia's mother explained that Julia's relationship with her grandfather was the deepest of them all. As she related repeatedly over the course of the interview, the relationship between the Julia and her grandfather was strong, unique and founded on a very deep, almost inexplicable connection. This affinity between the Julia and her grandfather, she attributed to her father having had a brain tumor when Julia was born,

and their deeper understanding and appreciation of one another because of this. While Julia also clearly loved her grandmother, her mother explained that this connection, for whatever reason, was just different, and not as deep as that with her grandfather.

With regard to her siblings, especially her baby sister, Julia's mother explained that Julia was very much a helper and a care-giver. Of her relationship with her sister, she explained that it was a very special relationship. Julia's attentiveness and responsiveness, as she described it, seemed like something akin to a mother's sensitivity and mother's instinct. Of her younger brother, Julia's mother explained that she felt that because they were of similar mental ages, that they were close in some respects, but that Julia more often than not, would tire of her brother.

Of all the relationships mentioned by Julia's mother, it was her own relationship with Julia (as she perceived it) that emerged to be the most intriguing and enlightening with regard to Julia's home-related Microsystem and its impact on relationships. While Julia's mother initially identified her relationship with Julia as being simply one of a 'mother and daughter', other comments and reflections made by her seemed to suggest that their relationship was far more complex. As the interview unfolded, it became clear that Julia's mother's relationship roles towards Julia were very strongly defined. In addition to simply being Julia's mother, she was also identifiable as Julia's protector/defender, decision maker, and her voice.

Since Julia's birth, it was clear that Julia's mother saw her primary role and responsibility to Julia as being her defender or protector. In her earliest years, Julia's little body was placed under numerous stresses, all of which required serious and intensive medical attention. Julia's mother sought desperately to protect Julia and ensure her well-being by advocating for her to receive the best medical care: " I wanted to get a second

opinion, and this doctor got mad at me, and he discharged her from the hospital. He said you are going to regret this, he made me feel horrible about this, and I felt he just wanted the surgery, that he wanted the money. So we took her out of the hospital. We were going to see a specialist the next day" (JM18).

In addition to protecting Julia, it was clear that under these same circumstances, Julia mother also sought to defend Julia against perceived inequities and, to some extent, discrimination: "I'm that way with doctors, if I don't like a doctor and if they're not attentive to her, I usually will switch" (JM15). As she explained of one doctor in particular: [E]verytime we would go in [the doctor] wasn't really, I don't know, not really friendly with Julia and we could tell that I wasn't happy there and she kept reminding how delayed Julia was and where she should be at that age, and constantly reminded me of how delayed she was' (JM 15). These sentiments seem to mirror those touched on previously with regard to earlier encounters with teachers who were perceived not to be attentive to or accepting of Julia.

In addition to defending and protecting Julia, Julia's mother was also the primary decision- maker for Julia, and the voice which expressed these decisions. Indeed, while Julia's mother outright addressed Julia's independence and strong-willed personality, she also addressed the important influence she had had in Julia's life. As the mother, she had been the decision maker for Julia and the important medical decisions that had had to be since Julia's birth: "[The] only way I can think of my relationship benefiting her is because of medically. I've had to make all those decisions, you know, and had to watch out for that kind of stuff…" (JM23). As she further explained, she had to think for Julia: "I have to change my way of thinking as well for her, you know, like you say, she's kind of tuned her

senses, and I have to do that for her so that I could understand what she was thinking and what she needed" (JM 13/14). Additionally, because of Julia's receptive and expressive communication limitations, Julia's mother repeatedly stated that she felt she had always had to be Julia's voice. As specifically relating to early medical decisions made for Julia, she explains: "I did not want to make a choice, I knew I was her voice and I was the one that made that choice [to have a tracheotomy] and I didn't want it to be the wrong one" (JM 18).

From the above discussion of Julia's Microsystems, both at school and home, some key trends emerge which may help to clarify how the dynamics within these spheres influence, either directly or indirectly, Julia's relational worlds. Within Julia's home Microsystem, the roles assumed by others and Julia's relative seclusion from relational opportunities and experiences outside of family may have influenced her relationships as observed during this study. With regard to the roles assumed by others, while Julia did participate in a range of varied relationships within her own family, the roles assumed in these relationships were readily identified by Julia's mother, and clearly defined. Given the limits of experience and exposure to relationships outside of the family and close friends, relationships within the Microsystem of the home may not parallel the larger range of relationships and relational roles experienced outside of her home and family. What is more, while Julia was certainly recognized as a very strong-willed and independent little girl within these family relationships, it was also recognized that much of her participation within and outside of the family was largely moderated by her mother. Certainly, because of cognitive, communicative, and age-related limitations in general, Julia's mother assumed what were natural and expected roles towards her daughter. However, it is important to consider that those roles assumed by Julia's mother (and family in general), in combination with a lack of

experience and exposure to varied relationships, may have influenced the social preparedness and savvy with which Julia was to first encounter and respond to social interactions outside of the Microsystem of the home/family (i.e., in the Microsystem of school).

With regard to Julia's school Microsystem, Julia's lack of exposure to peers and social interaction would invariably have impacted the success with which she was able to interact with her peers. What is more, the possibility that Julia's peers had had little exposure and experience in interacting with Julia, or other peers with significant disabilities, could have similarly, if not doubly compounded relationship development. Indeed, teachers had stressed the importance of appreciating difference and in establishing expectations for acceptance. What is more, teachers had also expressed an understanding of the important role they could play in teaching and modeling appropriate behaviors. However, those roles modeled and those expectations for acceptance may have presented mixed or confusing messages regarding relational interactions with peers with significant disabilities, such as Julia. As a result, the relational worlds experienced by Julia and by those peers with whom she interacted were largely defined by inconsistency and confusion.

Summary and Conclusions

As this Eco-systematic approach has demonstrated, Julia's relational worlds and experiences as observed over the course of this study were impacted both directly and indirectly by each of the concentric spheres of this system. At the farthest reaches of the relational eco-system – the Macrosystem – specific policy and procedures as relating to educational law and disability did impact the extent to which Julia had access to her general education peers, and consequently made available opportunities for social interactions. At the Exospheric level, the climate and culture of Julia's school supported (or not) settings and

conditions within which relationships could be experienced and wherein they could ideally evolve and flourish. The Mesosystem presented a shared, yet at the same time *mixed* set of cultural expectations and artifacts, all of which differentially could be shown to impact how Julia's relationships were experienced. Finally, the Microsystem, as a composite of different though equally as influential spheres (influences/individuals at home and school), were also shown to impact how Julia's relationships were realized and experienced.

The subsequent chapter will revisit each of these levels to better understand the outcomes of differential, divergent, competing spheres of influence. Particular attention will be paid how each sphere might be better conceptualized, re-conceptualized and restructured so as to best ensure that Julia, and other students with significant disabilities, are maximally able to participate and benefit from relationships with their peers.

Chapter 6

Discussion

The two previous chapters have sought to give depth and perspective to the range of Julia's relational worlds. This final chapter will reflect on the observations and trends as a means gaining a better understanding the possible meanings, significance and impact of these relational worlds on Julia and those with whom she interacts.

The first section will briefly review the traditional Ecosystems approach as presented by Bronfenbrenner (1977) and will restate how this model was used to define the varying spheres of influence for Julia and her relational worlds. The next section will revisit the range of Julia's relational worlds and the trends which emerged within and across these relational experiences. Specific attention will be paid to *who* Julia is and *how* she may have been of influence within and across her interactions with others. In light of the data previously presented, this chapter will reconsider Julia's placement in relation to the larger ecosystem of relationships, such as presented through the school experience. An alternate systems configuration and alternate placement of Julia within this system will be presented. The final section of this chapter will explore how a realignment of systems is necessary, how it can be made possible, and the extent to which such a re-alignment could positively impact Julia's relational experiences. The ultimate goal of the discussion will be to consider how the ecosystem, as reconfigured, might better accommodate the development of more mutually positive and meaningful relationships for Julia (and her peers.)

Julia's Relational Ecology Revisited

As conceptualized in the previous chapters, Julia and her relational experiences are nested within the concentric and inter-dynamic spheres of a larger relational ecosystem (See

Figure 5). To summarize, Julia herself and those individuals with whom she most frequently interacts are those who define the Microsystem and the dynamics therein. Immediately external to Julia and her direct relationships, exists the Mesosystem, or those major settings wherein Julia spends the majority of her time. For this research, the immediate classrooms were considered as the Mesosystem(s). As Bronfenbrenner (1977) explained, the Mesosystem can be conceptualized as an array of Microsystems. Indeed, Julia's immediate classrooms embody and reflect elements of a more defined Microsystem. These classrooms, however, are also conceived of as embodying or reflecting more broad characteristics, or culture as manifest through behaviors, beliefs, and cultural artifacts. As such, the classrooms (as part of the Mesosystem) were here considered as something greater than immediate individuals and circumstance (or Microsystems). The classrooms often seemed to present a convergence of disparate and sometimes competing spheres of influence. These classrooms, or spheres, were differentially influenced by experiences, beliefs and behaviors as both collectively shared, and individually realized.

Indeed, as the Mesosystem is influenced by the Microsystem, it is also impacted by interplay with elements of the Exosystem. As explained by Bronfenbrenner, the Exosystem is more distal to, and of less direct impact on, the individual. It consists of those larger structures, both social and physical, which comprise the larger milieu of the individual. For Julia and her relational worlds, the Exosystem is envisioned as the school. The school reflects broader scale aspects of governance, services, and social networks such as those which define Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of the Exosystem. In turn, elements of the Exosystem are moderated not only by influential aspects of composite Exosystems (or classrooms and cultures therein, as experienced not just in Julia's classes, but in classrooms

and activities across the school as a whole), but also by the greater Macrosystem. As defined by Bronfenbrenner, aspects of the larger culture, legal social and educational systems are those which define the Macrosystem. For Julia, then, educational and legal policy and practice define her relational Macrosystem. While the most distal sphere of influence to Julia, this sphere is of significant impact insofar as the extent to which it affords her access to the world around her and to social experiences to be encountered therein.

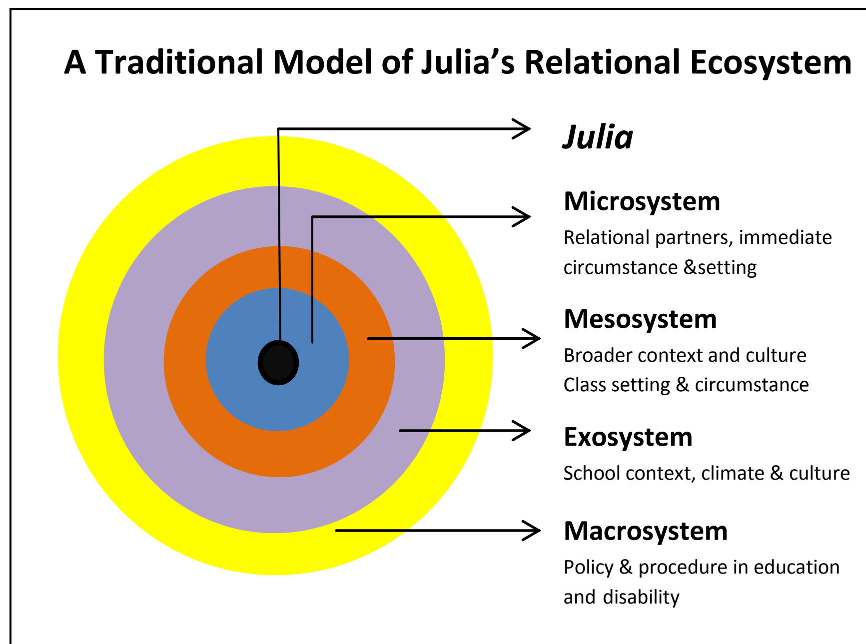

***Figure 5.* A Traditional Model of Julia's Ecosystem.**

The Heart of the Matter: Reviewing Julia's Experiences and Her Impact on Relational Experiences

The aim of this current research was to explore relationships from the vantage of a single child with a significant disability – specifically Julia. Because of cognitive and communicative deficits demonstrated by Julia, it was not possible to directly inquire as to her perspectives. Instead, observations were conducted as a means of gathering information

relating to the kinds of relationships Julia participated in and her observed responses to and behaviors within these relationships. Specifically, attention focused on Julia's affect and behavior in response to interactions with others. It was beyond the scope of this research to describe and codify each response, affect, and expression of Julia's with regard to each specific interaction. However, observations revealed that there were some definite trends with regard to both relational types and Julia's responses to specific relational types and interactions. Vignettes in the previous chapters were presented in such a way as to highlight and describe some of the key trends observed over the course of the study. Of course, these trends are not definitive. They are not absolutes that can or should be used to define who Julia is. What is more, these vignettes do not necessarily reflect the entire range of all possible interactions and responses. These vignettes simply reflect trends noted in the observational data. These trends and how they are impacted by Julia, directly or indirectly, will be explored in the following sections.

Relationship trends. The analysis of accumulated data resulted in the emergence of distinct trends with regard to the types of relationships observed, the settings of specific relationships, as well as Julia's responses (affect, expressions, and behaviors). With regard to the types of relationships, trends were noted in the range and distribution of relationships. With regard to setting, it appeared that certain circumstances and environments seemed to effect which relational type was observed to take place. And finally, with regard Julia's responses to interactions, trends were noted in the consistency by which she responded to varying relational types. Each of these trend areas will be discussed in turn.

Trends in frequency of relationship types. As reviewed in Chapter 4, Julia's interactions spread across a continuum of interaction types. At one extreme, Julia was

observed in solitary engagement, while at the other she was observed in mutual social interactions, many of which appeared to be akin to friendships. Between these two extremes, Julia was observed to “engage” with others at different times, and under different settings and circumstances as an outside observer (fringe), as a unilateral participant, and as a mutual, though loosely defined, participant. All of these interaction categories where noted from the beginning of the study, to the end of the study. However, there were marked trends in terms of the absolute and relative frequency of these relational types.

Absolute frequency. In absolute terms, over the period of observation, Julia’s observed interactions fell predominantly within the areas of “fringe” and “unilateral” relationships. In comparison to these relational/interactive types, both solitary and mutual engagements were far less frequently observed. As a fringe participant, Julia often appeared to be engrossed with what others were doing. Her interest, during such participation events, was genuine, and her role as an inspector was completely voluntary.

During unilateral participation, Julia was observed in both unreciprocated and hierarchical interactions with both peers and adults. The great majority of unilateral interactions, however, were observed to be those of a hierarchical nature wherein Julia assumed either the role as primary “controller” or as the “controlled” in interactions. All teachers and Julia’s mother reported that they believed Julia liked to have things “on her own terms” and wanted to be the “boss”, suggesting that most of her interactions were unilateral on her part. Indeed, Julia was observed to attempt to control situations and individuals on numerous occasions. For a great many of these interactions, Julia’s attempts more frequently than not, led to Julia’s behaviors being rebuffed or rejected.

In spite of these observed efforts to control interactions with others, it is important to note that she was observed in equally as many (perhaps more) interactions wherein she was placed in the role of the person being controlled, rather than the controller. A large number of instances of unilateral participation included those wherein Julia assumed a position of unequal and lower power as compared to her interactive partner(s). In such instances, Julia was observed to assume the role of the student/learner, the person being disciplined, or the person being helped. Interestingly, of these three role types the least frequently observed role was that of Julia being the "helpee". Most observed instances of individuals helping Julia were noted among adults, and were specifically linked to their helping her with self–care (helping her with tying her shoes, helping her open containers and so forth) and fine motor activities (specifically cutting, but also other classroom activities involving specific tool use). During most, if not all, of these instances adults were the primary interactive partners, with Ms. Lilly being the one to most frequently assist her. Students were rarely observed to assume the role of helper to Julia. As alluded to by Ms. Lilly in her interview, it may have been that the students perceived a certain degree of equity in terms of her ability to do physical activities (or as Ms. Lilly termed it in some instances, like recess, Julia was able to "run with the dogs"), and so did not feel the inclination or need to help her.

The instances of Julia as the learner, or the person being taught by someone else, were about equal to those of Julia as a "helpee". Again, and as would be expected within the classroom, the teachers were the primary interactive partners during these types of unilateral interactions. Occasionally peers would also attempt to engage Julia by "teaching" her something. Interestingly, the majority of these interactions, although unilateral, were positive in nature and outcome. For example, Aretha and Monique frequently sat next to Julia during

math and/or literacy periods in Ms. Kay's class and tried to get her attend to class activities by redirecting her and/or by trying to teach her their crude approximations of sign language as relevant to the lesson at hand.

The most frequent role Julia assumed on the lower end of the hierarchical interaction was that of the disciplined. Over the course of research, all students were observed to reprimand Julia for her negative, inappropriate, or simply unwanted or misunderstood behaviors.

Relative frequency. From the beginning to the end of the observation period, there were both noted consistencies and noted shifts in the relative frequencies of relational types. In terms of consistencies, there appeared to be little change in the relative frequency with which Julia engaged in solo activities or in unilateral activities wherein she assumed general control over others. With regard to solo activities, and as discussed previously, these types of engagement were comparably fewer than other interaction types observed. As for unilateral interactions wherein Julia was perceived as trying to take control, her attempts were often met by her interactive partner ignoring, rebuffing or rejecting her.

By contrast, there was a marked change in the frequency of mutual interactions. Specifically, mutual interactions of all types, from appropriate and inappropriate interactions with special education peers to appropriate and friendly interactions with general education peers increased during the latter half of the research. More specifically, appropriate interactions with special education peers increased as did mutual interactions with general education peers. A correlate to this increase in mutual behaviors is the fact that unilateral interaction, wherein Julia was the person being disciplined, and solitary interactions decreased. These findings were not surprising given the fact that, over the course of

observations, Julia's time spent participating/integrating with her general education peers increased, thereby increasing the opportunities for peer interactions.

Trends in location and setting. As discussed in the previous chapters, Julia participated in activities across all environments, and as such, experienced relationships across these varied environments. While all relationship types were observed across all settings, the only interactions that appeared not to coincide with any specific location or circumstance were those of a hierarchical nature. Hierarchical interactions, on the part of both Julia and her interactive partners, were observed across all activities and environments. By contrast, solitary, "fringe", and all forms of mutual interaction, appeared to correspond with some settings more than others. It must be stressed, however, that none of these interaction types were exclusive to specific settings or circumstances.

Solitary activities, both voluntary and involuntary in nature, seemed to more frequently correspond with Julia being in environments wherein she was allowed play or free time. Such environments were typically the special education classroom or the playground.

Fringe and hierarchical interactions appeared to occur with the greatest frequency in Ms. Kay's classroom during group instructional periods such as calendar and morning literacy. It was also observed in other large group settings wherein Julia demonstrated a keen interest in what her peers around her were doing. Such fringe participation was also noted outside of Ms. Kay's class during physical education classes and during the lunch hour when Julia would sit amongst her general education peers.

Mutual interactions were observed in very different environments, depending on their specific interactional type. For example, inappropriate (though mutual) interactions between Julia and her special education peers, although they were observed across all environments,

were more frequently observed outside of the special education classroom. What is more, they were frequently observed during large group activities, such as during group learning activities in Ms. Kay's class, and during pull-out activities including physical education, library and art. Appropriate mutual interactions with both general education and special education peers were observed predominantly, though again not exclusively, to occur during on the playground and in the classroom during fun, free time activities.

Trends in affect and behavior. As with the above discussions of trends in relational types and relational settings, trends in Julia's affect and behaviors in response to her interactions with others were not static or predictable. That said, however, there were some subtle trends noted in her affect and expression which may be loosely correlated to relationship types.

Happiness. For any individual, Julia being no exception, the ideal outcome of social engagement and interaction is happiness, satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment. For Julia, expressions of happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and so forth, were observed throughout the research. Such expressions seemed to cluster at the extremes of the relational continuum, specifically during periods of solitary engagement, or mutual engagement with those around her. When playing or working on her own, Julia often appeared to slip into her own world, oblivious to the world around her, but content in what she was doing. During such engagement, others rarely attempted to engage her, and when they did – and if Julia even noticed - she would more often than not, dismiss their attempts. Under such circumstances, Julia seemed focused and confident in what she was doing. At the other extreme, when involved in mutual engagement with others, either positively or negatively, Julia's affect reflected a certain comfort and satisfaction.

Of note at these two extremes of "happiness" is that they both reflect circumstances wherein the expectations of interaction may have been more clearly defined. For example, when engaged in solitary work or play, Julia was focused and intent on her activities. While it may not always have been clear to the on-looker, it was apparent that Julia herself clearly knew what she was doing and why she was doing it. As such, her withdrawal into herself and to solitary play and work may have further supported clear expectations and predictable outcomes insofar as the clutter and confusion of others' input and expectations would have been substantially minimized.

As with the above, mutual engagement also appeared to result in happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment on the part of Julia. Unlike solitary engagement, mutual interactions would have necessarily have brought in input and expectation on the part of Julia's interactive partner(s). However, input and expectations would not necessarily have brought with them confusion or conflict. At the extreme of mutual engagement, especially if such engagement approximated friendship or something like it, expectations would not have been disparate, but rather shared. Such a sense of similarity, connectivity, and an expected and predictable shared-ness would have been critical to defining such relationships and interactions as friendship. What is more, in assuming some element of friendship, it is logical to assume that both Julia and her interactive partners experienced and shared between them an understanding of equality. Such a shared recognition and appreciation of each other, and a sense of equality would have mitigated against the conflict and confusion of unshared expectations and of unequal relationships.

In addition to solitary and mutual engagement, Julia's affect seemed to indicate happiness under an additional type of observed interaction, namely unilateral, hierarchical

control wherein Julia "was the boss", in a position of control or having things her own way. This observed indication of happiness, however, can be contrasted to the previously discussed indications insofar as it was often short-lived, quick to mutate into another state altogether. As discussed in Chapter 4, in those instances wherein Julia assumed the role of "boss", or the person in control of the interaction, two outcomes were frequently observed. First, and as exemplified in her interactions with Maria and Monique (Chapter 4), during instances of marked efforts to be in control Julia's peers frequently ignored her attempts to interact. Additionally, as was especially observed to be the case in those instances when Julia assumed the role of teacher, students often responded to her advances with expressions of confusion or with a disciplinary tone. Under such circumstances, Julia's happiness frequently faded and was often replaced by affect or expressions seeming to indicate confusion, frustration, and quite often, anger.

Something other than happiness. In spite of the above trends towards greater perceived happiness and satisfaction in relationships, it is important to note that the majority of observed interactions between Julia and her peers appeared to continue to cluster within the middle of the continuum. Specifically, Julia's relationships appeared to cluster within the area of "fringe"ship and unilateral (both unreciprocated and hierarchical) engagement. The range of affect and responses observed in Julia for these types of interactions was greater than those observed in the solitary and mutual extremes of engagement. While expressions of happiness or contentment were observed with interactions falling towards the middle of this continuum, they were infrequent. Instead, the majority of expressions, affects, and behaviors demonstrated by Julia included those suggesting a wide array of emotions and states from disinterest to curiosity and wonderment, from compliance to resistance and anger.

Affect and effect of "fringe" ship. As discussed, participation at the fringe was a frequently observed type of interaction for Julia. Fringe participation typically took place during large group activities. During these times Julia's affect was typically one of wonderment and curiosity. She would often sit, leaning forward, her eyes open wide and staring at the object(s) or person(s) of interest. Her mouth would often be slightly open, almost as if she had forgotten to close it in her rapt state. Her head would swivel back and forth between those individuals moving and interacting around her. Very often, Julia would press at her hearing aids, while she shifted her jaw back and forth as if trying to find a better fit for her hearing aid. For Julia, her participation in large group settings was reported by all teachers as having been relatively recent. As such, her understanding of classroom routines and activities was correspondingly limited, as would have been her understanding of and familiarity with her peers. Given this, it is not surprising that Julia's participation from the fringe was so predominant among her relational and interactive realms, and that her affect was that of something other than "happiness".

Affect and effect of unreciprocated hierarchical interactions. Julia was observed, although infrequently, to engage in unreciprocated interactions, such as that portrayed in Chapter 4. In interacting with her peers in a helpful or friendly way, she was very often rebuffed if not ignored altogether. Her affect during such interactions appeared to indicate a certain degree of nonchalance accompanied by mild surprise, confusion and, infrequently, anger. Her behaviors and expressions to such outcomes almost seemed to suggest awareness on Julia's part as to what should have been appropriate responses by her peers.

Affect and effect of hierarchical "not in control" interactions. During instances when others appeared to assume roles of power and control over Julia, Julia most frequently

responded with overt anger, frustration and resistance. Her face would scrunch, her eyes would narrow, and her fists would clench (that is if she was not wagging her finger angrily in the face the individual trying to take control). On rare occasions, such as those most frequently observed when teachers (specifically Ms. Cash) were observed to be “in control”, Julia often responded with contrite compliance.

What is interesting to consider and contrast in these different types of responses and affect from Julia is what they appear to reveal about Julia’s understanding of individuals, their roles, and the expectations of these roles. For example, Julia recognized her teacher as a person of authority, and someone to whom she should listen and respond appropriately to. By contrast, she may not have readily recognized or understood the varied roles and expectations of others besides her immediate teacher, Ms. Cash. In fact, especially as relating to Julia’s peers, she certainly may *not* have perceived any noted hierarchical difference between herself and her peers.

In light of the above review of trends observed within and across Julia’s interactions within school, it is important to bring these trends together and to summarize at a broader level what they may indicate about Julia’s relational worlds. For Julia, as for any child, those with whom she works and interacts would hope for her maximal and positive participation, inclusion and acceptance and across all school settings and activities. Ultimately, for Julia and all those with whom she interacts, happiness and fulfillment through interactions is the preferred outcome. While expressions of joy, enjoyment and happiness were observed, their observance over both time and space was comparably limited and inconsistent. Over the course of research, such expressions were observed less frequently than other expressions, affects and behaviors. Over space, they appeared to be limited to those circumstances and

settings wherein expectations where clear to Julia and/or those with whom Julia was interacting. By contrast, expressions of frustration, anger, resistance, confusion, and wonderment, were inferred from observational data at much greater frequency. Given these broader trends, and given the understanding that social interactions involve not just the "other" but also Julia, it is important to discuss what aspects of Julia may be said to impact, directly or otherwise, her relational experiences and their outcomes.

The influence of cognitive ability, communication and experience on relationship development. Three key categories emerged from all sources of data, including interviews, questionnaires, and observations, which may be helpful in understanding Julia's relationships and how Julia herself may have, intentionally or not, had an impact on those relationships that she was to participate in and the outcomes of these relationships. These categories reflect aspects of who Julia is, or at the very least, how Julia is perceived by others. These categories correspond to: (a) Julia's experience and exposure to social interactions; (b) Julia's cognitive and corresponding social skill levels; and (c) Julia's communicative ability. These categories are certainly not mutually exclusive, but are intricately intertwined. While it is important to understand how each category manifests in Julia and how each impacts Julia's interactions and relationships, it is important also to understand the dynamic and interface between each category.

Cognitive ability. Individuals with Down syndrome fall along a range of cognitive abilities, and as noted by Cebula and Wishart (2008) these range from mild to profound intellectual deficits. Research has repeatedly supported that cognitive delays are strongly correlated with more specific delays or deficits in areas relating to an individual's socio-cognitive understanding and skills (Wishart, 2007; Cebula, Moore & Wishart, 2010). While

the underlying causes for cognitive delays/deficits for individuals with Down syndrome are still poorly understood, it is recognized that these deficits do often impede an individual's ability to appropriately seek out and participate in social interactions (Cebula, Moore & Wishart, 2010). One reason postulated as to why individuals with Down syndrome have such difficulty understanding and responding appropriately within social contexts has been that these individuals have difficulties in recognizing and interpreting emotional cues observed in others (Williams, Wishart, Pitcairn & Willis, 2005; Kasari, Freeman & Hughes, 2001).

The implications of these cognitive trends are clear for Julia. While her specific cognitive levels were never ascertained during this study, based on observations of performance and behavior across all school activities, Julia demonstrated significant cognitive delays as compared her grade level peers. More specifically, socio-cognitive skill levels also appeared to be considerably lower than her peers. In some instances, such as those observed during solitary engagement and during appropriate peer interactions that were friendly, Julia did respond in a manner and with an affect that was appropriate to the situations. However, in many more instances, Julia's behaviors and affect were observably incommensurate with and inappropriate to the situation, especially as relating to those instances when she attempted to "control" interactions with others.

This latter point indicates that Julia may have had difficulty interpreting and responding to the emotional cues of others. Research has suggested that happiness is among the easiest emotion or expression for young children to recognize (Denham & Couchoud, 1990). During solitary engagement, of course, there were not emotions to be read in others. Solitary engagement, however, did present predictable and clear expectations, if only for Julia herself, which may have contributed to her contentment. By contrast, in her increasingly

more frequent interactions with peers over the course of the school year, Julia necessarily had to respond to an increased number of individuals, hence a greater diversity of responses was required of her.

As discussed, for Julia the majority of interactions experienced by Julia were those of either a hierarchical nature, or those which demonstrated fringe participation. During such engagements, Julia was confronted with an array of responses from her peers, ranging from rejection, to anger, fear and surprise. Interestingly, as reported by Watt, Johnson and Virji-Babul (2010), research has demonstrated that children with Down syndrome appear to have greater difficulty interpreting such expressions as fear, surprise, and anger as compared to their typical peers. With regard to hierarchical situations wherein Julia was in control – those same instances wherein Julia herself often appeared quite content – she may have not been cued to less favorable peer responses, including anger, fear, and so forth. During those situations wherein others attempted to control Julia (i.e., as teachers, disciplinarians, and helpers), Julia's interactive partners rarely expressed outright happiness. As a result, their expressive responses and their intentions may have been misinterpreted, if not completely inaccessible to Julia.

With regard to the latter point, however, Julia's response and affect to those attempting to exert control over her may also have been equally (or more) a product of a certain frustration or confusion regarding the situation and how others are interpreted (or not) as behaving towards her. Fringe participation, as possibly with some hierarchical interactions, speaks to a prevalence of confusion and wonderment/curiosity that was noted to be expressed by Julia over the course of observations. In many respects, Julia may not have been able to directly participate or understand activities and interactions with others because

of certain cognitive delays. Her affect, focused attention and behaviors, however appeared to indicate some desire to learn and understand those around her.

Communication. Research supports that individuals with Down syndrome frequently demonstrate deficits in both hearing and oral motor/verbal skills (Kumin, 1996; Roberts, Price & Malkin, 2007). As such, hearing and speech deficits can directly and negatively impact both the receptive and expressive communication abilities of the individual. Julia demonstrated significant deficits in both hearing and in speech. With regard to hearing, while she did wear hearing aids, her facial affect and movements (frequently moving her jaw and pressing her throat) combined with the frequency with which she pressed her hearing aids suggested that her hearing, hence receptive ability or skills, were compromised. Julia's hearing difficulties appeared often to render her oblivious to the activities and interactions around her. What is more, when interacting with peers, she often appeared not to understand what was being said to her. This barrier to communication combined with the limited skill by which she was able to read and interpret others' responses to her would have contributed to her confusion and increased levels of frustration. In turn, peer responses towards her would have also been further frustrated, which may have perpetuated peer efforts to control (teach or discipline) Julia, and in some instances may have contributed to peer rejection of Julia and her attempts at interaction.

With regard to her speech, Julia was able to express herself with some vocalizations (such as laughter and growls, to name only two common vocalizations) but only limitedly, and with minimal intelligibility was she able to verbalize using articulated words. To compensate for speech deficits, picture communication systems were put in place within structured activities in the special education classroom (specifically, during those activities

wherein Julia worked with her speech language therapist) and basic sign language was introduced to her during unstructured activities (including the viewing of signing videos and the introduction of relevant signs by Ms. Cash). However, both of these alternate forms of non-verbal communication were very new to Julia at the time of this study. What is more, they were also new to not only her teachers, but also to her peers. As a result, communication interactions – as both non-events or failed events – appeared to greatly impact Julia's interactions with her peers and other interactive partners.

Experience and exposure. It is well recognized that social acuity is very strongly correlated to exposure to and practice within social interactions (Falvey & Rosenberg, 2005). For Julia, all sources of information (predominantly interview and observational data) suggested that her social practice and participation had been very limited, and were closely moderated by family and school dynamics and circumstance.

With regard to social experiences outside of school, Julia's mother reported that aside from her family and a handful of close friends, such interactions were quite limited. What is more, aside from her two younger siblings and a small handful of children (at church and from close family friends) Julia's child friends and peer interactions were extremely limited. The fact that Julia did not attend her home school must be underscored in its importance in relation to its impact on naturally occurring interactions with individuals outside of her immediate network of family and close friends. That Julia did not attend her neighborhood school may have reduced the probability and frequency with which Julia encountered peers and friends from Vista Alta. As such, this would have invariably reduced her opportunities for random and naturally occurring peer interactions, and possibly may have reduced

opportunities for relationships beyond school to be experienced and explored outside of the school setting.

As Julia's mother explained, a great many of Julia's interactions and social experiences were linked to the more significant and present adults in her life, including both Julia's mother herself, and her grandfather, with whom Julia was said to have a very special connection and relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter, Julia's mother's discussions of social interactions outside of the home suggested that Julia's mother herself assumed the social and interactive roles on Julia's part. As she said, she was Julia's voice and Julia's decision maker. In light of this information, it can be concluded that Julia's direct social experiences and opportunities for social practice and skill development may have been somewhat circumscribed.

At school, all teachers suggested that Julia's participation and inclusion in the general education classroom and in general education activities had only recently begun. As such, her exposure to the range of individuals, activities and corresponding expectations (of both individuals and activities) was likely very restricted prior to the beginning of the study. Consequently, her understanding of and practical skills in social interaction were very likely strongly correlated to her exposure – limited. Even over the course of research, Julia's opportunities for social interaction were relatively limited, especially as compared to her general education peers. While Julia was observed to participate with peers in the general education classroom (Ms. Kay's) the average amount of time she spent in there was minimal. Of course, she was also with her peers on other occasions across the school day but, as previously described, she and her special education peers were often kept separate from their general education counterparts, such as was the case during lunch, recesses, PE, and library.

Her physical separation from her typical peers, within and across space and time, would have directly limited reduced her opportunities for her to practice and build on social skills. As it was, a great deal of time was spent with Julia alone or on the “fringe” and/or interacting with her special education peer (and engaging in frequent and inappropriate behaviors).

There are three implications to the above circumscription of Julia’s social worlds and social practice. First, until recently, Julia’s relationships had revolved predominantly around interactions with adults. As Watt, Johnson and Virji-Babul (2010) have reported, for children with Down syndrome there appears to be strong tendency for adults (rather than same aged peers) to be identified as friends. What is more, as these authors suggested, as individuals with Down syndrome themselves pass through adolescence and into adulthood, their limited perspectives and conceptions of “friends” may further limit their ability to establish relationships with individuals beyond immediate family and caregivers. Next, and as related to the first point, a lack both in the depth and frequency of exposure to a range to of interactive social partners and experiences, would significantly limit the overall socio-emotional growth and skill development among individuals with Down syndrome. Finally, and as interrelated with the previous implication, Julia’s exposure and experience with her peers, both within and outside of the school setting, would invariably have impacted the extent with which she was able to explore and develop her communication potential – both from expressive and receptive perspectives - through natural, practical and appropriate interactions (as related to both circumstance and to the individuals with whom she is communicating).

Refining the Model: Redefining Julia's Place within Relational Ecosystems

All of the above features (communication, cognitive levels, as well as experience and exposure) may be argued to have impacted Julia's relational worlds to varying degrees. It may be argued that certain deficits in communication, socio-cognitive skills and experience may have served as barriers to Julia's fullest participation and understanding of the social worlds and circumstances surrounding her. As a result, Julia appeared to exist almost peripheral to her relational worlds – something supported by the prevalence of relational types including "fringe" ship and unilateral engagement.

From the traditional Ecosystems perspective, the functioning of the individual nested in the center is a result of the interplay and responsiveness of the spheres or systems surrounding that individual. As Bronfenbrenner (1977) explained, there exists a certain degree of predictability – or "ecological validity" – between the individual and his or her surrounding spheres (or environment). In essence, "the environment experienced by the (subject)… has the properties it is supposed or assumed to have by the investigator" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 516). What is more, there exists interdependence between and within all levels of the ecosystem – an interplay which would support "the progressive accommodation between the growing human organism and its environment through a systematic contrast between …systems or their structural components" (Ibid, p. 517). The ecosystems of the individual, then, are not inert, rather they are dynamic and responsive to changes (spatial and temporal) and needs of the individual. The critical, underlying assumption of such an ecological approach is founded on this notion of dynamic and responsive system, and supports that research "… should include experiments involving the innovative restructuring of prevailing ecological systems in ways that depart from existing

institutional ideologies and structures by redefining goals, roles, and activities and providing interconnections between systems previously isolated from each other" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 528).

In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's model, ideally, one would assume that all levels of Julia's relational ecosystem would support and accommodate Julia's inclusion and acceptance within relationships. However, as revealed through observational data, Julia's actualized relational worlds and experiences appear to manifest peripheral to the larger system. As depicted in Figure 6, a barrier exists between Julia and the larger ecosystem. Aspects of Julia herself (including certain deficits in communication, socio-cognitive skills and general exposure) often presented themselves in conflict rather than interdependence with those cultural manifestations (i.e., beliefs, behaviors and artifacts) of the ecosystem. As compared to a traditional and healthy ecology wherein all aspects or spheres support and respond to the individual, Julia's displacement from the larger system suggests a "toxic" ecology (Van Brockhern, Brendtro, & Brokenleg, 2000), or a system of such internal conflict and inconsistency that it alienates the individual at the core (Ibid).

In Figure 6, Julia's relational worlds are reconfigured and reconceptualized from Bronfenbrenner's traditional model (1977). Here, Julia, the individual, is pictured apart from, rather than included in the ecology. The barrier which separates Julia from the influential relational systems is complex. On the one hand, Julia's own limitations (cognitive, communicative, and experiential) may be said to be of impact. On the other hand, elements of the larger systems or "cultures" such as beliefs, behaviors and artifacts, also may serve to define this barrier.

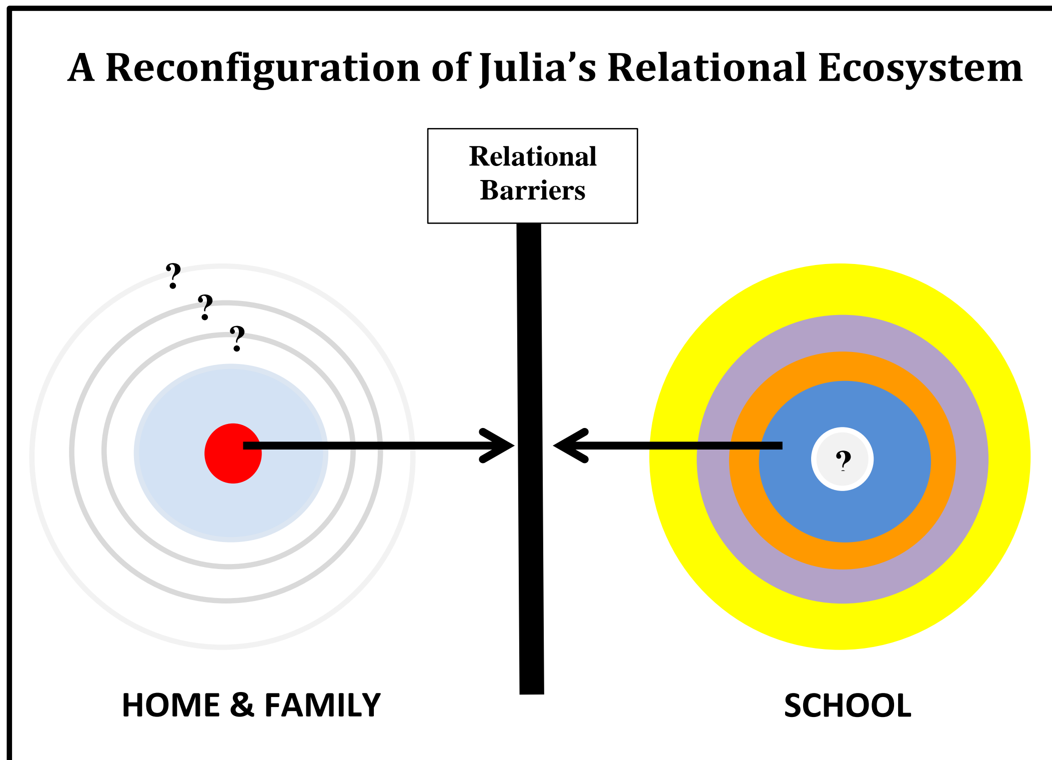

Figure 6. **A Reconfiguration of Julia's Ecosystem.**

In this revised model, Julia exists separate from the larger ecosystem of relational worlds of school. She is nested within the influential Microsystem of her home and family (the impact of this sphere, as discussed in Chapter 5). Opposite Julia, one finds the larger socio-ecology as it exists within Julia's educational setting and circumstance. The interface between the two realms is considerably restricted (as depicted by dotted arrows), and in many instances any interface is completely deflected by competing (constrictive?) aspects of these realms. The impasse between, as depicted here, is differentially fortified on either side. For Julia, cognitive levels, communication skills, and experiences restrict her interface and inclusion within the larger system. For the large sociological system, very different barriers of communication, experience, and broad aspects of overarching culture(s) exist.

While it cannot be claimed that the systems around Julia were inert with regard to the facilitation of mutual, beneficial participation and interaction, it may be argued that these systems may not have been as responsive to Julia (the individual organism) as one might have otherwise expected or hoped for given the idealized model of her relational ecosystem. The following section will explore how, at each level, each of the systems may be interpreted as being in conflict with Julia, and how each system may be reconsidered and reconfigured so as to more adequately create a lived cultural system – a system of beliefs, behaviors and artifacts – which would best support Julia's relational experiences and the benefits to be had from such experiences.

Actualizing Ideals: A Reconciliation of the Realities of Julia's Relational Worlds

From the discussion above, and from the findings of this research, it is clear that very real obstacles stand in the way of Julia and her positive participation across relational realms. While some of the obstacles are related directly to Julia, it must also be considered that a great many obstacles exist beyond Julia and her control. Regardless the source of the obstacles, there is little doubt that these obstacles must be taken down, or at the very least minimized if Julia *and* those she interacts with are to maximally benefit from their relationships. This section will explore how changes across all levels of Julia's relational ecosystem may be altered so as to ideally better support her relational experiences.

Restructuring the Macrosystem. While the Macrosystem is the farthest removed from the core of the ecosystem (here, Julia), its significance and impact is of definite note. Specifically, aspects of the law and accountability as established at the farthest, broadest reaches of the Macrosystem – namely federal policy – function with a "trickle-down" effect and impact, to differing degrees all spheres of the whole ecosystem of relational worlds.

At the Federal level, in light of the mandates of No Child Left Behind legislation [NCLB (PL107-110, 2002)] and with the increased interface between NCLB and the reauthorization IDEA (PL 108-446, 2004) , special and general educators alike are increasingly held accountable to the progress of *all* students towards state and local standards (Yell, Katsylvannas, & Shiner, 2006). As such, in relation to the ecosystems model, the impact of the federal law and accountability for student progress is felt at all levels of the relational ecosystem, from the state and district agencies, to the school-proper, and to the individual participants within the school, including teachers, peers, and Julia herself.

It has been recognized that what is important with regard to growth and development (the education experience) of the individual is not exclusive to academic learning and progress (Goodlad, 1978). As devised by Goodlad (Ibid), a recognition of the needs of the *whole* individual requires that, in addition to academic development, aspects of vocational, social and personal growth also be considered. With regard to current legislation, however, a strict adherence to standards based progress and accountability appears to leave little leeway for growth and progress beyond strict academics. From the perspective of the special education teachers (and by extension, the general education collaborating teachers) this emphasis on standards may prove to be problematic. As reported by Agran, Apler and Wehmeyer (2002), a comprehensive survey of special education teachers revealed that neither content, nor instruction was regularly aligned to standards for two reasons. First, teachers were reported to feel that many academic standards were inappropriate to the unique needs of the students being educated. What is more, teachers often reported the contention that social skills development was of considerably more value and a greater indication of the progress of students with specific learning considerations. As such, the expectations of

accountability and learning present a real conflict for the realities of what is important to the individual learning needs of the child.

For Julia, this conflict between expectations (as trickling down from the Macrosystem) and her individual learning needs was clear over the course of the research. As a “road map” to her specific learning needs, Julia’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was of direct impact to not only what Julia was to learn, but also *how* and *with whom* she was to learn. As such, her IEP directly influenced her relational worlds insofar as it specified the extent to which Julia was to be included in activities (and which activities in particular she would participate in) alongside her general education peers. However, in light of the aforementioned disparities between learning expectations and learning realities, observational data suggests that the intentions of the IEP may not always have been realized, and ‘unrealized’ may have significantly impacted her progress in relational arenas.

Three key questions arose from the research which seemed to highlight the disconnect between expectation and reality. First, were appropriate learning needs and goals – needs and goals which would ideally maximize her participation and progress across socio-relational realms - identified on Julia’s IEP? Second, as needs and goals were identified, to what extent were they appropriately addressed and programmatically implemented? Finally, and as related to the previous, was there a meaningful consistency in the way these goals and programs were implemented? Each of these questions will be addressed in turn.

Regarding the first question, Ms. Cash confirmed that Julia’s IEP did contain goals which targeted both Julia’s socio-behavioral and communication needs. Additionally, and as discussed in Chapter 5, Julia’s IEP also stipulated a certain degree of inclusion in activities with her peers both within the classroom and across a variety of school settings. However, as

observational data revealed, and as discussed with regard to the subsequent questions, both specified goals and general participation may not have always been meaningfully or consistently actualized.

With regard to the second question, behavioral and communicative goals (in a general sense) for Julia were certainly appropriate to Julia and her specific needs. What is more, progress in these goal areas would have certainly benefitted Julia's growth in socio-relational areas. Observational data, however, suggested that the implementation of these goals and their practice was not necessarily appropriate or meaningful, especially when one takes into consideration the social aspects inherent to interpersonal response, behavior and communication. While behaviors and communication were practiced across settings, two trends emerged from observations. First, such goals – especially communication – were primarily targeted during very specific and very structured instructional times (as will be discussed in a subsequent section). Second, much instruction was targeted at Julia and Julia alone. While often Julia was in the company of her special education peers during such learning opportunities, she was only ever rarely in the company of her general education peers. Given the above trends, Julia's ability to practice these skill areas in more natural and meaningful settings and opportunities was markedly reduced. As such, not only her understanding and experience of socially appropriate behaviors and communication, but also the experience and understanding of her peers, would have been impacted.

Finally, with regard to the third question, while, as Ms. Cash explained to me, goals for communication and behavior were stipulated on her IEP, observations suggested that there was a certain degree of inconsistency in how and when these goals were practiced. One of the more prominent inconsistencies identified through observational data relates to the

consistency over time and space wherein Julia was included with her general education peers (and by extension, afforded opportunities to practice and generalize her learned skills). As discussed in Chapter 5, while Julia was included with her peers across activities and settings, such in the art room for art, and the gym for physical education, there was an inconsistency noted across many of these activities. Specifically, while Julia was with her peers across activities, very often she was (along with her special education classmates) only marginally included in activities. While she occupied the same space as her general education peers, often - as was the case during such activities as PE and art - she did not participate or directly interact with these peers. Additionally, while Julia's IEP was said to have stipulated her participation across environments and activities very often, Julia (and her special education peers) were kept completely separate from her general education peers. Such full-scale separation was most frequently noted during recess, and also lunch periods in the classroom.

Whether Julia's separation from her peers was only partial or complete, the implications of her separation are clear. Being apart from her peers ultimately distanced her from very valuable social learning and practice opportunities. As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the key obstacles for Julia in regards to relationships was her relative lack of experience. For this reason, ensuring that Julia was with her peers to the maximum extent possible (or as specified on her IEP) would have been critical to facilitating greater exposure and experience with regard to social interaction. Equally as important, Julia's participation alongside her peers would have also increased her peers' exposure and experience with her. Such increased mutual exposure and experience as facilitated by broad-scale adherence to policy and procedure would invariably contribute to increased mutual understanding and acceptance, such as are necessary to the foundation of friendships.

Restructuring the Exosystem. Julia's school herein was viewed as the Exosystem of Julia's relational ecosystem. As described in Chapter 5, the school principal had explained her commitment to students with special needs, and expressed her own expectations that all children would be included. The school itself, in terms of its physical space and layout, also appeared to indicate an environment supportive of inclusion. However, as was revealed through the observational data, certain behaviors and events appeared to reflect inconsistencies between the expectation and appearances of inclusion and the actualization of inclusion. In many respects, the impact and influence of the Exosystem on Julia's relational worlds were consistent with those demonstrated in the above discussion of the Macrosystem. Namely, the influence of accountability, combined with observed inconsistencies with regard to the inclusion of children with disabilities across school environments and activities did not always reflect a school culture supportive of the social participation and growth of all students.

With regard to issues of accountability, the trickle-down effect of the larger Macrosystem was evident over the course of the study. While issues of academic accountability were present across both the special and general education setting, they were more clearly identifiable in the general education setting wherein academics (as discussed in the subsequent discussion of Julia's Mesosystem) seemed to take precedence over all other areas of learning. As the semester progressed, the importance of student progress and performance became especially clear as the students in Ms. Kay's class began to take necessary state mandated standardized testing. During these times of testing, handfuls of students from Ms. Kay's class began to more frequently join Julia and her special education peers in Ms. Cash's classroom, during which times students would engage in coloring and/or

other fun, self-selected activities. The marked contrast observed across activities in these separate environments - especially during times of testing (and assays of accountability) – appeared to underscore the conflict between expectations and the realities of academic accountability as observed to have trickled down to the Exosystem from the larger Macrosystem.

Within the school itself, a disparity was also noted between expectations and realities. While there was a stated expectation for inclusion, observed behaviors across school activities spoke to a "culture" or system of behaviors and beliefs that was not always consistent in its approach to inclusive practice. As described in Chapter 5, many activities (and the behaviors observed during these activities) involving the entire school (for example, assemblies, lunches and recesses, to cite the most prominent) resulted in the distancing, and sometimes the complete separation of students with special needs from their general education peers. Evidence of such separation was also noted, to varying degrees, during school-wide instructional blocks (or pull-out activities) such as art and physical education. In essence, there was a notable sense – a generated perception – of exclusion, rather than inclusion. There was no indication that this generated perception of separateness was intentional, neither was it pervasive nor definitive. However, the inconsistency with which inclusion was practiced and observed at the school level, may have impacted the range of perceptions and opportunities for interactions between individuals with disabilities, such as Julia, and the larger school population. Additionally, it is important to consider the extent to which a lack of teacher preparedness and training vis a vis students with disabilities (and their fullest inclusion in both settings and activities) may have contributed to the degrees of separation observed in this study. Indeed, school wide the variable influences of

preparedness, training, experience and corresponding perceptions and inconsistencies may well have impacted (or trickled down to) dynamics within component Meso and Micro systems within the school, *and* Julia herself.

Restructuring the Mesosystem. At the Mesosystem, or the classroom level, the acceptance and inclusion of all students was repeatedly demonstrated. As with the larger Exo- and Macrosystems, there were some discrepancies noted between stated expectations for inclusion and how these expectations were actualized, and perceived by those participants within the Mesosystems of the classrooms.

As developed in Chapter 5, Ms. Cash and Ms. Kay (as well as the classroom assistants) were extremely competent and caring teachers, who demonstrated undeniable commitment to ensuring the best for all the students within and between their classrooms. All teachers identified themselves as proponents of the inclusion of all students, to the greatest and most appropriate extent possible. At no point during this research did their actions or words directly imply otherwise. However, the "cultures" perceived within each classroom appeared to reflect very different approaches and expectations with regard to the inclusion of all students. Differences between the classroom spaces, classroom activities, and accessibility (to activities and social partners) all underscored what were these perceived differences with regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities, including Julia herself.

With regard to the classroom set up (as a type of "cultural" expression or artifact), each space appeared to reflect a very different physical reality, and possibly even presented to the on-looker a very different set of expectations with regard to what was "special education" and what was not. For example, Ms. Cash's classroom was very sparsely decorated and uncluttered. It was a "matter of fact" environment, with little in the way of

“academics” or other learning materials readily visible. By contrast, Ms. Kay’s classroom was teaming with activity and information. The walls were covered with learning materials, the shelves with books, and the tables with pencils and paper. This visual contrast was striking. To some extent, these environmental differences may have suggested, perhaps even reinforced, perceived differences in abilities between the two classrooms.

In addition to setting, the activities which took place between the two classrooms were also of considerable difference, if not in terms of content, at least in terms of delivery. Again, activities between the two classrooms presented a contrast in terms of learning expectations, and by extension abilities associated with each activity. For example, in Ms. Kay’s class, structured academics, including daily literacy and calendar activities, were the norm. Students were expected to appropriately attend to and participate within these activities. By contrast, integrated activities in Ms. Cash’s class were less structured, and more often than not had a play-like quality to them. For example, the most frequent integrated activity in Ms. Cash’s room was coloring. What is more, these coloring activities were often accompanied by the playing of a fun video and/or followed by less structured play and free time. Again, for all students, but especially those students of Ms. Kay’s room, these differences in activities may have suggested, perhaps even reinforced perceptions of difference between the classrooms and the students within.

Accessibility, both in terms of the physical environments and the social and learning environments was also noted to impact social interactions between Julia and her peers. Access to physical space, as well as access to activities (learning *and* social) was of primary note. At the broadest level, the simple fact that Ms. Cash and Ms. Kay did not share the same classroom, or at the very least did not have adjoining classrooms, made it difficult for and

limited the about of time for regular (and natural) interactions. At a more specific level, the issue of accessibility within classrooms was also a limiting factor, especially for Julia. For example, only infrequently in Ms. Kay's classroom during academic activities were modifications (i.e., sign language communication, picture communication systems, modified or accessible materials or manipulatives, and so forth) made so that Julia was better able to attend to or participate in what was happening around her. As a result, she would often resort to solitary engagement, fringe participation, or inappropriate interactions with those around her – the same activities which were ignored or which were met with disapproval by Julia's peers. In not being able to access the activities around her, Julia was ultimately (though certainly unintentionally) excluded from the learning community which was around her. Such exclusion may have also further entrenched any perceptions of difference between Julia and her classmates.

As Korinek, Walther-Thomas, McLaughlin and Toler-Williams (1999) explained, the teacher plays a pivotal role in the building of the classroom climate. More specifically, teachers are instrumental in building healthy and accepting classroom communities for all learners, regardless of (dis-) ability (Ibid). As these authors elaborated, the teacher is instrumental in developing curricula which will facilitate reciprocal, supporting and accepting relationships – such curricula which will define learning (and other) expectations, and will set individual and shared goals within the classroom (Ibid). Further, as developed by Kliewer (1998), teachers can directly contribute to positively influencing perceptions and orchestrating changes in the attitudes and approaches of others:

> Teachers who recognize a fundamental motivation to bond convey to other students the message that the child with a disability, though different in presence, is not

> different in spirit. Such an acknowledgement opens possibilities for connection that might otherwise go unrealized (p. 118).

In light of the above discussion, Julia's teachers, may have unwittingly created two classroom "cultures" and associated cultural artifacts (namely activities and space) - the dynamics of each which may have supported two very different, perhaps even conflicting expectations for acceptance and inclusion. In addition to these artifacts, teacher behaviors may also impacted how students perceived Julia and her special education peers. Given this, it is very important to note that classroom staff members were not simply teachers to their students, but were also purveyors of expectations as well as models of behavior.

As discussed previously, in their observations of teachers' interactions with Julia, it is not surprising that Julia's peers learned and modeled those most frequently observed roles of "teacher", "disciplinarian" and "helper". What is more, in light of less frequent (if not completely absent) interactions of more friendly and playful actions between teachers in Julia, it is also not surprising that such interactions between Julia and her peers were equally as infrequent. Given this, for peer perceptions and actions to be modified in regards to how they interact with each other (or here, in specific, how they interact with Julia) teacher awareness and correction of their own behaviors may have had a great and positive impact on classroom interactions and acceptance.

The importance of modeling appropriate behaviors was clearly as important for Julia's peers as it was for Julia herself. It is well recognized that young, elementary-aged children, regardless of ability, are just beginning to experience, explore and understand the intricacies and nuances of more consistent and meaningful social relationships (Doll, 1996; Rizzo & Corsaro, 1995; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). For Julia's general education peers, for

whom typical interactions may have presented a real puzzle, there is little doubt that Julia's less than typical behaviors and responses only added to their conundrum. It was clear that Julia's peers were sometimes wary, and even put-off by her behaviors. While it was made clear during interviews that Ms. Cash had involved students (general education and special education alike) in a group activity which provided them an opportunity to explore and discuss differences, at no time was any indication given (either verbally, or through observations) that the students had been given the opportunity to discuss student-specific differences and, further how these differences could be understood and accommodated. Such an activity and discussion - either as a one-time event, but preferably an on-going series of activities - could have helped students better understand their special education peers and how they themselves could participate in and even encourage positive interactions with their special education peers. In sum, towards the end of ensuring maximal inclusion and positive interactions between all students, Julia's teachers could have explored appropriate ways "to transform or normalize unconventional behaviors in ways that fit within the peer cultures… [so as to] promote empathy and compassion among children… to dispel such exclusionary practices as apathy and indifference and peer rejection" (Wolfberg, Zercher, Lieber, Capell, Matias, Hanson, & Odum, 1999, p. 82).

Research supports that certain activities and alternate means of instruction, such as peer tutoring, peer buddies, and cooperative learning groups, are successful not only for increasing all students' access to and participation within the general education curriculum, but also demonstrate positive outcomes in terms of creating a classroom community founded on interdependence and acceptance peers (Utley, Mortweet, & Greewood, 1997; Jenkins,

Antil, Wayne, & Vadasy, 2003). There were few, if any indications that such learning techniques were used during times of integration for Julia and her special education.

As Kennedy devised (2001), allowing students to work together facilitates student growth and acceptance through the naturally occurring circumstance of interdependence. Peer supports tend to facilitate a more rapid development of social skills, and contribute to a more natural sense of belonging to the community simply because the supports are both typical and frequent -especially when received in the general education environment (Ibid). What is more, peer interactions provide natural reinforcers of appropriate social and communicative behaviors – those very behaviors students will require to maximally participate in all areas of the curriculum. The fostering of interdependence, and the provision of natural and structured opportunities for group work and interaction, can help build up a circle of friends for students with disabilities. Building such a circle of friends is a critical way of not only increasing the student's access to, connection with, and participation within the general curriculum, but also establishing strong bridges to the greater community (Amado, A., 1993).

Restructuring the Microsystem. Given the above discussion of the disjoint between Julia and the Mesosystem, it is important to consider how dynamics of the Mesosystem, in turn, trickles down and impact at the Microsystem level. As depicted in Figure 6, observational and other data accrued over the course of research, suggested that Julia was differentially influenced by the Microsystem of home and the Microsystem of school. What is more, the influence of each of these separate Microsystems on Julia, may have been of potential impact regarding the interface between these two realms. Each of these Microsystems will be discussed in turn, with an emphasis given to how Julia's relative

position in each may be altered so as to better fit within the larger ecology of her relational worlds.

Microsystems of school. Julia's Microsystem at school consists of those environments, activities and people in which and with whom Julia most frequently engaged. As previously discussed, Julia's relational opportunities (and their outcomes) were suggested to be strongly correlated with her specific cognitive and communicative abilities, as well as by her overall exposure and experience to social opportunities. Each of these correlates was considered as obstacles to Julia's successful, full inclusion and acceptance within the larger ecosystem of her relational worlds. However, it is important to reiterate, that obstacles were not exclusive to Julia. Julia's peers also were confronted with obstacles in their own abilities and understandings of who Julia was and where she fit in their own relational worlds. Student perceptions, as generated from their own externally (to school) derived biases, experiences (or lack thereof), and student communication impacted all those who engaged with Julia.

External biases carried by those individuals with whom Julia regularly interacted, cannot be ascertained given the scope of the data presented here. Aspects of biases generated within the school context, however, may be postulated. Given the close interface (and the trickle-down effect) between the Exosystem and Mesosystems of the school, observances of behaviors and cultural expressions and artifacts (and inconsistencies observed between these) may have contributed to student perceptions and/or biases.

Just as Julia's exposure and experiences with her general education peers (and associated environments and activities) were identified as having been considerably limited while at school, so too were the experiences and exposure of Julia's peers to Julia and her special education peers. As stated by all teachers, the exposure of Julia's general education

peers to students with disabilities, like Julia herself had been quite limited. For these peers, then, their increased exposure and experiences with Julia would have contributed to a greater degree of confidence and acceptance on their part. In addition, as with Julia, increased opportunities for interaction would have been critical in two areas of skill development and competence for these general education children as well.

Communication was perhaps the biggest barrier that stood between Julia and the success with which she was able to interact with her general education peers. Communication was also a barrier to Julia's peers. Research has suggested that language ability (and over all communicative skills) are strongly correlated to levels of social acceptance (Kaiser, Hester, & McDuffle, 2001). More specifically, children with limited language skills are often less successful in their ability to play and engage with others in socially appropriate and acceptable ways, and therefore are less accepted by their peers (ibid).

While Julia was learning more effective and appropriate means to communicate with others, her peers, too, were attempting to learn means by which to communicate with Julia. For Julia, picture communication systems were used in structured work settings with her speech language therapist, but were never noted to be used outside of those structured activities. Sign language was also being learned by Julia. Sign language instruction was impromptu in its delivery, and predominantly occurred between Julia and Ms. Cash. Ms. Cash frequently used signed language with Julia when completing activities in the special education classroom, but was only rarely observed to use signed language in parallel with spoken language and instruction in the general education classroom. As a result, not only was Julia limited in the extent to which she was able to participate and engage in classroom

activities, but she was also limited in her ability to communicate and interact with those around her (either through pictures or signed language).

By that same token, Julia's peers, because they were neither directly taught, nor were they regularly able to observe signed language, were not able to adequately communicate or engage in a way that was more meaningful to Julia. Establishing a consistent and shared system of communication across learning environments and activities could have had significant and positive outcomes with regard to Julia's interactions with her peers. In support of this, it has been recognized that allowing students to explore and use alternate forms of communication, such as sign language, across different peers and circumstances can heighten individuals' understanding of the value of varied forms of communication and can also provide children important avenues by which they can explore and understand the richness inherent to diversity and difference (Brereton, 2008).

Microsystems of home and family. Family is recognized as playing a significant role in the social skills development of children with disabilities (Bennett & Hay, 2007). Indeed, unique aspects of and dynamics within a family have been demonstrated to correlate to the trajectory of social skills development (Ibid). In light of this, it is critical to recognize that the Microsystem of the home is impacted by its own ecology and circumstance (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It is important to recognize the important role that this separate ecology may have played in Julia's relational worlds while at school.

The Microsystem of the home does not directly impact the relational worlds of school as experienced by Julia. However, past and present experience and circumstance may be said to have a real, though indirect impact on Julia's relational worlds and experiences outside of the home. As mentioned previously, Julia's social relationships were limited in both kinds

and quantities. As discussed, in terms of relationship types, with the exception of a handful of family friends, most were identified by Julia's mother as family oriented. What is more, relational partners were almost exclusively adults within Julia's family. Those relationships identified by Julia's mother which took place beyond the family and were those which took place at church and at the hospital when she was younger. In quantity they were reportedly few, and in terms of frequency they were comparably sporadic.

Within the context the home Microsystem, Julia's experience with and exposure to a variety of social learning and participation opportunities as correlating to the kinds and quantities of relationships, would have been few. As such, opportunities to observe, model and learn through repeated and varied social circumstances would have correspondingly limited her growth in areas of social skill development and appropriate social communication. The implications of this for the school setting and school interactions are clear. Namely, Julia may not have had the skill sets and skill practice that would have benefited her in her interactions with peers while at school.

Research has suggested that families of children with significant disabilities are frequently limited in terms of their opportunities to access and participate in the greater community (Worcester, Nesman, & Keller, 2008; Resch, Mireles, Benz, Grenwelge, Peterson, & Zhang, 2010). Their concerns and needs – ultimately their voices – often go unheard (Ibid). As this research suggests, families of children with significant disabilities frequently report that their access to information and services, limited inclusion within and across the community and, ultimately, a lack of general family supports present real barriers regarding the extent to which they are able to best meet the needs and growth of their own

child (Ibid). For Julia's family, information given by her mother appears to support that Julia and her family faced many of these same barriers.

During our final meeting and interview, Julia's mother repeatedly spoke to issues of inclusion within the community, access to information and services, and her overall perceptions of supports for her and her family. With regard to community inclusion, outside of Julia's own family (and school), Julia's mother spoke only of Julia's participation in church related activities and involvement with close family friends as primary areas of community involvement outside of Julia's own family. She explained that she felt there was "not a lot of community stuff" in her local community or in the city in general which supported Julia's involvement outside of the family.

This idea of limited access to community activity, hence inclusion, speaks to other concerns of parents not having access to information and services. As Julia's mother explained, she had only recently learned and started participating in the local Down Syndrome Society. What is more, she had recently accessed information about the local Special Olympics chapter and was considering having Julia start participating in that. This general lack (or late awareness) of community resources would have further limited the amount of exposure and experience Julia had in new and different social activities outside of the family and routine activities.

Finally, Julia's mother repeatedly expressed frustrations with regard to the available supports and levels of acceptance afforded both her and Julia. In growing up, and facing considerable medical issues, Julia's mother repeatedly expressed that she often met with doctors and medical professionals who did not seem to offer support or sympathy. What is more, she spoke of previous teachers who appeared to lack "compassion" and support.

Additionally, she recognized that peers and adults alike had often been reluctant to offer supports, or to simply engage with Julia.

To increase levels of support and services to children with disabilities and their families, family-centered approaches have received increased attention and emphasis (Freedman & Boyer, 2000; Davis & Gavidia-Payne, 2009). As Davis and Gavidia-Payne (2009) stressed, families are “the back bone in a child’s life, and…therefore should be viewed as specialists in their children’s abilities and needs” (p. 154). From the Microsystems level, it can be extended then, that if we are better able to empower and support parents and families, we will better support and empower the child with a significant disability. For Julia’s mother and family, these necessary supports were lacking to some extent within the family’s ecosystem. What is more, the disconnect (barriers) between Julia (and her microsystem) and the relational ecosystem of the school suggests that the interface, hence supports – the family centered and family supporting approach – may have also been limited.

Given this final statement, the role of teachers, the school, and even the larger educational system cannot be overlooked in terms of the role each can play in family-centered (and by extension, child-centered) planning within and between a child’s lived Microsystems. While Julia’s mother expressed nothing but gratitude and appreciation for the work, support and dedication of Julia’s current teachers, the noted deficits of support at previous schools was clearly noted. Had these supports been in place, and consistent in their delivery – had they been more entrenched and consistent across all levels of the relational ecosystems experienced by Julia – they would have further supported Julia’s growth, participation and benefit from her social relationships (past *and* present *and* future). As such, it is important for family empowerment and support to be addressed as an important factor in

a child's growth and fulfillment within and between relational ecosystems, including those of school and associated relational worlds.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

This dissertation has explored the relational worlds of a single child, Julia, within the educational context. Indeed, the research has demonstrated that Julia engaged in a wide range of relationship types within and across school settings. In turn, each of these relationships was met by quite discrete behavioral responses, and expressions on the part of Julia. In this concluding chapter, I will first re-summarize the benefits of relationships, both for Julia and her interactional partners. Next, I will revisit the various obstacles present at each level of Julia's relational ecosystem and how they impeded Julia's participation, growth and benefit from her interactions with others. In this section, an emphasis will be placed identifying the need for a systems' change and I will propose possible means of change and intervention at each level. In the final section, I will discuss the limitations presented by this research and the need for future research regarding relationships and individuals with significant disabilities.

The Need for and Benefits of Relationships and Friendships

In light of this current research, it is clear that the importance of friendships specifically, and relationships in general cannot be overlooked or understated in relation Julia, other children with significant disabilities and their peers. With regard to relationships in general, the research presented herein has suggested that interactions between individuals with significant disabilities and their peers can be instrumental in the overall growth and development of all interactive partners. As observed in Julia and her peers, and as noted by teachers, over time and space opportunities for interaction directly facilitated an appreciation of diversity, an acceptance of difference, as well as a learning of belonging, of participation,

and of community. Indeed, exposure and opportunity contributed to varied degrees of growth in competence, confidence and overall development of all children. Such developments over time would have influenced not only how Julia was perceived and interacted with by her peers, but also would have impacted how Julia perceived and responded to her peers.

For Julia, the impact of peer relationships and interactions was manifold. As discussed in the previous chapter, peer interactions afforded Julia opportunities to build valuable skills, including those directly relevant to relationship development, including social skills, behavioral skills, communication skills, and general cognitive skills. While friendships were the least represented relationship type, their comparable importance in relation to all other relationships observed, cannot be denied. Julia's affect and response during friendly, mutual encounters demonstrated aspects of realized satisfaction and happiness as so important to friendship.

While friendships were observed, their relative lack may have limited Julia's overall fulfillment and happiness. Given this, it is important to reconsider what factors may be standing in the way of maximal relationship development and Julia's ultimate participation in meaningful and beneficial friendships. Of course, Julia herself was demonstrably a key influence on relationships and their outcomes. Importantly, however, the socio-ecology of relational worlds may have been of considerable impact to the development of Julia and, in turn, to the development of Julia's relationships.

For Julia, behavioral, cognitive and communicative deficits posed real obstacles to successful interactions with others. Over time, and with experience, successful interactions increased. Such increases were largely attributable to her exposure to and increased participation within the social spheres around her. However, these social spheres were also

arguably the same spheres which inhibited her maximal growth through participation. From the ecosystems perspective, starting from the broadest level of the relational ecosystem – the Macrosystem – policy and procedure, laced by broad-scale attitudes and beliefs regarding disability and education, were of very real impact. From this broadest level, influence trickled down through the system affecting each concentric sphere, and ultimately impacting Julia in her relational worlds. Which obstacles were present (for Julia in particular, but for all children with disabilities in general), and how they may be overcome through systemic restructuring will be considered in greater detail in the subsequent section.

Confronting Obstacles and Building Bridges: A Need for Systems Restructuring

To ensure that children with disabilities have maximal opportunity to interact with their peers and to develop friendships, it is crucial that all areas of the child's socio-ecology are structured in such a way that all spheres accord with the form, function and formation of friendships. To refer again to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1977), the final, and perhaps most important consideration or proposition of the ecosystems approach is that the system is responsive and changing to the needs of the nested individual.

> Research on the ecology of human development should include experiments involving the innovative restructuring of prevailing ecological systems in ways that depart from existing institutional ideologies and structures by redefining goals, roles, and activities and providing interconnections between systems previously isolated from each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 528).

As such, it is important that each of the ecological spheres which surround the child (the Macrosystem, the Exosystem, the Mesosystem and the Microsystem) be carefully considered and that appropriate modifications be put in place. A discussion of each sphere follows with considerations for action and intervention.

The farthest reaching of the systems, the Macrosystem, is arguably the most influential and also the most immutable sphere of the child's ecosystem. At this level, large scale, institutionalized practices and principles (values and beliefs) are pervasive and firmly entrenched. With regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities into the mainstream, federal legislation serves to protect and enhance the participation of students with disabilities, and thereby, is fundamentally instrumental in ensuring that children with disabilities are able to maximally participate within and benefit from social participation in the communities of which they are apart. While the law is clear in its intent, societal values and beliefs (whether spoken or unsaid) may threaten to undermine the proper application of the law. At the Macrosystem level, large scale alterations of institutionalized values and beliefs may be impossible. However, systemic changes in policy and procedure may be more readily conceived and actualized.

Specifically, and as related to relationship development and success for individuals with significant disabilities, the intent of educational policy and procedure under the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) is for students to be included in school activities to the maximum extent possible alongside their general education peers. However, intentions cannot necessarily be realized when one considers the intent and reality which underscores more broadly encompassing educational policy and procedure, such as No Child Left Behind, wherein student success is accounted for in terms of "standards met", rather than more global growth and fulfillment of the individual. The strict and defined letter of standards-based, educational law leaves little wiggle room for social experience and growth for all students. In some sense, policies and procedures, attitudes and beliefs at this larger systems level may be said to be contributing to a continued erosion of a child's healthy

ecology, and as such, rather than promoting individual growth and well-being may inadvertently be leading to the alienation children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Van Brockern et al., 1990).

In general, Julia's alienation from the larger socio-ecology may have been strongly moderated by aspects and conditions of the Macrosystem. Specifically, those policies and procedures supporting academic progress and performance, may have done little in promoting the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities across the educational setting. Accountability for some may have contributed to the alienation of others. As proposed by Brendtro et al. (1990), a system responsive to the basic needs of children – namely the needs of belonging, independence, generosity and mastery – is a system which best educates children through empowerment and inclusion (Vanbrockern et al., 1990).

Within the Exosystem, more finite educational policy and perspective come into play. At the school level, administrative visions, attitudes and programs which support (or not) the inclusion of students with disabilities can positively (or not) affect opportunities for social interaction and friendship building among students with disabilities and their peers. Students with disabilities, especially students with more severe disabilities, continue to be largely educated in locations separate and segregated from their peers, as was demonstrated over the course of this research. The persistence of such separateness may be due in large part to administrative perspectives and attitudes (Stanovich et al., 1998). Before practice can change, perspective must be altered in such a way that it models a collaborative effort and climate of acceptance (Ibid) and is ultimately supportive of friendship formation.

Administrator and staff trainings and supports which instill interventionist attitudes and encourage instructional practices supportive of collaborative efforts between and across

individuals *and* environments (Ibid) are critical to ensuring not only that all individuals participate, but also that they *benefit* from their participation. Such professional development might include trainings to provide administrators and staff with basic understandings about: (a) educational law; (b) the reality (versus pre/mis-conceptions) and varied expressions of disability; and (c) means of accommodating disability within the educational environment. Research has suggested that one course alone can increase a teacher's tolerance and acceptance of disability, and sense of confidence and competence in accommodating disability (Van Ruesen, Soho, & Barber, 2000).

The neighborhood is also a critical part of the Exosystem of relationships, or more specifically friendships. Parents and care-givers should be provided appropriate opportunities to learn and implement strategies and interventions which support the active and appropriate participation of their child within and across these larger social environments that constitute the community (Vaughn et al., 1997, Vaughn et al., 2002). Such interventions may include establishing networks and social circles in the larger community – networks which function to support both the child and the family as a whole (Amado, A., 1993). Ensuring that, as appropriate, the child is schooled within their own neighborhood would further increase the likelihood that the child would have greater opportunities to meet and interact with their peers in more natural settings. Ideally, the occurrence of more frequent and natural interactions with familiar peers would certainly support community participation and foster a sense of belonging to the community. Ultimately, access to peers and social opportunities within the community would further the chances for relationships to develop. Further, awareness and acceptance of disability in the community should be maximized through increased opportunities of exposure and interaction with and for persons with disabilities

(Falvey & Rosenberg, 1995). “Building community relationships and friendships means contributing to moving the world from an ‘us and them’ mode of operation to an ‘all of us’ togetherness” (Amado, A., 1993). Community participation can offer a wealth of social (and other) supports to individuals with disabilities (and their families), and can greatly facilitate the necessary growth of friendships and valuable social networks. Teachers and administrators alike can help build the bridge between home and school *and* home and the community by helping in the dissemination of contacts and other information relevant to increased community participation.

The Mesosystem level for the ecology of friendship encompasses the array of activities and environments that the individual with a disability most frequently has access to and participates in – the classroom environments. The extent to which a student has access to varied environments is directly linked to the extent to which a child will interact with others, establish commonalities and connections, and forge friendships. While physical and/or cognitive impairments may limit the extent to which children with disabilities independently access other environments, these impairments should in no way completely inhibit a child’s exposure to and participation in these environments. Adults, including teachers and paraprofessionals, can certainly facilitate a student’s physical access to and participation in varied environments (Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). They can also facilitate their social participation (Causton-Theoharis & Malmagren, 2005). However, many have cautioned that the omnipresence of an adult may overshadow natural and spontaneous interactions between children with disabilities and their peers and can negatively impact naturally occurring friendships (Meyer, 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005). To ensure that children receive the maximum benefit from peer interactions, with the least amount of adult

intrusion, adult professional development and training should be made readily available, for " [w]ithout proper training, paraprofessionals can act in ways that unwittingly isolate and segregate students whom they support" (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005, p. 442).

Peers provide natural and less obtrusive means for children with disabilities to access other areas of their Mesoenvironment. The use of peers as facilitators, especially when peers self-select to interact and assist children with disabilities, help to keep friendships "real" (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 7) by allowing for naturally occurring, mutually founded friendships to blossom (Kennedy, 2001; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Doll, 1996).

In the home environment, family may similarly limit the extent to which their children with disabilities participate with others beyond their immediate environment. Interventions aimed at facilitating friendships must involve family participation. Parents must be made aware of the value of social supports for their children beyond the family, and should receive assistance and training so that they can actively help to open doors to friendship for their children with disabilities.

In sum, at the Mesosystems level, both parents and teachers can actively participate in helping children with disabilities establish circles of peers and friends both within the varied environments of the community and the school (Amado, A., 1993; Falvey & Rosenberg, 1995). Once established, such a circle provides a network of bridges and supports which foster and facilitate increased participation in a greater number of more diverse community environments. A certain degree of consistency across those environments of the Mesosystem in which the individual participates may also better ensure the quality of participation and of outcomes. Consistency may present itself in broad terms, and may include consistent expectations and values across environments. Such consistency, indeed, may be generated

and perpetuated from the broader systems level (i.e., Macro- and Exosystems), but may also be generated and shared between more discrete environments/situations, such between classrooms. Consistency may also manifest itself through those cultural/lived artifacts, environments and activities that the individual regularly encounters.

The Microsystem is perhaps the most critical area wherein an individual's social competence can be more fine-tuned and the foundation for friendships laid. What is experienced within a single classroom or environment can serve as the arena where notions of friendship and the value of friends can be explored and experienced. The classroom becomes a place wherein the acceptance of others, regardless of their ability, is learned, practiced and lived. Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro, and Peck (1995), explained that the acceptance of others should not be based on recognitions of differences among students, but rather founded on understandings of similarity. The values and behaviors presented by a teacher should be those which promote the positive views of others, while simultaneously they also promote the individual's self-esteem and empowerment (Gordon et al., 2005; Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro, & Peck, 1995). As a community, the classroom should not be a place where autonomous individuals meet and function independently of one another. Rather the classroom should be a place of collaboration, cooperation and interdependence (Kennedy, 2001). It is from this core of the classroom that individual worth and acceptance is explored and expanded to other areas of the ecosystem of friendship and disability.

Within the classroom, many support that notions of "friendship" should be an integral part of an anti-biased teaching curriculum (Falvey & Rosenbery, 1995; Gordon et al., 1995). As a cooperative group, students should learn and practice what friendship is (Doll, 1996). To ensure that all students have access to the curriculum of "friendship" the classroom

environment should accommodate multiple ways of knowing by providing a rich and diverse context of learning and interaction (Arthur et al., 1999; Meyer, 2001).

Certainly, some children, notably those with more significant disabilities, will require more intensive and individualized instruction and guidance vis a vis the formation and maintenance of friendships. For students with disabilities, to better strengthen their understanding and to support the maintenance and generalization of their acquired knowledge and skills, instruction should occur regularly and frequently across not only structured, but also *natural* learning environments and opportunities (Kennedy, 2001; Falvey & Rosenberg, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1987). Instruction may be delivered directly by teachers, and may include such teaching techniques as coaching (Stainback & Stainback, 1987), and shaping and modeling of appropriate social behaviors (Falvey & Rosenberg, 1995). Research has demonstrated that when a structured learning activity has involved teacher facilitation (versus no teacher interaction) more frequent and effective social interactions were observed for both students with and without disabilities (Lau, Higgins, Gelfer, Hone, & Miller, 2005).

For reasons cited previously, while teachers and other adult staff may be valuable facilitators, their role and presence in the child's social milieu should be kept to a minimum. Studies have found that peer moderated learning and interaction, both direct and incidental, had more immediate and profound effects on children with disabilities (Odom, McConnell, McEnoy, Peterson, Otrosky, Chandler, Spicussz, Skellenger, Creighton,, & Favazza, 1999; Prater, Serna, & Makamura, 1999). Indeed, peers can and do play a critical role in facilitating natural communication opportunities and social interactions, and may also be a natural reinforcer for appropriate social behaviors (Carter & Maxwell, 1998). A teacher may initially

facilitate appropriate peer interactions by first providing valuable behavioral models, and subsequently by ensuring maximal opportunities for social engagement. Such opportunities may include such instructional strategies cooperative groupings, collaborative problem-solving activities, and peer tutoring (Salisbury& Palombaro, 1998).

Limitations of Current Research with Considerations for Future Research

A number of limitations are acknowledged in this research, including those relating to the ability to find and give credible "voice" to the focal subject Julia, to the interpretation of findings, and to the generalizability of findings.

The first limitation identified is the extent to which Julia's "voice" was adequately captured – especially in light of the fact that Julia herself was unable to directly express her thoughts and feelings regarding those relationships and social experiences she was a part of. Observational data of Julia's behaviors and expressions and affect were the primary means by which "voice" was accounted for. However, the fact remains, that Julia's "voice" did *not* reveal certain truths. Rather the 'realities' of her relational experiences were largely inferred through what was observed. While such inference may be viewed as a limitation to the study, it must be recalled that the very purpose of this study was to explore alternate means of understanding and hearing the "voice" of a child with a significant disability who lacked the skills necessary for adequate, direct expression. Documentation of affect, expression and behavioral responses, while they did not capture "voice", did certainly present concrete means by which Julia's relational worlds and experiences could be interpreted.

This first limitation segues into the second identified limitation of the study, namely how the collected data (observational, interview and questionnaire data) were interpreted of this interpretation. In an effort to "fortify" interpretations, all data sources were considered

together as a means of triangulating the results. As such inferred "realities" garnered from one data source were supported (or not) by other sources of information. As a result interpretations of findings were more solidly grounded on multiple perspectives as presented through multiple data sources.

In spite of rigorous efforts to triangulate the data, interpretations of observational data continued to present certain limitations with regard to my documentation and interpretation of events, behaviors, and expressions and their potential meanings in terms of Julia's relational worlds. With regard to documentation, my observations of Julia may have been tinted to some degree by the lenses through which I conducted my research – those same lenses as acknowledged before entering the field site, namely the lenses of a teacher, a person with a disability, and as a researcher. The presence of a secondary observer was not considered for this current study, but alternate observations and perspectives might have brought further depth and understanding to what was observed and how it was (or could be) interpreted. Future research in this particular area would benefit and be strengthened from cross-checking and inter-observer tests checks, as might take the form of two more observers, or perhaps even video-taping over extended periods.

While a second observer was not included in this study, post-hoc interpretations of the data were considered in the final sorting, coding and interpretation of the results. Specifically, an external "reviewer" was presented with verbal descriptions of key events presented within this dissertation and, in turn, asked to interpret each event in relation to (a) what kind of relationship the reviewer considered Julia to be engaging in (this based on a general schema and continuum of relationships such as presented in Chapter 4), and (b) how, based on the description of affect and behavior, Julia responded in each presented

circumstance. Again, however, those vignettes given to reviewer were generated from my own observations, and viewed through my own lenses and filters. Regardless, the external views and interpretations of the data did help in the recognition and categorization of both Julia's relational worlds and her responses within these worlds.

The final limitation acknowledged in this study is that of the generalizability of the findings and how applicable or relevant the presented findings here are to other individuals with significant disabilities. Clearly, the relational worlds presented here are specific to a single child with a significant disability, Julia. Julia does not represent all other children with significant disabilities, nor does her relational ecosystem reflect the same conditions and circumstances presented by others' ecosystems. As such, the findings specific to Julia cannot be generalized to the specific social needs and concerns of other students with disabilities and their relational worlds. However, this study does certainly exemplify the utility and necessity of identifying what may be lacking with regard to the social opportunities and interactions for children with significant disabilities. What is more, this study exemplifies the need for careful consideration of these individual needs, individual access, individual supports, and so forth, for those students with significant disabilities (and without clear voice) who do not have sufficient access to the social worlds and opportunities around them, and in turn, do not have those essential opportunities for social participation, growth, and ultimate fulfillment. Finally, this study suggests that the trickle-down effect of the Macrosystem (policy and procedure, belief and attitudes) – the same effects which are of impact to all students participating in the social arenas of the educational system – is of consequence to all children. In recognition of the impact of higher-order effects of the Macrosystem on all other levels of an individual's ecosystem, future research should continue to explore the impact of

current conditions with a consideration for how systems' change can directly, and positively impact the social growth and overall fulfillment of all children – with and without disabilities.

"Happiness is … friendship!": Concluding Remarks

As this dissertation has explored, the relational worlds of a child with a significant disability are great and many. What is more, and as gauged through Julia's affect and behavior, the ultimate level of relational fulfillment and engagement - friendship - is a many-splendored thing. As an idea and as a lived and valued entity, friendship is extremely complex. While it is as difficult to define as it is to measure, the fact remains that friendship is something of very concrete value and importance to the individual. While for individuals with disabilities, this holds equally true, the unfortunate truth remains that opportunities for social growth and participation - ultimately friendships – are comparably limited for these individuals. When one considers the complex nature of the socio-ecological framework around which friendships form (or not), it becomes clear just how ill-defined (or completely absent) and unstable certain spheres and systems are for children with disabilities. This research has demonstrated the importance of friendships for all individuals – including those with disabilities. While an ecological framework has been offered, it is clear that continued consideration and effort be given to the apparent barriers which stand between the ideal and the actuality of friendships for children with disabilities. Friendship is neither a right nor a privilege – it is a necessity. Continued research must focus on how to align the ecologies of friendships to insure that all individuals, regardless of ability, are afforded maximum access to and benefits from friendships in specific, and relationships in general.

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Appendix A

Interview Format and Questions

Parent/Teacher Interview

This interview will take place towards the close/end of the research period. These questions are to be largely open-ended, and the researcher will likely ask additional questions in light of interviewee responses (i.e., may as for a clarification or an elaboration of something said by the interviewee, etc.)

Before starting the interview, the interviewee will be reminded that the interview will be audio-taped, that the discussion will be fully transcribed by the researcher, and that all information discussed during the interview will be kept completely confidential.

The interview will begin with re-introductions and a general re-cap of the study/research. The preamble will help reduce apprehensions and increase comfort level of interviewee and will help to establish the necessary report between interviewer and interviewee.

1. Tell me about/describe some of the relationships that (your child/the student) is a part of at home, in the community, at school (question will be restated so that each domain is covered by and as appropriate to the interviewee)?

2. Can you tell me at what level these relationships are. I mean, for example, are they close relationships? Are they friendships, or just acquaintances? Tell me why you think this.

3. Can you tell me if you see these relationships as different from what you see as a typical relationship? How are these relationships similar or different from how you usually see/define relationships?

4. What do you think (your child/the student) feels about these relationships? Do they have different meanings? Different functions? Different levels of importance to him/her?

5. Talk to me/describe to me the different ways that these relationships have effected and continue to effect (child/your student)? Are they good? Are they beneficial? How are they beneficial, or not?

6. What sorts of factors/things do you think most affects the kinds, qualities and outcomes of your child's relationships? (your child's ability level? the perceptions of others? The environment? Structure/planning of activities and the environment? Spontaneity and natural conditions? Overall exposure and opportunity? Role - modeling? Guidance?)

7. Given these factors (we've just talked about), what do you think could be done across all settings to improve opportunities and outcomes for positive and meaningful relationships for **(your child/the student**) specifically?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your input is greatly appreciated. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to call me. Here is my phone number and e-mail. You may also try to reach me here at the school. Here is the phone number.

Appendix B

Others' Perspectives on Affect and Behavior

State/ Emotion	Observed Responses/Behaviors			
	Gestures	Vocalization	Body Posture	Facial Expressions
Happy	Hugs(MC) Waves (MC, MS) Wants to communicate (ML)	Babble (MC, mom) Laughs (MC, ML, mom) Vocalizes indep. (MS)	Relaxed/open (MC, mom) Up/mobile (ML)	Smiles (MC, mom, ML) Bright eyes (MC) Laughs (ML)
Engaged/ Interested	Points & Signs (MC) No eye-contact (mom) Tunes out (mom)	Babble (MC) "Shhhh!" (ML)	Hunched over (MC) Stands still (ML)	Serious/concentrated (MC, ML) Eye-contact (ML) Happy/interested (mom)
Comfortable	Same as "Happy" (ML) Plays (mom)	Same as "Happy" (ML) Babble (mom)	Same as "Happy" (ML) Relaxed (mom)	Same as "Happy" (ML) Happy (mom)
Refreshed/ Energetic	Signs readily (ML) Gives thumbs-up (mom)	"Yeah!" (mom)	Upright (ML) Open (mom)	Cheery (ML) Smiles (mom, ML)
Excited	Claps (MC, mom) Points (MC) Signs (MC) Same as "Happy" (ML) Gives thumbs up (mom)	Happy babble (MC) Same as "Happy" (ML) Signs "thank you" (mom)	Open/excited (MC) Same as "Happy" (ML) Excited (mom)	Happy (MC, mom) Wide-eyed (MC, mom) Same as "Happy" (ML)
Does not want	Holds hand out/up (ML) Pulls/walks away (mom)	"No!", "Stop" (ML) "Finish" sign (mom)	Stands straight (ML) Normal (mom)	Scowl (ML) Serious (mom)
Mad	Hands across body/face (mom, MC) Pushes things away (MC) Hands near head (ML)	"No!" "Stop!" (MC, ML, mom) Grumpy babbly (MC) "Grrrr!" (ML)	Crosses arms (MC) Turns away (MC) Hands on hips (ML) Closed/tense (mom)	Mad eyes/face (MC) Shows teeth (ML) Small, mad eyes (mom)
Sad	Hides face (MC) Covers eyes (ML) Chews fingers (mom)	Crying (MC, ML, mom) Has trouble breathing (mom)	Closed off (MC) Won't look at others (MC) Head down (ML)	Sad eyes (MC) Closes eyes (mom)
Bored	Pushes activity away (MC) Moves away (ML) "Never bored" (mom, ML)	"Never bored" (ML, mom)	Never bored (ML, mom)	Never bored (ML, mom)
Nervous/ Anxious	Chews fingers (mom) Pushes trach or ears (mom)		Tense/closed (mom)	Serious (mom)

Not feeling well	No movement (MC) Holds tummy (ML) Same as "sad" (mom)	Less sign (MC) Few vocalizations (MC) Quiet (MC) "No!" frequently (ML) Same as "sad" (mom)	Slow (MC) Slumps (ML) Same as "sad" (mom)	Less expressive (MC) Sad (MC) Stares (ML) Scowls (ML) Same as "sad" (mom)
State/ Emotion	**Gestures**	**Vocalizations**	**Body Posture**	**Facial Expressions**
Tired	Like "Not feeling well" (MC)	Like "Not feeling well" (MC) Fake crying (ML) Grumpy "No" (ML)	Like "Not feeling well" (MC) Head down (ML) Tense/grumpy (mom)	Like "Not feeling well" (MC) Sleepy eyes (ML) Upset (mom)
Wants something	Takes away from others (MS) Points/grabs (MC, ML, mom)	"No" (MS) Signs or says "please" or "want" (MC) "That" (MC) Babble (MC) "Do" or "You" (ML) Yells (mom) "Mama" (mom)	Angry (MS) Open (MC) Straight (ML) Frustrated/tense (mom)	Mean face (MS) Open eyes (MC) Eyes narrow (ML) Brows arched (ML) Mad/serious (mom)
Afraid	Holds your hand (ML) Hides (ML) Holds onto someone (mom)	"No!" "Stop!" "Mommie" (ML) Quiet (ML)	Closed off/protective (mom, MC) Close to or behind an adult (ML)	Wide eyes (MC, ML) Open mouth (ML) Upset/scared (mom)
Confused	Stretched out arms (ML) Gets made (mom)	"What?" (ML, mom)	Thinks (mom) Won't pay attention (mom)	Eyes wide (ML)

Appendix C

Trends in Affect and Mood

Relational Realms, Variability			Trends in Julia's Affect/Behavior/Response
Solitary	**Voluntary**	Play	*Happy, withdrawn, distant, unaware*
		Mimic	*Content, focused, deliberate, serious*
		Work	*Content, focused, intent, unaware*
		Escape	*Angry, resistant*
	Involuntary	Time Out	*Dramatic, angry, frustrated*
		Forced Separation	*Non-responsive, angry, surprised*
		Eating	*Unaware/oblivious*
"Fringe"	**"Fringe"ship**		*Curious, wonderment, interest, focused*
Unilateral	**Unreciprocated**	By Julia	*Content, oblivious*
		By others	*Surprised, confused, wonderment, non-responsive*
	Hierarchical	Julia 'in Control'	*Content, determined, happy*
		Julia as Teacher	*Excited, happy, angry, frustrated*
		Julia as Student	*Resistant, angry, interested, focused, curious*
		Julia as Helper	*Determined, content, serious, happy, concerned*
		Julia as "Helpee"	*Angry, resistant, oblivious, compliant*
		Julia as Disciplinarian	*Angry, serious, mimic*
		Julia as 'disciplined'	*"fake-cry", anger, resistance, curious, compliant*
Mutual	**Special Education**	Appropriate	*Happy, content, excited*
		Inappropriate	*Happy, content, excited*
	Adult		*Happy, content, excited*
	General Education		*Happy, content, excited*

Friend-ship			*Happy, content, excited*

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