

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 834

PS 026 206

AUTHOR O'Connell, Paul; Sedighdeilami, Farrokh; Pepler, Debra J.;  
Craig, Wendy; Connolly, Jennifer; Atlas, Rona; Smith, Carla;  
Charach, Alice

TITLE Prevalence of Bullying and Victimization among Canadian  
Elementary and Middle School Children.

PUB DATE 1997-05-00

NOTE 12p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Aggression; \*Bullying; Elementary  
Education; \*Elementary School Students; Foreign Countries;  
Incidence; \*Middle School Students; Middle Schools; Peer  
Relationship; \*Student Surveys

IDENTIFIERS Canada; Victimization

ABSTRACT

This study examined the prevalence of bullying and victimization among Canadian school children. Using a questionnaire developed by Olweus, the study surveyed 4,743 children in grades 1 through 8. Six percent of children acknowledged bullying others "more than once or twice" in the preceding 6 weeks, and 15 percent of children reported they had been victimized at the same rate. Very few (2 percent) reported being both bullies and victims. Fourteen percent of children reported being bullied because of their race. There were significant developmental differences. With increasing age, there was an increase in the tendency to join in bullying, a decrease in willingness to help a victim, and a decrease in reports of peers assisting victims. Bullies were more likely to be known to teachers, and victims were more likely to be known to parents. The findings pose implications for intervention efforts to reduce bullying in schools. (Contains 11 references.) (EV)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

# PREVALENCE OF BULLYING AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG CANADIAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN

Paul O'Connell, Farrokh Sedighdeilami, Debra J. Pepler, Wendy Craig  
Jennifer Connolly, Rona Atlas, Carla Smith, and Alice Charach

Debra J. Pepler, Paul O'Connell, Rona Atlas, Farrokh Sedighdeilami, Jennifer Connolly, and Carla Smith, Department of Psychology and the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, York University; Wendy Craig, Department of Psychology at Queen's University; Alice Charach, C. M. Hincks Centre.

This research was supported by the Ontario Mental Health Foundation.

We wish to thank our colleagues Suzanne Ziegler, Pam Brown, Don Kent, Susan Williams, Loren McMaster, Phillip Whissel, Wendy Perry, Allison Mitchell, Terry Diamond and many other students for their assistance with the data collection. We are particularly indebted to the children, their parents and teachers who participated in this research program.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the prevalence of bullying and victimization among Canadian school children. Using a questionnaire developed by Olweus, we surveyed 4,743 children in Grades 1 to 8.

6% of children acknowledged bullying others "more than once or twice" in the past six weeks and 15% of children reported they had been victimized at the same rate. Very few children (2%) reported being both bullies and victims. These figures are similar to those from other countries. 14% of children reported being bullied because of their race.

There were significant developmental differences. With increasing age, there was an increase in the tendency to join in bullying, a decrease in willingness to help a victim, and a decrease in reports of peers' assisting victims.

Bullies were more likely to be known to teachers and victims were more likely to be known to parents.

These findings are discussed in light of intervention efforts to reduce bullying in schools.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND  
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS  
BEEN GRANTED BY

Paul  
O'Connell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES  
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

## PREVALENCE OF BULLYING AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG CANADIAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN

Bullying is defined as negative actions - physical or verbal - that have hostile intent, are repeated over time, and involve a power differential (Olweus, 1991). Bullying may be direct or indirect. The latter form of bullying comprises social behaviours that covertly cause distress to a victim (e.g., gossip, spreading of rumours, encouraging others to exclude a person). The power differential in bullying may arise from differences in size and stature, but also from higher social status, a knowledge of vulnerabilities, or from the number of children colluding with the bully. Regardless of its form, the problems of bullying impact on both the bullies and their victims. For bullies, there is a risk of extending the use of power and aggression into adulthood which is manifested in criminality and other forms of antisocial behaviour (Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1991). For victims, repeated bullying can cause significant psychological distress and interfere with many domains of functioning (Besag, 1989; Olweus, 1993).

Bullying has been extensively studied in Scandinavia since the early 1970s. In general, these studies found that 15% of students reported themselves to be involved in bully/victim problems more than once or twice per term: 7% as bullies, 9% as victims, and 1% as both bullies and victims (Olweus, 1991). In Ireland, 3% of primary school children report engaging in serious bullying behaviour; 8% of children report being the victims of serious bullying (O'Moore, 1989). In England, 26% of school children report being bullies "sometimes" and 15% are bullied "more often" (Boulton & Underwood, 1992). Within high schools in Britain, Yates and Smith (1989) found that 12% of students reported bullying now and then or more frequently and 22% of students reported victimization at that rate.

To date, no large-scale North American studies of bullying and victimization have been reported. This paper compiles data from four Canadian surveys of bullying and victimization. The studies were conducted between 1991 and 1995 on a total of 4,743 children from one large and one small city in Southern Ontario. These data include reports from 588 children in primary grades (1-3), thus extending downward the age range of children who have been surveyed about bullying and victimization problems.

### METHOD

#### Participants

A total of 4,743 children in grades 1-8 (2,336 boys and 2,407 girls) participated in the four studies reported in this paper. Descriptions of the four studies are included in Table 1. The 22 schools in the studies vary demographically, ranging from low to upper socioeconomic status and representing a wide ethnic diversity. Two of the schools were private schools, not funded by government.

Sex and grade distributions, across studies, are included in Table 2.

## Measures

All children were administered a self-report Bully/Victim Questionnaire, based on Olweus (1989). This measure examines the amount of bullying and victimization that students have been directly involved in over the past six weeks, as well as their general awareness of bullying at their school. In three of the studies, additional items asked about affective and behavioural responses to bullying and the role of peer involvement.

## Procedure

Questionnaires were administered individually to children in grades one and two by trained research assistants. Questionnaires were administered to children in their classroom groups for grades three through eight by at least one trained researcher. Additional support was given to any children for whom English was a second language and who experienced difficulties with the questions.

Based on the responses to the questionnaires, three subgroups of children were identified: bullies, victims, and bully-victims. These groups were compared with the overall sample on a number of questionnaire items. Children were classified as bullies if they responded "more than once or twice", or more frequently, to the question "How often have you bullied since the beginning of the school year?" Children were classified as victims if they responded "more than once or twice", or more frequently, to the question "How often have you been bullied since the beginning of the school year?" The third classification was for bully-victims which comprised of children who met the criteria for both bully and victim status.

## RESULTS

### Bullying

- 29.5% of children reported bullying others "one or twice", or more often, during the term
- 6% reported bullying others "more than once or twice" during the term.
- There were no significant differences in reports of bullying across grade levels: 4.2% for primary (grades 1-3), 5.1% for junior (grades 4-6), and 7.4% for intermediate (grades 7-8).
- There were no gender differences: 6.8% of boys and 5.1% of girls acknowledged bullying others more than once or twice in the past six weeks.

### Victimization

- 38% of children reported being bullied at least "once or twice" during the term; 15% reported being bullied "more than once or twice" during the term.
- Victimization decreased across grade levels: 26% of primary children reported victimization, compared to 15% of junior and 11.5% of intermediate children ( $z=6.5$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- There were no gender differences in victimization.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

### **Peer Involvement in Bullying**

- 83% of children stated that bullying made them feel either "a bit" or "quite" unpleasant.
- 31% of students indicated that they "could join in bullying someone they didn't like".
- The tendency to join in increased with grade level: primary children (13.3%) were less likely to indicate they would join in bullying than junior (31.3%) or intermediate students (49.6%)( $z=7.0$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- 41% of students indicated they "do help" the victim.
- Helping victims declined with grade level: 57% of primary students, 39% of junior students, and 27% of intermediate students reported helping ( $z=4.9$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- 11% of students indicated that peers "almost always" tried to stop bullying when they saw it.
- Primary children (24%) more frequently reported peer interventions than junior (11%) or intermediate children (7%) ( $z=4.4$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

### **Adult Involvement**

- 29% of students indicated that teachers "almost always" intervened.
- Primary children reported a higher frequency of teacher interventions (37%) than junior (26%) and intermediate students (30%) ( $z=2.5$ ,  $p<.05$ ).
- 46% of bullies had spoken to their teachers and 35% of bullies had spoken to their parents about bullying.
- 41% of victims had talked with a teacher; 54% of victims had talked with their parents about problems of victimization.

### **Racial Bullying**

- 14% of students indicated that they had been bullied "one or twice" because of their race; 5% reported being more frequent victims of racial bullying.
- There were significant differences among grade levels: primary students reported greatest racial bullying (10%), followed by junior (5%), then intermediate students (2%) ( $z=2.9$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

### **Bully-Victim Status**

- 1.6% of children reported both bullying and victimization "more than once or twice".
- There were no significant grade level or gender differences in reports of bully-victim status.

## DISCUSSION

### Prevalence

The prevalence of bullying and victimization in Canada is similar to that from other countries. This survey of students in Grades 1 to 8 revealed that 6% of children acknowledged bullying others "more than once or twice" and 15% of children reported that they had been victimized "more than once or twice" since the beginning of term. This compares to 7% and 9% for bullies and victims in Norway (Olweus, 1991). The number of children experiencing victimization is similar to that in England (Boulton & Underwood, 1992).

Consistent with other research, rates of victimization were higher than rates of bullying. This may occur for at least two reasons. Aggressors may underestimate their involvement in bullying, while victims may be reporting on bullies who aggress against multiple targets.

### Bully-Victims

Consistent with the Norwegian studies (Olweus, 1991), very few children (2%) reported that they had both bullied others and been bullied by their peers. This is inconsistent, however with our naturalistic observations of bullying on the playground. Forty-five percent of the children whom we observed bullying or being victimized, were observed in both roles (Craig & Pepler, 1997).

### Racial Bullying

We were concerned about racial bullying, given the ethnic diversity in the samples from Toronto, which has been cited by the United Nations as the most ethnically diverse city in the world. One in seven children (14%) reported being bullied because of their race. Within the school system, there is a concerted effort to reduce racism. The decrease in reports of racial victimization across the grade levels may reflect success in reducing racists comments throughout the elementary school years.

### Developmental Differences

Although there was only a modest increase in reports bullying across grades, there were other indications of decreasing concern for victims with development. With increasing age, there was an increase in the tendency to join in, a decrease in willingness to help a victim, and a decrease in reports of peers' assisting victims. These developmental trends reflect the decreased concern for victims found in Rigby and Slee's (1991) Australian study. This trend must be considered in our efforts to intervene to reduce bullying. Perhaps interventions will be most successful if they are initiated in the early grades and maintained throughout the middle years of elementary school.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

### **Peer Involvement**

We were concerned about peer involvement in bullying based on our observations that peers are present in 85% of bullying episodes both in the classroom and on the playground (Atlas & Pepler, 1997; Craig & Pepler, 1995). When asked about their peers' behaviours, 11% of students indicated that peers "almost always" tried to stop bullying when they saw it. This concurs with our observations on the playground.

### **Adult Intervention**

Bullying is a covert activity which often goes undetected by adults due to many factors. Our observations indicated that teachers intervened in 4% of bullying episodes (Craig & Pepler, 1996). Children's reports reflect a somewhat higher rate of adult intervention. Approximately half of the bullies and victims had discussed the problem with teachers and parents. Bullies were more likely to be known to teachers, whereas victims were more likely to be known to parents.

### **Conclusion**

Bullying is a pervasive problem among Canadian elementary school children. Almost a third of children acknowledge that they bully other students "one or twice" during a term and over a third of children report they are victimized with that frequency. Although this frequency of bullying and/or victimization does not suggest pathology, it may contribute to a negative climate within the school environment. The more frequent reports of bullying and victimization suggest a persistent and significant problem which may require focused intervention efforts.

Bullying needs to be addressed because of the potential long-term effects for all children who are involved, whether as bullies, victims, or witnesses to violence. As Cairns and Cairns (1991) note, aggressive children tend to affiliate with others who are aggressive, thereby increasing the likelihood of future delinquency and antisocial behaviour. Victims of serious violence have been found to be at risk for themselves perpetrating violence (APA report, 1993). Witnesses to violence may become desensitized to it and ultimately more accepting of it.

## REFERENCES

- Besag, V. (1989). Bullies and Victims in schools. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Boulton, M. J., & Underwood, K. (1992). Bully victim problems among middle school children. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 62, 73-87.
- Cairns, R., & Cairns, B. (1991). Social cognition and social networks: A developmental perspective. In D. Pepler & K. Rubin (Eds.). The development and treatment of childhood aggression. (pp. 249-278). Hillsdale, N. J.: L. Erlbaum.
- Craig, W., & Pepler, D. (1997). Observations of bullying on the school playground. Unpublished manuscript. York University, Toronto, Canada.
- Farrington, D. P. (1993). Understanding and preventing bullying. In M. Tonry (Ed.). Crime and Justice, 17. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Olweus, D. (1989). Students' Bullying Questionnaire. Unpublished document.
- Olweus, D. (1991). Bully/victim problems among school children: Basic facts and effects of a school-based intervention program. In D. Pepler & K. Rubin (Eds.). The development and treatment of childhood aggression, Hillsdale, N. J. Erlbaum.
- O'Moore, A. M. (1989). Bullying in Britain and Ireland: An Overview. In E. Roland and E. Munthe (Eds.). Bullying: An International Perspective. (pp. 3-21). London: David Fulton.
- Pepler, D., Craig, W., Ziegler, S., & Charach, A. (1993). A school-based antibullying intervention: Preliminary evaluation. In D. Tattum (Ed.). Understanding and managing bullying. Heinemann.
- Rigby, K. & Slee, P. T. (1991). Bullying among Australian school children: Reported behaviour and attitudes to victims. Journal of Social Psychology, 131, 615-627.
- Yates, C., & Smith, P. K. (1989). Bullying in two English Comprehensive schools. In E. Roland and E. Munthe (Eds.). Bullying: An International Perspective. London: David Fulton.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



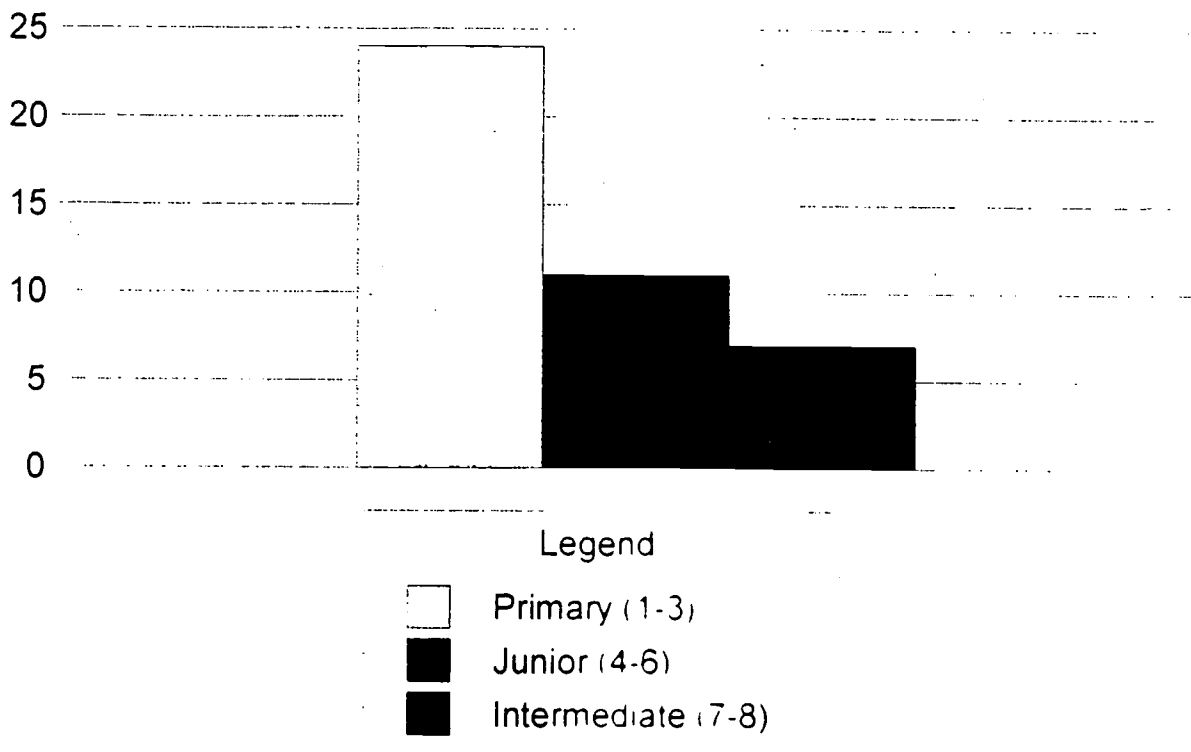
**Table 1**  
**Description of Study Samples**

<b>Grade Range</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Time of Pretest</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
3 - 8	1	Toronto	Spring 1991	5	1247 620 boys/627 girls
1 - 6	2	Toronto	Fall 1992	3	905 464 boys/411 girls
5 - 8	3	Toronto	Fall 1995	7	1774 883 boys/890 girls
3 - 8	4	Kingston	Spring 1995	12	784 375 boys/409 girls

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of Students by Grade and Gender**

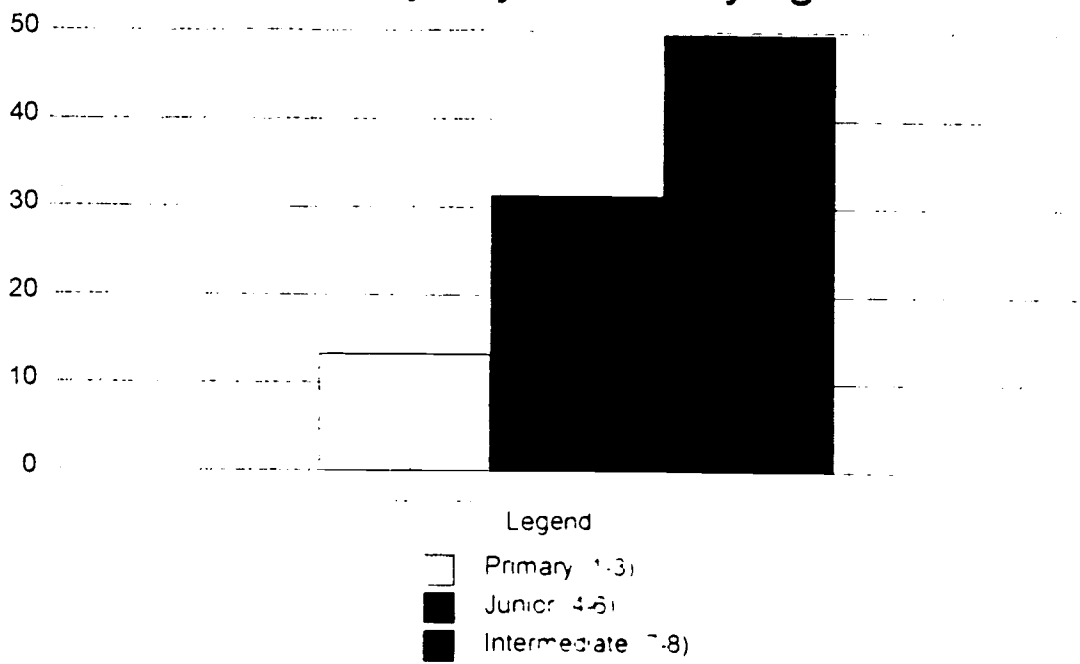
<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>Total</b>
Boys	61	68	165	287	394	417	485	459	2336
Girls	54	71	169	274	408	440	472	519	2407
Total	115	139	334	561	802	857	957	978	4743

# Developmental Differences: Peers almost always intervene



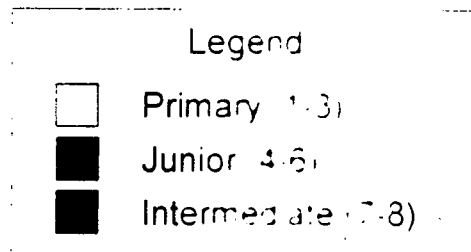
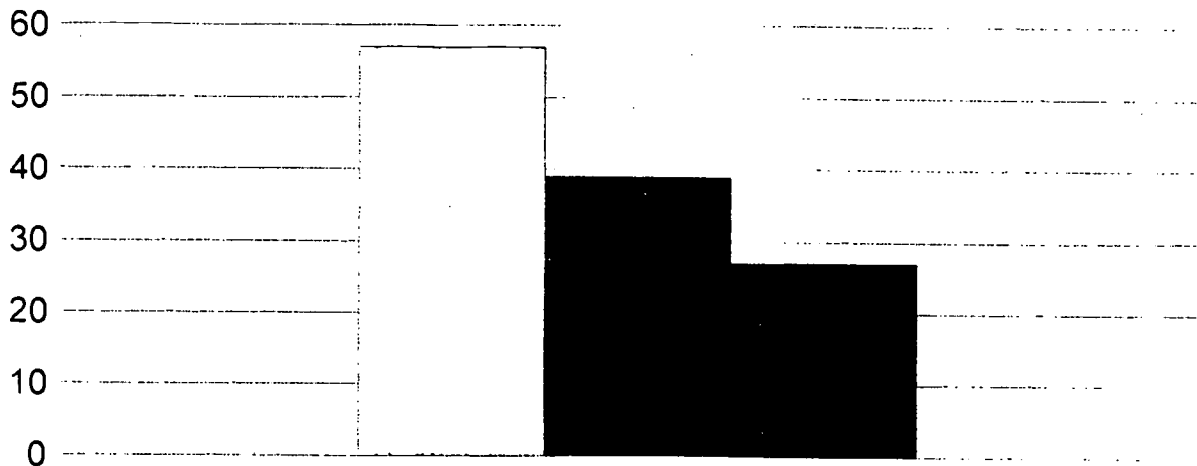
BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Developmental Differences: Could you join in bullying?



# Developmental Difference

Willingness to help victim.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE



U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)  
National Library of Education (NLE)  
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



# REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

## I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: PREVALENCE OF BULLYING AND VICTIMIZATION AMONG CANADIAN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN.	
Author(s): O'CONNELL, PAUL, F. SEDIKDEILAMI, D. PEPLER, W. CRAIG, J. CONNOLLY, R. ATLAS.	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: MAY, 1997

## II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

\_\_\_\_\_ Sample \_\_\_\_\_

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 1

Level 2A

Level 2B

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature: <u>Paul O'Connell</u>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <u>PAUL O'CONNELL, Ph.D. candidate</u>	
Organization/Address: <u>YORK UNIVERSITY 4700 KEELE ST TORONTO, CANADA M3J 1P3</u>	Telephone: <u>(416) 657-8551</u>	FAX:
	E-Mail Address: <u>oconn@yorku.ca</u>	Date: <u>March 20/99</u>

(over)

026206

### III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

### IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

### V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:	Karen E. Smith, Acquisitions Coordinator ERIC/EECE Children's Research Center University of Illinois 51 Gerty Dr. Champaign, Illinois, U.S.A. 61820-7469
---	---

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

#### ERIC Processing and Reference Facility

1100 West Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Laurel, Maryland 20707-3598

Telephone: 301-497-4080

Toll Free: 800-799-3742

FAX: 301-953-0263

e-mail: [ericfac@inet.ed.gov](mailto:ericfac@inet.ed.gov)

WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>