Université de Montréal

Comportements oppositionnels et engagement scolaire :

effet modérateur de la relation maître-élève

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# Résumé

Les élèves qui présentent des problèmes de comportements externalisés comme l'opposition éprouvent généralement de la difficulté à s'engager dans leurs apprentissages (Janosz, 2000). Or, un faible engagement scolaire peut générer des problèmes d'ordre académique et mener au décrochage. Toutefois, certains facteurs environnementaux tels que la relation maître-élève semblent influer sur l'investissement des élèves dans les activités scolaires. La présente étude vise à examiner le lien entre le degré d'opposition d'élèves du 2$^e$ cycle du primaire et leur engagement comportemental et affectif en français. Elle tente aussi de vérifier si la chaleur ou les conflits présents dans la relation maître-élève agissent comme facteurs de protection ou comme facteurs aggravants face à l'engagement scolaire des élèves oppositionnels. Finalement, cette étude s'intéresse à l'effet différentiel de la relation maître-élève sur l'engagement scolaire des garçons et des filles. Des régressions linéaires multiples hiérarchiques effectuées sur 385 élèves québécois ont permis d'atteindre ces objectifs. Les résultats obtenus révèlent que la chaleur n'agit pas à titre de facteur de protection en ce qui a trait à l'engagement comportemental des élèves oppositionnels, mais qu'elle est bénéfique pour l'engagement comportemental des filles. Les résultats confirment également l'effet aggravant des conflits sur l'engagement comportemental des élèves oppositionnels. Finalement, cette étude indique que les conflits élèves-enseignants sont nuisibles pour l'engagement affectif des garçons. Les implications de ces résultats pour la recherche et pour l'intervention en psychoéducation seront présentées.

**Mots-clés** : engagement scolaire, opposition, relation maître-élève, chaleur, conflit

**Abstract**

Students who display externalized behavior problems such as opposition generally find it difficult to engage themselves in their learning (Janosz, 2000). Yet, a lack of engagement toward school can result in diverse academic problems and eventually lead to drop-out. However, certain school-related factors such as the student-teacher relationship might influence students' investment in academic activities. The current study has three objectives. First, it attempts to examine the link between the degree of opposition of 3$^{rd}$ and 4$^{th}$ grade students', and their behavioral and emotional engagement toward French activities. Then, it tries to verify whether the level of closeness or conflict in the student-teacher relationship acts as a protective or aggravating factor regarding the school engagement of oppositional students. Finally, the current study is interested in the differential effect of the student-teacher relationship on the school engagement of boys and girls. Hierarchical linear regressions were conducted on a sample of 385 students from Quebec in order to reach the study's objectives. Findings reveal that closeness does not act as a protective factor for the behavioral engagement of oppositional students, but that it is beneficial for girls' behavioral engagement. Results also confirm that conflict is an aggravating factor for the behavioral engagement of oppositional students. Finally, this study indicates that student-teacher conflict is harmful for boys' emotional engagement. Implications of these findings for research and for intervention will be discussed.


**Keywords**: school engagement, opposition, student-teacher relationship, closeness, conflict

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Chapitre 1

Introduction

## Introduction

Le présent mémoire a pour objectif de démystifier le lien entre les comportements oppositionnels des élèves, et leur engagement comportemental et émotionnel face aux activités de français. Il vise également à observer de quelle façon la qualité de la relation maître-élève influe sur l'engagement scolaire des élèves oppositionnels. Finalement, il tente d'examiner l'effet différentiel de cette relation sur l'engagement scolaire des garçons et des filles.

Ce mémoire est divisé en trois sections : a) une introduction générale sur le trouble de l'opposition avec provocation (TOP); b) un article empirique résumant les thèmes de recherche, la méthodologie employée ainsi que les résultats obtenus; c) une discussion générale sur les implications des résultats pour les psychoéducateurs et psychoéducatrices.

### Trouble Oppositionnel avec Provocation (TOP)

**Définition et comorbidité.** Manifester de la résistance ou contester les demandes des adultes constituent des attitudes normatives à certaines périodes du développement de l'enfant. Néanmoins, certains enfants présentent des conduites qui outrepassent ce qui est considéré normal. Classifiés comme étant « oppositionnels », ces enfants démontrent un ensemble de comportements négativistes, hostiles ou provocateurs (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Par exemple, ils se mettent souvent en colère, contestent ce que disent les adultes et s'opposent souvent activement ou refusent de se plier aux demandes ou aux règles. Ils embêtent les autres délibérément et font fréquemment porter à autrui la responsabilité de leurs erreurs ou de leur mauvaise conduite. Finalement, les enfants oppositionnels sont souvent susceptibles ou facilement agacés par les autres, fâchés ou plein de ressentiment, et ils se montrent fréquemment méchants et vindicatifs.

Dans le DSM-IV-TR (2000), le TOP est classé dans la catégorie des comportements perturbateurs en compagnie du trouble des conduites (TC). Par contre, le TC se distingue du TOP par la sévérité des comportements qui y sont reliés. Il se caractérise principalement par un « ensemble de conduites répétitives et persistantes dans lesquelles sont bafoués les droits fondamentaux d'autrui ou les normes et règles sociales correspondant à l'âge du sujet » (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Les enfants qui souffrent d'un TC manifestent de façon répétée des comportements agressifs comme des bagarres, de l'intimidation, de la cruauté envers les personnes ou les animaux, ainsi que la destruction de biens matériels.

Il est parfois difficile d'établir un diagnostic de TOP en raison de la comorbidité entre ce trouble et le TC, mais également à cause de sa comorbidité avec le trouble déficitaire de l'attention avec hyperactivité (TDAH). En effet, selon Lahey et Loeber (1994), environ les trois quarts des enfants diagnostiqués avec un TC souffrent ou ont précédemment souffert d'un TOP. De plus, même si le DSM-IV-TR distingue désormais les comportements perturbateurs des problèmes reliés à l'attention et à la suractivité et inclut le TDAH dans une catégorie distincte (Keenan & Wakschlag, 2002), la cooccurrence des deux troubles demeure très élevée (Frick, 1998). Cette comorbidité est parfois expliquée par l'impulsivité caractéristique au TDAH, puisque cette impulsivité occasionne souvent des conflits entre les élèves hyperactifs et les adultes de leur entourage. Il est donc plausible que des élèves qui sont en confrontation avec leur enseignant manifestent des signes d'opposition envers celui-ci, lorsqu'il leur impose des contraintes. Finalement, les troubles anxieux et les troubles de l'humeur sont aussi associés aux comportements oppositionnels (Dumas, 1999).

**Prévalence.** De façon générale, le taux de prévalence du TOP varie entre 2 et 16%, selon le type de population étudiée et les méthodes d'évaluations utilisées (APA, 2000). Les garçons

sont plus fréquemment diagnostiqués avec un TOP que les filles. Au Québec, selon les données du Ministère de l'Éducation (MEQ, 1999), 25 000 élèves des écoles publiques reçoivent des services éducatifs complémentaires relativement à leurs problèmes de comportement, dont la moitié au primaire. De plus, les garçons sont cinq fois plus nombreux que les filles à recevoir des services scolaires complémentaires pour ces difficultés (Conseil Supérieur de l'éducation, 2001; Dyke, 2008). Il n'existe pas de statistiques précises concernant la proportion d'élèves québécois ayant un TOP, mais dans les écoles primaires, le taux d'élèves identifiés qui présentent des problèmes de comportement est passé de 0,78% à 2,5% en l'espace de 15 ans (Conseil Supérieur de l'éducation, 2001). Près des deux tiers de ces élèves éprouvent des difficultés suffisamment graves pour répondre aux critères du DSM-IV-TR pour un TOP ou un TC (Déry, Toupin, Pauzé, & Verlaan, 2008). Les difficultés des filles suivies au primaire semblent encore plus complexes que celles des garçons. En effet, leurs difficultés de comportement sont deux fois plus fréquemment concomitantes avec des problèmes intériorisés (43% chez les filles pour 24% chez les garçons) (Marcotte, 2007).

**Prédicteurs.** Divers éléments semblent prédisposer les élèves à manifester des problèmes de comportement tels que l'opposition. En premier lieu, certains facteurs environnementaux et biologiques interagissent pour influencer l'apparition des comportements perturbateurs. Ainsi, les anomalies génétiques, les dommages cérébraux, la mauvaise alimentation, les irrégularités biochimiques, les maladies physiques, de même que le tempérament difficile peuvent contribuer à l'apparition d'un trouble du comportement (Kauffman, 1997). Néanmoins, ces éléments ne sont pas reliés directement aux problèmes de comportement. Ils semblent plutôt constituer des facteurs de vulnérabilité.

Parmi les caractéristiques familiales pouvant être associées aux troubles de comportement

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tels que l'opposition se trouvent le type de cellule familiale et le type de discipline parentale. Les enfants issus de familles monoparentales sont plus susceptibles de démontrer des comportements perturbateurs. De plus, les parents qui rejettent leurs enfants, qui font preuve de négligence et qui sont trop permissifs tout en se montrant sévères, hostiles et incohérents dans leur approche disciplinaire, ont plus souvent des enfants avec des difficultés de comportement (Hetherington & Martin, 1986). Les élèves provenant d'une famille où il y a beaucoup de coercition semblent également moins bien préparés à se conformer aux directives des enseignants, à remplir leurs tâches, ou à interagir avec leurs pairs (Patterson, 1986). Enfin, certains problèmes chez les parents, comme la dépression, la consommation abusive d'alcool et de drogue ou la criminalité, sont aussi associés aux troubles du comportement de leur enfant (D'Angelo, Weinberger, & Feldman, 1995; Downey & Coyne, 1990).

Certaines caractéristiques de l'environnement scolaire sont également associées aux difficultés de comportement telles que l'opposition. Parmi celles-ci, on retrouve des attitudes de l'enseignant telles que l'insensibilité aux besoins des élèves, des attentes inadéquates envers ces derniers, un manque d'uniformité dans les interventions, l'enseignement d'habiletés perçues comme inutiles par l'élève et l'utilisation de systèmes de renforcement non efficaces (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982; Hetherington & Martin 1986; Kauffman, 1997; Mayer, Nafpaktitis, Butterworth, & Hollingsworth, 1987; Poliquin-Verville & Royer, 1992). En ce sens, lorsqu'un enseignant conserve une attitude rigide qui ne tient pas compte des besoins individuels des élèves, les élèves aux comportements perturbateurs peuvent voir leurs problèmes s'aggraver. En effet, selon Mayer, Nafpaktitis, Butterworth & Hollingsworth (1987), plusieurs élèves développent du ressentiment, manifestent de l'hostilité, de la résistance passive ou commettent des actes de vandalisme quand ils évoluent dans une atmosphère répressive. De plus, lorsqu'un enseignant

entretient des préjugés défavorables envers les élèves aux comportements perturbateurs, ces idées peuvent être communiquées aux élèves. Or, ces derniers auront tendance à s'y conformer (Poliquin-Verville & Royer, 1992). À l'inverse, lorsqu'un enseignant place les élèves ayant des difficultés de comportement devant des tâches trop ardues, ces élèves peuvent avoir tendance à devenir agressifs ou à adopter des conduites immatures (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982). Une gestion de classe incohérente entretient également les troubles du comportement. Lorsque les élèves ne peuvent prédire la réponse des adultes à leurs comportements, ils sont en effet plus susceptibles de devenir troublés et incapables de choisir des comportements appropriés (Hetherington & Martin, 1986). Il en est de même lorsque les élèves ne perçoivent pas l'utilité de ce qu'on leur enseigne. Ils deviennent ainsi fortement tentés de se retirer ou de déranger les activités de la classe (Poliquin-Verville & Royer, 1992). Finalement, certaines recherches démontrent que les systèmes de renforcement employés en classe sont peu efficaces. Les élèves aux comportements perturbateurs reçoivent beaucoup d'attention, que ce soit par le biais de critiques ou de punitions, ce qui contribue à renforcer leurs comportements inappropriés. À l'inverse, les comportements souhaitables sont souvent peu remarqués par les enseignants (Kauffman, 1997).

**Conséquences des Problèmes de Comportements tels que l'Opposition**

De façon générale, les individus qui manifestent des problèmes de comportement dès l'enfance font face à de multiples conséquences néfastes à l'adolescence. En premier lieu, ces jeunes commettent davantage d'agressions physiques et d'actes délinquants (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva, & Stanton 1996). Cette situation s'explique par le fait que les élèves aux comportements perturbateurs ont tendance à fréquenter des jeunes qui leurs ressemblent, parce qu'ils sont attirés les uns envers les autres, mais également parce qu'ils sont rejetés par leurs pairs

prosociaux (Lahey, Waldman, & McBurnett, 1999). Or, à l'adolescence, ces affiliations négatives renforcent et maintiennent les tendances à la délinquance des élèves qui présentent des problèmes de comportement (Fergusson & Horwood, 1996). En second lieu, ces élèves utilisent généralement davantage de drogue et d'alcool que leurs pairs (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992). Vers la fin de l'adolescence, 50% des élèves ayant des comportements oppositionnels au primaire ont une consommation problématique d'alcool et de drogues (Marcotte, 2007). Encore une fois, la présence de telles attitudes semble être reliée à la fréquentation de pairs déviants (Fergusson & Horwood, 1996). Finalement, les élèves en difficultés de comportement performent aussi moins bien à l'école (Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood 1996; Kratzer & Hodgins, 1999). Une recherche ayant suivi durant six ans des enfants démontrant des problèmes d'opposition au primaire révèle d'ailleurs à quel point ces difficultés comportementales influencent le parcours scolaire des élèves (Déry et al., 2008). En effet, ceux-ci voient en général leurs difficultés se maintenir et même augmenter au fil des années, et plus de la moitié se retrouvent éventuellement dans une classe spéciale.

Ultimement, la présence de problèmes comportementaux dès le primaire jumelée à tous les facteurs de risque qui y sont associés rendent les garçons et les filles aux comportements perturbateurs plus susceptibles d'abandonner l'école avant la complétion de leurs études secondaires (Fortin & Picard, 1999; Fortin, Royer, Potvin, Marcotte, & Yergeau, 2004; Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Moffit, Caspi, Harrington, & Milne, 2002). Selon certains auteurs, 26% des élèves issus de ce groupe décrochent avant d'avoir obtenu leur diplôme (Déry et al., 2008), et par la suite, seul 40% de ces décrocheurs occupent un emploi rémunéré (Marcotte, 2007). Globalement, le pronostic de ces élèves semble plutôt sombre comparativement à leurs pairs ne présentant aucun problème d'opposition.

Toutefois, les conséquences associées à l'opposition ne seraient pas les mêmes pour les garçons et pour les filles.

Il existe peu d'études portant spécifiquement sur les troubles de comportement chez les filles, qui différencient l'opposition d'autres types de conduites perturbatrices, car les filles ont davantage recours à l'agression indirecte plutôt qu'à la violence physique lorsqu'elles se comportent de façon inappropriée (Verlaan, Déry, Toupin, & Pauzé, 2005). Néanmoins, lorsque des troubles de comportement tels que l'opposition surviennent chez les filles dès l'enfance, ils sont eux aussi associés à plusieurs conséquences négatives à l'adolescence et à l'âge adulte. En effet, selon Marcotte (2007), l'accès de ces filles au niveau collégial devient ardu. Elles sont deux fois moins nombreuses que les garçons en difficulté de comportement à accéder au Cégep. De plus, lorsque ces filles s'inscrivent au Cégep, elles sont plus susceptibles d'avoir des conduites antisociales telles que l'agression physique, le vandalisme et la consommation de psychotropes. Finalement, toujours selon cette auteure, les jeunes filles présentant des difficultés de comportement au primaire et au secondaire sont également plus à risque de vivre des grossesses précoces.

**L'engagement Scolaire des Élèves aux Comportements Perturbateurs**

Les conséquences du décrochage scolaire pour les élèves ainsi que pour la société dans son ensemble sont inquiétantes, tant au point de vue économique qu'au point de vue social. En effet, parmi les adultes de 18 à 20 ans, les individus qui n'obtiennent pas leur diplôme d'études secondaires présentent le plus haut taux de chômage, soit 22,5% (Enquête auprès des Jeunes En Transition (EJET) (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). De plus, les individus qui ne complètent pas l'école secondaire possèdent un revenu inférieur à celui des diplômés, ils sont en plus mauvaise

santé, meurent plus jeunes et bénéficient davantage de l'aide sociale et de l'assurance-emploi (Belfield & Levine, 2007; Garnier, Stein, & Jacobs, 1997; Ménard, 2009). Finalement, les décrocheurs commettent davantage d'actes délinquants et sont incarcérés en plus grand nombre (Belfield & Levine, 2007).

Afin de prévenir le décrochage scolaire ainsi que les conséquences individuelles et sociétales néfastes qui y sont associées, plusieurs chercheurs se sont intéressés aux facteurs pouvant diminuer les probabilités qu'un élève quitte l'école avant la complétion de ses études secondaires (Fortin et al., 2004; Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Or, l'engagement scolaire se positionne de plus en plus comme l'un des facteurs de protection pouvant contribuer à réduire le risque de décrochage (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbini, 2001; Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wylie & Hodgen, 2011). En effet, selon diverses théories, le décrochage scolaire n'est pas un choix fait de façon irréfléchie et soudaine, mais il résulte plutôt d'un processus de désengagement à long terme, qui débute souvent dès l'école primaire (Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 1995; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).

Les deux modèles conceptuels de Finn (1989) sont particulièrement utiles pout comprendre ce processus. Selon le modèle de « participation-identification », la plupart des élèves entament leur parcours scolaire avec enthousiasme et en désirant participer à la vie active de leur école et de leur classe (Finn, 1989). Au tout début, ces élèves sont encouragés par leurs parents et les activités de la classe exercent sur eux un certain attrait. Au fur et à mesure que le temps avance, les élèves peuvent mesurer l'impact de leur implication envers les tâches scolaires et ils rencontrent également des opportunités de succès, ce qui accroît leur sentiment d'appartenance

envers l'école ainsi que leur participation. Bien que bon nombre d'élèves suivent cette trajectoire, selon ce modèle, ceux qui empruntent d'autres avenues présentent des risques accrus de désengagement et ultimement, s'avèrent plus à risque de décrocher. Les élèves présentant des comportements perturbateurs font partie de ce groupe. En effet, même s'ils entrent à l'école avec les mêmes désirs que les autres, ces élèves ont tendance à vivre du rejet de la part de leurs enseignants et à recevoir davantage de sanctions que leurs pairs (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004). Ils ont également moins d'occasions de vivre des succès à cause de leurs comportements dérangeants et non centrés sur la tâche (Junod, DuPaul, Jitendra, Volpe, & Cleary, 2006). En conséquence, les élèves aux comportements perturbateurs voient leur participation ainsi que leur enthousiasme envers l'école diminuer au fil de leur parcours scolaire, ce qui accroît leur risque de décrocher.

Afin d'expliquer le désengagement des élèves, Finn (1989) propose également un autre modèle, celui de la « frustration-estime de soi », qui identifie des relations bidirectionnelles entre l'échec scolaire et la présence de comportements perturbateurs. Ce modèle suggère que l'antécédent principal du désengagement est l'échec scolaire, puisqu'il altère l'estime de soi des élèves, et les amène à manifester des comportements inappropriés. En retour, ces comportements inappropriés nuisent à la performance scolaire des élèves ainsi qu'à leur estime de soi, ce qui augmente la fréquence de leurs comportements inadéquats. Éventuellement, les élèves pris dans un tel cercle vicieux quittent l'école ou en sont renvoyés en raison de leurs problèmes disciplinaires. Bien qu'il cible l'ensemble des élèves, ce modèle s'avère fort pertinent pour décrire la trajectoire des élèves aux comportements perturbateurs qui, dans bien des cas, ont tendance à vivre davantage d'échecs que leurs pairs.

## But de l'Étude

Tel qu'exposé précédemment, les élèves oppositionnels sont à risque de subir plusieurs conséquences négatives, dont un désengagement précoce envers l'école. Néanmoins, l'engagement scolaire de ces élèves ne suit pas toujours la même trajectoire. Ainsi, certaines caractéristiques individuelles ou environnementales doivent influer sur cet aspect de leur vécu scolaire. Dans le but de mieux comprendre les facteurs qui contribuent à l'engagement et au désengagement des élèves oppositionnels, la présente étude vise à déterminer de quelle manière la qualité de la relation liant les élèves à leur enseignant au primaire peut modérer l'effet des comportements oppositionnels sur l'engagement. La présente étude fournira de nouvelles informations quant au rôle de la relation maître-élève en ce qui a trait à l'évolution de l'engagement scolaire des élèves oppositionnels. Ces nouvelles connaissances contribueront à la conception de modèles théoriques expliquant les trajectoires développementales de l'engagement scolaire. Éventuellement, ces résultats permettront également de créer des programmes de prévention visant le désengagement des élèves à risque.

Chapitre 2

Article de recherche

Oppositional behaviors and School Engagement:

the Moderating Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship

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**Oppositional behaviors and School Engagement :**

**the Moderating Role of the Student-Teacher Relationship**

School drop out rates vary between countries. In the province of Quebec between 2006 and 2009, 11.7% of youth between the ages of 20 to 24 years old had no high school diploma. This proportion is higher than the national average, which stands at 9.2% (Statistics Canada, 2009). Research shows that Canada's high school drop out rate is significantly lower than that of the United States, Germany and France. However, we still trail eight European countries, including Finland, the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic (de Broucker, 2005). Those statistics are alarming considering that youths who drop out of high school usually face harsher living conditions than their graduating peers. They earn inferior salaries, are more likely to be unemployed or on welfare, and they constitute the majority of the prison population (Hartnagel & Krahn, 1989; *Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaire*, 2009). Individuals who do not complete high school are also more prone to depression, and tend to die younger than their counterparts (*Groupe d'action sur la persévérance et la réussite scolaire*, 2009). Fortunately, some factors are known to decrease students' risks of dropping out.

A consensus exists in the educational literature regarding the importance of student engagement to promote school perseverance and success. Engaged students tend to obtain higher grades, perform better on tests, and are less likely to drop out than their disengaged peers (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbini, 2001; Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Wylie & Hodgen, 2011). Unfortunately, research shows that for many students, investment in academic learning and in-school activities decreases with time (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008). Furthermore, although students' disengagement frequently occurs after they

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transition to high school, that decline can start as early as elementary school (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). This is even truer for youths who present with behavioral or learning difficulties, such as oppositional students. As highlighted in numerous studies, along with their behavioral difficulties, these students often show early signs of disengagement. They tend to display less interest for school activities, are less invested in school life, and miss school more frequently than their non-oppositional peers (Baker, 2006; Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). However, that link between oppositional behaviors and disengagement could very well be indirect. It could vary for boys and girls, and be modulated by elements of the classroom environment such as the relationships students share with their teacher.

Drawing on this hypothesis, the current study has three objectives. First, it attempts to examine the association between the degree of students' oppositional behaviors, and their level of behavioral and emotional engagement in French Language Arts. We chose to focus our investigation on this particular domain because boys and girls' level of engagement in literacy tends to vary (Chouinard, Karsenti, & Roy, 2007; Jacobs, Lanza, Osgood, Eccles, & Wigfield, 2002; Marks, 2000). Furthermore, since French Language Arts skills are central to learning in most academic subject matters, knowing what contributes to students' engagement in this academic domain will benefit every other classroom activity. The second objective of this study is to determine whether the level of closeness or conflict reported in the relationships linking students to their teacher can respectively act as protective or aggravating factors regarding oppositional students' behavioral and emotional engagement. Finally, the current study tries to identify whether the role played by closeness or conflict in the teacher-student relationship remains the same for male and female students.

Longitudinal studies of student engagement are scarce (Wylie & Hodgen, 2012). The current study will yield new information about the influence of teachers regarding the school engagement of boys and girls presenting oppositional behaviors. This newly acquired knowledge will contribute to theoretical models that try to explain the diverse developmental trajectories of student engagement and eventually, it will allow the creation of prevention programs targeting the disengagement of at-risk students.

## School Engagement

### Defining School Engagement

Recently, much of the literature on school engagement has tried to define each specific type of school engagement, namely the behavioral, cognitive and emotional components (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Archambault & Vandenbossche-Makombo, submitted; Marks, 2000; Rose-Krasnor, 2009). However, the study of school engagement suffers from a lack of consensus concerning not only the number of subtypes, but also regarding the definition of the concept itself. Reschly and Christenson (2012) refer to this problem using the terms "jingle" and "jangle". According to them, the name "school engagement" is utilized to name different concepts (jingle), while different appellations are used to designate the construct of school engagement (jangle). Furthermore, there remains some confusion regarding the difference between school engagement and motivation. Some researchers define school engagement as "students' psychological investment in and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). Following that conceptualization, school engagement constitutes an internal state that is not necessarily observable and must be deduced from students' level of participation, interest

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and/or enthusiasm. In contrast, the concept of motivation corresponds to "students' desire to succeed in academic work" (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992). Hence, a student can be motivated, without being engaged in academic tasks. This could be the case for students with externalized behavior problems who want to perform in school, but who do not possess the skills needed to participate properly in class or to become interested in the subject at-hand.

Despite the lack of uniformity that hinders school engagement definitions, certain models attempting to conceptualize that construct have become more prominent. At first, Finn (1989) suggested that school engagement had a behavioral and an emotional component: participation and identification. The term participation refers to students' response to the school requirements, their initiative, their involvement in extracurricular activities, and their contribution to the governance of the school. The identification component corresponds to students' sense of belonging to their school, and the extent to which they value success in school-related goals. Expanding on Finn's dichotomous model, Fredricks et al. (2004) defined engagement as students' active investment in their learning. This concept incorporates students' behaviors and attitudes toward school, as well as their involvement in it. In their review of the literature, Fredricks and her colleagues (2004), identified three dimensions of engagement: behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement. Their behavioral and emotional types resemble Finn's (1989). Indeed, the behavioral dimension corresponds to students' involvement in academic and social aspects of school, such as completing homework and participating in classroom or extracurricular activities. It also encompasses students' conformity to the demands of the classroom, which is similar to Finn's (1989) conceptualization. The emotional component includes students' affective reactions towards their school experience, or whether they enjoy or dislike academic activities. It includes students' feelings of belonging or identification with school, which is once again similar to Finn's

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(1989) conceptualization, but adds a new aspect that has to do with students' relationships with teachers. Lastly, cognitive engagement corresponds to the use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. It also comprises students' willingness to try hard and expand effort in order to understand complex academic tasks.

Although Fredricks et al. (2004) three-part typology is increasingly recognized, other recent definitions also exist in the scientific literature. For example, Appleton and his colleagues (2006, 2008) introduced a fourth component, academic engagement, which encompasses the time students spend on task, their homework completion, and the actual number of credits they earn. Moreover, following in Finn's footsteps, Martin (2007) maintained a bi-dimensional conceptualization of school engagement, which he described as " students' energy and drive to learn, work effectively, and achieve to their potential at school, and the behaviors that follow from this energy and drive ". However, Martin (2007) innovated by giving more importance to cognitive engagement. According to his model, adaptive cognitive dimensions correspond to students' valuing of school, mastery orientation and self-efficacy, while adaptive behavioral dimensions include persistence, planning and task management. In contrast, maladaptive cognitive dimensions refer to avoidance of failure and uncertain control, while maladaptive behavioral dimensions comprise disengagement and self-handicapping strategies. More recently, other researchers used a motivational conceptualization of engagement by incorporating the negative pole of school engagement, which they labelled disaffection (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008; Skinner, Kinderman & Furrer, 2009). In that model, behavioral engagement includes students' effort, attention, and persistence during learning activities, while emotional engagement manifests itself through students' enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment during those activities (Skinner et al., 2008). Disaffection means more than the absence of

engagement. It refers to the "occurrence of behaviors and emotions that reflect maladaptive motivational states" (Skinner et al., 2008). Hence, the behavioral component of disaffection comprises passivity and withdrawal from participation in learning activities. The emotional aspect of disaffection corresponds to students' boredom, anxiety and frustration in the classroom (Skinner et al., 2008).

All types of school engagement are relevant to the research on drop out prevention. However, in line with many studies that only focused on the behavioral and emotional components (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Finn, 1993; Finn & Rock, 1997; Libbey, 2004), the current study will only examine these two dimensions of engagement. Behavioral and emotional engagement seem to pertain to the study of oppositional students because those dimensions have been consistently linked to externalized behavior problems, either as predictors or outcomes of such difficulties (Baker, 2008; Downer, Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2007; Finn & Rock, 1997; Gest, Welsh & Domitrovich, 2005; Junod, Dupaul, Jitendra, Volpe & Cleary, 2006). However, the association between cognitive engagement and externalized behavior problems remains less solid.

**Developmental Trajectory of School Engagement**

Numerous authors suggest that students' level of behavioral and emotional engagement toward school is not immutable (Eccles et al., 1993; Fredricks, & Eccles, 2002; Jacobs et al., 2002; Marks, 2000; Wylie & Hodgen, 2007). Students' conformity to classroom rules, their participation in academic activities, and their enthusiasm for the latter are rather part of a developmental trajectory. Generally, school engagement weakens as grade level increases (Marks, 2000). More precisely, it starts to diminish as early as the 3rd grade (Fredricks, & Eccles,

2002), through the end of high school (Jacobs et al., 2002; Janosz et al., 2008; Martin, 2003). Furthermore, school engagement tends to decrease within each school year (Skinner et al. 2008). Nevertheless, all students do not necessarily follow one unique path that leads to disengagement (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani 2009; Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 2000). According to Cicchetti and Rogosch (1996), these multiple pathways could be explained by the principle of equifinality. Following the latter, individual differences in the nature and course of academic experience could lead to the same disengagement outcome.

Research has identified certain environmental factors or individual characteristics that may influence the temporal evolution of student engagement: family socio-economic status, parents' academic support, students' history of academic achievement, and the type of classroom students attend can contribute or undermine student investment in school. More specifically, students who come from homes in difficult financial situations are more likely to show less engagement (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Felner et al., 1995; Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992; Lee & Smith, 1993; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007; Wylie & Hodgen, 2007). Furthermore, students whose parents are more involved in their schooling experience and those who get better results in school are typically more engaged than their peers (Archambault et al., 2009; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Marks, 2000; Royer, Moisan, Saint-Laurent & Giasson, 1993). Finally, students who attend special education classrooms usually demonstrate lower levels of engagement than their peers from regular classrooms (Archambault et al., 2009; Viau, 2000; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Among the predictors of student engagement, numerous studies also point out the importance of gender. In general, research indicates that girls possess better levels of engagement toward academic activities than boys ((Finn, 1989; Finn & Cox, 1992; Jacobs et al., 2002; Lee & Smith, 1993; Marks, 2000; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007), and more specifically in academic domains such

as English or Liberal Arts. This might be explained by different factors, such as students' history of achievement. According to Ready, LoGerfo, Burkum, and Lee (2005), girls enter school with stronger literacy skills than boys, and this gap widens in early elementary years. As such, it might be easier for them to become interested in French activities because they experience success in that academic domain. Moreover, evidence suggests that curriculum activities and material, especially in literacy, tend to correspond to the learning preferences of girls rather than those of boys (Brozo, 2002; Connell, 1996). The nature of languages arts activities could therefore directly contribute to girls' engagement and interest in those activities. Yet, beyond sex differences, the degree of opposition demonstrated by a student remains a significant element that might influence the temporal evolution of his engagement in school. Indeed, Marks (2000) asserts that students' degree of behavior problems is one of the strongest existing predictors of school engagement, over and above the contribution of students' past history of achievement, and family socio-economic status.

## Opposition

### Defining Opposition

According to the DSM-IV-TR's (APA, 2000), an oppositional child typically gets excessively angry and disregards authority. He also frequently refuses to conform to adults' requests, deliberately annoys others or blames others for his own mistakes. In addition, an oppositional child is often touchy or easily annoyed, angry and resentful to others, and frequently spiteful or vindictive. Such behaviors unfortunately tend to contribute to important academic and social difficulties in school (Déry et al., 2008; Fergusson, Lynskey, & Horwood 1996; Kratzer & Hodgins, 1999).

**Oppositional Behaviors and School Engagement**

Most of the work on the association between students' externalized behavior problems and academic outcomes, such as school engagement, examined hyperactivity or inattention (Junod, DuPaul, Jitendra, Volpe, & Cleary, 2006; DuPaul, Volpe, Jitendra, Lutz, Lorah, & Gruber, 2004). The remaining studies used a global score of externalized behavior problems, without distinguishing between aggression, antisocial behaviors, hyperactivity, inattention, or opposition (Baker, Clark, Maier, & Viger, 2008; Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Van Damme, & Maes, 2008). Yet, the disruptive behavior category as it exists in the DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) includes diverse types of behaviors that can be classified in two groups: a) aggression, antisocial behaviors, and opposition, as well as b) hyperactivity, inattention and impulsivity. Notwithstanding their comorbidity, these two groups remain conceptually and methodologically distinct and warrant separate studies (Hinshaw, 1992).

Despite the lack of studies on the specific link between oppositional behaviors and school engagement, research showed that in general, students who display disruptive behaviors are typically less behaviorally engaged in school than their peers (Downer, Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2007; Fortin & Picard, 1999; Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2005; Janosz, 2000). Considering that oppositional behaviors belong to the category of disruptive behavior disorders (APA, 2000), it is plausible that it might also be the case for students who display oppositional behaviors more specifically. Diverse theoretical elements point to that possibility. Indeed, Moffitt (1990) has underscored the consistent presence of deficits in executive or self-regulatory functions in youth who display disruptive behaviors, such as oppositional students. She also asserts that deficits in the area of executive functions alter, among other things, regulatory control over thought and behavior to facilitate goal-directed or intentional action, mental flexibility to meet task demands,

inappropriate-response inhibition, sequencing, attention and concentration. As a result of those insufficiencies, oppositional students display more maladaptive behaviors than their peers, and are also less often on-task (Junod et al., 2006). Furthermore, self-regulation deficiencies may result in difficulties concentrating on a task, persevering, adopting appropriate behaviors and inhibiting inappropriate ones, as well as adapting to new situations (Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Such attitudes could negatively impact students' conformity to the demands of the school environment, their implication in academic tasks, as well as their participation in school activities (DiPerna, Volpe, & Elliott, 2001; Junod et al., 2006), all of which are necessary to reach a satisfying level of behavioral engagement.

The non compliance, defiance and anger exhibited by oppositional students also prevent them from reaching academic success or building positive interactions in the school environment, all of which negatively impact their self-esteem and enthusiasm for school, and increase the severity of their disruptive behaviors (Finn, 1989; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; Junod, DuPaul, Jitendra, Volpe, & Cleary, 2006; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Such unpleasant experiences could contribute to the development of an aversion toward school, which might be illustrated by low levels of participation and conformity to classroom demands, as well as a lack of interest for academic activities.

Those negative patterns regarding oppositional students' investment in school activities might however vary for boys and girls. Indeed, despite the lack of empirical studies documenting it, some elements lead us to believe that oppositional girls probably display fewer adaptive behaviors during French activities and show less enthusiasm toward those activities compared to oppositional boys. First, a small number of girls demonstrate oppositional behaviors (Déry et al.,

2008).  It is possible that these girls end up experiencing more rejection and punishment than boys who go through the same difficulties, because teachers are less equipped to deal with their misbehavior.  As previously explained, such negative treatment is typically detrimental to students' participation in and interest toward classroom activities (Finn, 1989).  Second, oppositional girls face cumulative risk factors.  Research shows that girls' externalized difficulties are accompanied by internalized behavior problems, such as depression, twice as frequently as boys' (Déry et al., 2008).  It is easy to see how depressive symptoms might damage girls' engagement.  In short, lack of energy and self-esteem as well as restlessness, irritability and a depressed mood make it difficult to participate actively during French activities and show enthusiasm for that academic domain.  Finally, the rather high comorbidity between depression and opposition found for girls might be more harmful to school engagement than the co-occurrence of attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity (ADHD) typical of boys (Frick, 1998).  Indeed, depressive symptoms tend to go unnoticed, while hyperactive and impulsive behaviors are disruptive in a classroom environment.  Consequently, teachers might intervene less rapidly with oppositional girls and exacerbate their pre-existing disengagement.

## The Student-Teacher Relationship

### Conceptualizing the Student-Teacher Relationship

According to Pianta (2001), the student-teacher relationship can be conceptualized as an ensemble of three dimensions: closeness, conflict and dependency.  Closeness corresponds to the open communication, warmth, and affection found in the interactions between a student and his teacher.  A high degree of closeness suggests that the student uses his teacher as a source of support to face the demands of the school environment (Birch & Ladd, 1997).  The concept of

conflict relates to the antagonistic and disharmonious exchanges linking a student and his teacher. The presence of high levels of conflict indicates discordant interactions and a lack of an emotional bond between a student and his teacher (Mantzicopoulos, 2005). Finally, dependency refers to the possessive attitude and lack of autonomy of a student toward his teacher. High levels of dependency are frequently associated with negative feelings and attitudes toward the school environment (Birch, & Ladd, 1997). In the current study, only closeness and conflict will be examined in association with students' school engagement. This decision stems from the fact that these two dimensions are the main characteristics that make it possible to evaluate the quality of a student-teacher relationship (Pianta, 2001).

**The Student-Teacher Relationship and School Engagement**

According to recent research, the close relationship a student shares with his teacher can foster his engagement toward school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Pianta, 1999). Hence, such a relationship is associated with participation in class and interest toward school activities (Birch & Ladd, 1997). In contrast, a student-teacher relationship characterized by conflict might cause a decrease in a student's school engagement, and is linked to unfavourable attitudes toward school, such as avoidance and disengagement in the classroom (Baker, Grant & Morloch, 2008).

The positive link that exists between warm student-teacher relationships and school engagement can be explained in various ways. First, according to attachment theory, children use their relationships with significant adults in order to organize their experiences (Bowlby, 1982). When adults provide emotional support and a predictable, coherent, balanced, and secure environment, children become able to rely on themselves and take risks, because they know that, whatever happens, an adult will be there to help (Bowlby, 1982). This mechanism has been

observed in parent-child relationships, but it applies to student-teacher interactions as well (Howes & Hamilton, 1992; Wentzel, 2002). Hence, students who share a close relationship with their teachers benefit from the emotional security necessary to explore the school environment and engage in learning activities (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Second, positive interactions might be more pleasurable for teachers and encourage them to devote more time to students with whom they share affectionate relationships. As research shows, it is easier to transmit to students the competencies necessary to actively participate in class, conform to the demands of the school environment, and enjoy academic activities through frequent contacts (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Pianta, 1999).

Some hypotheses have also been proposed to explain the association between student-teacher relationships categorized by antagonistic exchanges and school engagement. A student-teacher relationship where conflict is present leads to discordant and unpleasant interactions for everyone who is involved (Pianta, 2001). For example, a teacher who struggles with a resisting or defiant student might be tempted to control him by using punitive methods, such as class exclusion (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). Yet, if he spends time putting in place such strategies, a teacher will possess fewer resources to promote a positive environment for the student who has difficulties, and may neglect to pass on to him the competencies that favour school engagement. Another explanation stipulates that disharmonious exchanges constitute stress factors for students. Indeed, such interactions create negative emotions such as anger, resentment and anxiety in students (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Ultimately, such emotions might alter students' enjoyment of learning activities as well as their participation in the classroom, which could be harmful to their school engagement.

Finally, research suggests that the influence of the student-teacher relationship on student engagement could very well vary as a function of students' sex.  On the one hand, sharing an emotional bond with a teacher might be more beneficial for girls' engagement than it is for boys'.  As pointed out by Thorne (1992), in mixed classrooms, if a teacher is reassuring, perceived as a secure base, and if channels of communication are open between him and his female students, their involvement and participation are encouraged to a greater degree.  The same might not be true for boys who are less affected by social desirability and less eager to please their teacher.  On the other hand, student-teacher conflict might be more detrimental to boys' investment in academic activities than it is to girls', especially in the domain of French Language Arts.  Because literacy activities are more in line with girls' interests and abilities (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Brozo, 2002; Connell, 1996), it might be easier for girls to take part in and appreciate those activities, even if they share antagonistic exchanges with their teacher (Gagnon, 1999).  Conversely, boys' engagement in Languages Arts might be more affected by discordant interactions with their teacher, because their interest and academic achievement in this domain is initially lower than girls'.  As a result, it could be more easily influenced by environmental factors such as the student-teacher relationship.

**Moderating Effect of the Student-Teacher Relationship**

Students who are at-risk of dropping out attach great importance to the quality of their relationship with teachers (Galand, Macquet & Philippot, 2000).  Certain studies even indicate that the negative association between externalized behavior problems and school engagement might be modulated by student-teacher relationship quality (Baker, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).  However, the potentially moderating effect of teacher-student interactions on the engagement of oppositional students specifically has never been studied.  Still, numerous findings suggest that a

close relationship between an oppositional student and his teacher could contribute to his school engagement, while a relationship characterized by conflict could yield the opposite effect. Furthermore, this link might vary according to students' sex, but the direction of this association remains hard to establish.

On the one hand, authors showed that interactions with teachers in which personal information and positive feelings are communicated have a "pacifying" role on students who display disruptive behaviors such as opposition (Galand, Philippot & Frenay, 2006). By altering their vulnerabilities and increasing their resiliency (Baker, 2006; Garmezy, 1984; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Rutter, 1979), such interactions may possibly weaken the disengagement caused by students' externalized behavioral difficulties, favour their conformity to classroom rules, and promote their active involvement in learning. But positive student-teacher interactions do not only increase students' conformity to school demands. They also constitute an efficient way to improve students' self-regulation capacities. When they are not arguing with students but rather communicating openly, teachers have more opportunities to serve as models of good behavior. Warm relationships also make it easier for teachers to give students feedback about different situations, and use techniques such as explicit teaching (Baker, 2008; Pianta, 1997a). Since oppositional students are lacking in self-regulation (Hinshaw, 1992; Moffitt, 1990), a close student-teacher relationship might benefit them to a greater extent than it does students who do not possess those difficulties. Indeed, by increasing their self-regulating abilities, students with oppositional behaviors will adopt appropriate behaviors and inhibit inappropriate ones, and adapt to new situations more easily. Those abilities favour behavioral engagement.

By means of that same affectionate bond, teachers may also favor oppositional students' emotional engagement. Indeed, students generally internalize socially valued goals and objectives

that favour their interest toward school activities through positive interactions with their teachers (Deci, 1992; Wentzel, 1998).  Oppositional students, and especially boys, typically hold a negative outlook on school, and their interest for school activities is lower than that of their peers' because they are more frequently punished (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004).   Hence, situations that are conducive to the improvement of their emotional engagement, such as sharing an affectionate bond with their teacher, might make them more sensitive to the regulations, feedbacks, and demands of the school environment (Baker, 2008) and might possibly be more beneficial for them than they are for their colleagues.

On the other hand, a student-teacher relationship where struggles are frequent is associated with weaker school engagement among students who possess externalized behavior problems such as opposition, because it tends to exacerbate the disengagement caused by those behavior problems (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).  Indeed, discordant interactions diminish students' access to the educational and social resources offered in the classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).  Evidently, when a teacher spends a lot of time struggling with a student, he possesses less time and energy to put that student in contact with tools that may be beneficial for him.  Due to their self-regulation deficiencies, oppositional students greatly need to learn the strategies necessary to become involved in their learning, take part in school activities, and conform to rules, all of which would improve their behavioral engagement.  In sum, those students are more penalized than their peers when conflict with their teacher limits their access to such resources.

Conflict in the student-teacher relationship is also associated with a gradual diminution of displays of prosocial behaviors among students (Birch & Ladd, 1998).  If students demonstrate less positive behaviors, it will certainly affect their ability to form and maintain positive relationships with others over time.  Ultimately, lack of rapport with one's teacher or peers

compromises a student's positive outlook on school, his sense of belonging to it, as well as his interest toward school activities (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; Ladd, 1990). Oppositional students, and more specifically boys, might be more vulnerable to conflict with their teachers, because it could alter their already complex social relationships, and intensify the rejection they experience, hence further damaging their interest for academic activities (Baker, Grant & Morloch, 2008; Cole, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

## Objectives and Research Hypotheses

Extending previous work on the factors that impact students' school engagement, the current study examines how the student-teacher relationship might influence the behavioral and emotional engagement of students who display oppositional behaviors. This study will first attempt to determine whether the degree of students' oppositional behaviors in elementary school at the start of the school year (T1) predicts their level of behavioral and emotional engagement in French Language Arts at the end of the school year (T2). Then, it will try to verify whether the level of closeness or conflict found in the student-teacher relationship amplifies or downplays the association between students' degree of oppositional behaviors and their behavioral and emotional engagement in French Language Arts. Finally, it will attempt to examine if the effect of the student-teacher relationship on students' behavioral and emotional engagement differs according to students' sex.

As illustrated in the research model (see Figure 1), it is first hypothesized that students who display higher degrees of oppositional behaviors at T1 will possess lower levels of behavioral and emotional engagement toward French Language Arts at T2, than their peers with less oppositional behaviors. Second, we expect that students who share a close relationship with their

teacher will be more engaged both behaviorally and emotionally at T2, than their peers who share a less affectionate bond with their teachers, while the opposite will be true for students who experience much conflict with their teacher. Next, we hypothesize that being a girl will be associated with higher behavioral and emotional engagement at T2 than being a boy. It is also hypothesized that the association between students' degree of oppositional behaviors at T1 and their level of behavioral and emotional engagement in French Language Arts at T2 will be weaker for students who share a very affectionate bond with their teacher; while the association between the independent and dependent variables will be stronger for students whose interactions with teacher are disharmonious. Finally, we expect oppositional girls to be less engaged both behaviorally and emotionally at T2 than oppositional boys.

**Methods**

**Sample**

Data from the current study comes from a three-year longitudinal research project that was established in partnership with a School Board of the Montérégie region, in the province of Quebec (Canada). That specific School Board was selected because of the high drop out rate of its students. Indeed, in 2010, 24.9% of the students in that School Board, among which 31.9% males and 18.7% females, did not complete high school (MELS, 2011). Our convenience sample comprised seven elementary schools.

For the current study, we used the data of 385 elementary students (54.8% males) who attended third and fourth grade classrooms as well as special education classrooms. The mean age of these students during the first year of the project was 8.97 years. Special education students represented 7.3% of the sample and regular students were well distributed across grades: 47.3% in

3rd grade, 45.5% in 4th grade.  The 28 participating teachers (17.3% male) were quite experienced in terms of number of years teaching, with the majority of the sample having taught for more than 15 years (56.8%), and only 4.9% being in their first year of teaching.

**Design and procedures**

The results of the current study come from the first year of data collection.  The recruitment of students occurred at the beginning of the school year.  At that point, each teacher distributed consent forms to their students' parents.  Only students with active parental permission were included in the study.  This procedure yielded a participation rate higher than 90%.  Participating teachers also provided signed informed consent.

The longitudinal design of the current study includes two time points: November 2009 (T1) and April 2010 (T2).  At T1, participating students completed a computerized questionnaire composed of numerous validated instruments.  This questionnaire provided information about the academic and social experiences of students since the beginning of the school year.  Trained research assistants managed the completion of the questionnaires during 75-minutes sessions.  During these sessions, students selected answers to questions that were read aloud by one research assistant, while another research assistant monitored students' understanding, and answered their questions.  Teachers completed their own questionnaires at the same time and were absent during these sessions.  Teachers' questionnaires comprised items about their experiences as teachers, and about the learning habits as well as the behaviors of their students.  When multiple teachers taught a student, the one who was more frequently in contact with the student provided the information.  In this sample, this only occurred for one group of students.  In April 2010 (T2), participating students and their teachers went through the same process.

**Measures**

**Dependent variable (T2).**

*School engagement.* Students described their level of engagement toward French activities using the Échelle des Dimensions de l'Engagement Scolaire (ÉDES) (Archambault & Vandenbossche-Makombo, submitted). This self-report instrument includes two subscales: the first one measures behavioral engagement and the other one evaluates emotional engagement.

The behavioral engagement subscale ($\alpha = 0.73$) comprises three items (e.g., " I listen carefully to my teachers' explications during French activities "). The emotional engagement subscale ($\alpha = 0.76$) is made of three items (e.g., "Reading and writing tasks are interesting"). The items in both subscales were answered using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Not at all* (1) to *A lot* (5). For each student, a mean behavioral engagement and emotional engagement score was computed.

This instrument possesses good construct validity, internal consistency and test-retest fidelity. Furthermore, each dimension of the ÉDES makes possible the prediction of achievement in French and mathematics.

**Independent variables (T1).**

*Oppositional behaviors.* Students' oppositional behaviors were assessed with the opposition scale of the French version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which has been validated (Goodman, 1997). This scale includes five items (e.g., "This child is generally obedient, does what adults request"). Using a sample of 403 American children aged from 4 to 16 years, Goodman (1997) found a high concurrent validity ($r = 0.88$) between the SDQ and the Rutter

(Rutter, 1967), which taps four dimensions of problem behaviors: total deviance, conduct problems, emotional symptoms, and hyperactivity (Rutter, 1967).

For the current study, one item was taken out (e.g., "This child steals from home, school or elsewhere"), because it did not match the DSM-IV-TR's (2000) definition of opposition that is used in this study. Teachers answered this item positively for only 0.6% of the students. Teachers completed the remaining four items ($\alpha = 0.80$) using a 3-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Not True* (0) to *Certainly True* (2). The opposition variable was dichotomized, because its scores were not distributed normally (0 = no oppositional behaviors; 1 = oppositional behaviors). Students who received scores of zero on all the items were deemed non oppositional, while students who were given a score superior to zero on at least one item were placed in the oppositional category.

***Student-teacher relationship quality.*** Students reported on the quality of their relationship with their teacher using the French adaptation of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, 2001). This adaptation validated in the Quebec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD, 2008-1012) includes two subscales: closeness and conflict. Students answered each item using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from Definitely does not apply (1) to Definitely applies (5). For each student, a mean closeness and conflict score was computed.

The closeness subscale evaluates the degree of affection and open communication present in the student-teacher relationship and comprises four items (e.g., "I share a warm and friendly relationship with my teacher"). A high score on the closeness subscale indicates a great degree of warmth in the student-teacher relationship. This subscale's possessed good internal consistency in the current study ($\alpha = 0.78$).

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The conflict subscale yields a measure of the degree of discordant or antagonistic interactions found in the student-teacher relationship and includes four items (e.g., "I am often in conflict with my teacher"). A high score on this subscale denotes a great degree of conflict in the student-teacher relationship. In this study, the internal consistency of this subscale was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.76$).

**Control variables (T1).** As mentioned before, numerous individual and environmental factors are known to be associated with students' school engagement. Therefore, those factors were included in the analyses as control variables.

*School engagement at the beginning of the school year.* The initial level of students' behavioral and emotional engagement was measured with the same subscales than the ones used to evaluate the dependent variable (Archambault & Vandenbossche, submitted). The internal consistency of each subscale was also satisfactory for this time-point ($\alpha = 0.81$ for behavioral engagement; $\alpha = 0.77$ for emotional engagement).

*Socio-economic status.* The socio-economic status of the students' families was determined by assessing their neighbourhood poverty. The dissemination areas (DA) of the 2006 Canadian Census were used to approximate the neighbourhood environment. DAs are geographic units that have a population ranging between 400 and 700 individuals (Puderer, 2001). As such, they constitute a convenient geographic unit that has been utilized in numerous neighbourhood studies as a good indicator of individuals' socio-economic background (Dupéré, Leventhal, & Lacourse, 2009; Kohen, Gunn, Leventhal, & Hertzman, 2002). In the current study, the mean income of families living in each DA, as well as the proportion of adults without a diploma were used as indicators of the students' socio-economic status.

*Parental support.*  Teachers used the parental support scale to report on the academic support provided by their students' parents (e.g., "To my knowledge, I could count on the collaboration of this student's parents if he/she experienced difficulties at school") (Archambault, & Vandenbossche, 2010).  That scale comprises three items which teachers completed with a three-point Likert-type scale ranging from Not true  (1) to Very true (3).  The internal consistency of this scale was satisfactory in the current study ($\alpha = 0.83$).

*Academic achievement.*  Information regarding students' achievement in French language arts and mathematics was collected using two items (e.g., "How would you rate this student's achievement in French?").  Teachers answered both items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from Markedly under the average of same-age students (1) to Markedly above the average of same-age students (5).  A global score of academic achievement was generated by computing the average of both items.

*Classroom type.*  Students first identified their grade level by selecting one of the five following choices: regular 3rd grade classroom (1), regular 4th grade classroom (2), regular 5th grade classroom (3), regular 6th grade classroom (4) or special education mixed levels classroom (5).  Based on these answers, we next computed a binary categorical variable identifying classroom type: third and fourth grade regular classrooms (0) and special education mixed levels classrooms (1).

**Data analysis**

Preliminary analyses were first performed in order to describe the study variables according to their mean and standard deviation, and to examine the correlations between each of those variables.  Next, we used two hierarchical linear regressions to examine the effects of our

moderators, that is closeness and conflict in the student-teacher relationship, and students' sex, on our two outcome variables (i.e., behavioral and emotional engagement). In each case, regression assumptions were verified, and variables were introduced in five steps. In a first model, we included the control variables. A second model added the opposition variable. A third model incorporated the moderators. Two-way interactions between opposition and closeness, conflict or students' sex were entered in a fourth model. Finally, a three-way interaction between opposition, closeness or conflict, and students' sex was inserted in the last model. The interaction effects found significant were then decomposed using Aiken & West's (1991) method. We conducted an analysis for the low scores of the independent variable, closeness or conflict, and another one for its high scores. As suggested by Aiken & West (1991), the analysis of the low scores was conducted by adding one standard deviation to the scores of the variable, so that its mean, originally centered at 0, ends up one standard deviation lower. The opposite was done for the analysis of high scores. The effect of the moderator at different levels of the opposition or sex variable can then be examined, by observing the non-standardized regression coefficients for oppositional students or boys who experience high vs. low levels of closeness or conflict with their teacher.

**Missing data**

To replace the missing data, we conducted multiple imputation analysis with the NORM software. By drawing values from the conditional distribution of the variables, NORM imputes missing data using an iterative method based on the expectation-maximization algorithm. This algorithm depends on the available and valid observations from the original data set (for technical details, see Schafer, 1999). The descriptive statistics of each variable were examined before and

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after the imputation process in order to compare both set of data. There were no significant differences between the samples before and after the imputation.

## Results

### Correlations

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. Overall, an expected pattern of correlations was found. Students' degree of opposition was negatively related to students' behavioral and emotional engagement, while closeness in the student-teacher relationship was positively linked to both outcome variables. Teacher-student conflict was negatively associated with emotional engagement. Students' sex also correlated in the expected direction with their behavioral and emotional engagement. In other words, girls possess higher levels of both types of engagement. Yet, unexpectedly, academic support provided by parents, students' academic achievement, and classroom type correlated with students' behavioral engagement, but not with their emotional engagement. Moreover, none of the measures of socio-economic status were related to the two outcome variables.

### Results of Multiple Linear Regressions

**Relationship between students' degree of oppositional behaviors and their level of behavioral engagement.** As shown in Table 2, the first step of this model, which includes only the control variables, is significant ($F(4, 380) = 32.320$, $p < .001$) and accounts for 25.4% of the variance in behavioral engagement. This step indicates that students' behavioral engagement predicts their level of engagement at the end of the school year. Indeed, students who are more engaged behaviorally when the school year starts tend to display higher levels of behavioral engagement when it ends. However, the level of academic support offered by parents, the types of

classroom students attend, or students' academic achievement do not significantly predict their behavioral engagement.

In the second step, the opposition variable was added to the previous variables. That model remains significant ($F_{(5, 379)} = 28.883$, $p < .001$), and explains 27.6% of the change in behavioral engagement. This step reveals that students' degree of oppositional behaviors constitutes a good predictor of their behavioral engagement, beyond the influence of control variables. More precisely, students who show less oppositional behaviors when the school year starts tend to be more engaged behaviorally at the end of the school year, notwithstanding their level of behavioral engagement at the beginning of the year.

Thirdly, all three moderating variables were introduced to the model. When those variables are added, the model is significant ($F_{(8, 376)} = 21.259$, $p < .001$), and explains 31.1% of the change in students' behavioral engagement. Moreover, closeness significantly predicts students' behavioral engagement. In fact, students who share a warm relationship with their teachers when school starts possess higher levels of behavioral engagement at the end of the year than their peers who do not form such a relationship. This remains true despite students' level of behavioral engagement and degree of oppositional behaviors at the beginning of the school year. The degree of conflict found in the student-teacher relationship or students' sex do not constitute good predictors of students' behavioral engagement.

The first three interaction terms were included in the model in the fourth step. The model thus created is significant ($F_{(13, 371)} = 14.760$, $p < .001$) and accounts for 34.1% of the variance in students' behavioral engagement. The interaction term of opposition and conflict is significant. Hence, the amount of conflict in the student-teacher relationship moderates the link between

students' degree of oppositional behaviors, and their level of behavioral engagement. In short, as shown in Figure 2, for students who display oppositional behaviors, experiencing low versus high conflict with their teacher is associated with better levels of behavioral engagement ($\beta$ = -0.459, p < .01). In contrast, the behavioral engagement of students with no oppositional behaviors does not vary according to the degree of conflict present in the relationship with their teacher ($\beta$ = -0.103, p > .05). The interaction term of closeness and sex is also significant, though marginally, which indicates that the association between the level of closeness in the student-teacher relationship and students' behavioral engagement is influenced by students' sex (see Figure 3). Hence, when closeness in the teacher-student relationship is low, boys and girls' levels of behavioral engagement is similar ($\beta$ = 0.026, p > .05). However, when there is a high degree of closeness in the student-teacher relationship, girls are more engaged behaviorally than boys ($\beta$ = 0.243, p = .05).

The last step comprises yet two other interaction terms composed of three different variables: students' degree of oppositional behaviors, their sex, and the level of closeness in the student-teacher relationship, as well as students' degree of oppositional behaviors, their sex, and the level conflict in the student-teacher relationship. The model thus created is significant ($F(15, 369) = 12.940$, $p < .001$) and explains 34.5% of the change in behavioral engagement. Yet, none of those interaction terms are significant. However, in that final model, the interaction term of opposition and closeness, which was previously entered at step four, becomes significant. More specifically, as illustrated in Figure 4, for students with no oppositional behaviors, sharing a student-teacher relationship that is high, as opposed to low, in closeness is associated with better levels of behavioral engagement ($\beta$ = -0.455, $p < .01$). Unfortunately, this effect is not found amongst students who display oppositional behaviors ($\beta$ = -0.062, $p > .05$).

**Relationship between students' degree of oppositional behaviors and their level of emotional engagement.** As seen in Table 3, the first step of this model only comprises the control variables. The model is significant ($F(4, 380) = 48.941$, $p < .001$), and accounts for 34% of the variation in emotional engagement across the school year. It indicates that students' emotional engagement at the start of the school year predicts their level of emotional engagement when the year ends. More precisely, students who are initially more engaged emotionally tend to possess better levels of emotional engagement at the end of the year than their peers who started school with less emotional engagement. However, as in the first model, the other control variables do not significantly predict emotional engagement.

In the second step, the opposition variable is added to the model, which is significant ($F(5, 379) = 40.225$, $p < .001$), and explains 34.7% of the change in emotional engagement. However, students' degree of oppositional behaviors at the start of the year does not significantly predict their level of emotional engagement beyond the contribution of control variables.

In the third step, the model stays significant ($F(8, 376) = 27.834$, $p < .001$). The proportion of variance it explains corresponds to 36.8%. This model reveals that students' sex and conflict in the teacher-student relationship do significantly predict students' level of emotional engagement at the end of the school year, beyond the influence of other control variables, such as students' initial emotional engagement. Indeed, girls tend to be more engaged emotionally at the end of the year than boys, notwithstanding their level of emotional engagement when the school year begins. Furthermore, students who experience less conflict with their teachers are also more engaged emotionally at the end of the year. Finally, this model indicates that closeness or conflict in the student-teacher relationship do not significantly predict students' emotional engagement.

Once again, the first three interaction terms are added to the model at step four. The latter remains significant ($F(13, 371) = 17.958$, $p < .001$) and accounts for 38.6% of the change in emotional engagement. With that model, we see that student-teacher conflict and students' sex interact to predict students' emotional engagement (see Figure 5). In short, when conflict in the student-teacher relationship is low, boys and girls are equally engaged emotionally at the end of the school year (ß = 0.048, $p > .05$). Yet, when conflict is high, girls are significantly more engaged emotionally than boys (ß = 0.653, $p < .001$).

The last model created is still significant ($F(15, 369) = 15.756$, $p < .001$) and explains approximately 39% of the variance in emotional engagement. In that model, neither the interaction term of opposition, closeness and sex, nor the interaction term of opposition, conflict and sex are significant.

## Discussion

This study examined the degree to which the quality of the student-teacher relationship is associated with the behavioral and emotional engagement in French Language Arts, of oppositional and non oppositional students. We were also interested in whether the effect of the student-teacher relationship varied according to students' sex. Consistent with previous studies, our results confirm the detrimental effect of students' opposition on their level of school engagement. However, those outcomes vary depending on the type of engagement studied, students' sex, and the quality of the relationship they share with their teachers. The findings from this study echo the importance of the student-teacher relationship in promoting the school engagement of boys and girls, irrespective of any display of oppositional behaviors.

**Students' Degree of Opposition as a Predictor of their School Engagement**

Our first hypothesis postulated that students with oppositional behaviors would be less engaged both behaviorally and emotionally toward French activities than their peers, at the end of the year. Consistent with previous findings, our results show that engagement decreases within the school year, and that oppositional students are less engaged than their peers (Skinner et al. 2008). Yet, this only proved true for behavioral engagement.

The sharper within-year decrease of behavioral engagement for oppositional students could be explained in different ways. First, these students often present multiple risk factors limiting their opportunities to socialize and learn in the classroom environment. Combined with their disruptive behaviors, these additional difficulties may exacerbate their behavioral disengagement throughout the school year. As pointed out by Henricsson and Rydell (2004), students who display oppositional behaviors typically receive more sanctions than their peers, and they are subject to supplementary criticism and rejection from their teachers, which increases their misbehavior and eventually, may contribute to their disengagement.

The self-regulation difficulties typical of oppositional students (Hinshaw, 1992; Moffitt, 1990) might also explain why they show lower levels of behavioral engagement than their peers by the end of the school year. Such deficiencies are equated to difficulties concentrating on a task, adopting appropriate behaviors, and inhibiting inappropriate ones, as well as adjusting to new situations (Rothbart & Bates, 1998). Such attitudes certainly have a negative impact on students' compliance to the classroom rules, and on their active involvement in academic tasks (DiPerna, Volpe, & Elliott, 2001; Junod et al., 2006). Those difficulties might be particularly detrimental during French activities, because of the nature of these activities and the context where they take

place. Actually, in order to read and write, students need to be focused on the task-at-hand and stay put, which might prove difficult for students who cannot easily inhibit their inappropriate reactions. In contrast, other activities such as science lessons are more interactive and require less impulse control. It would be interesting to verify whether oppositional students show more engagement toward those tasks.

Surprisingly enough, students' oppositional behaviors did not predict their emotional engagement toward French activities, which contradicts part of our first hypothesis. Compared to their peers, students who display oppositional behaviors are not necessarily less interested by French activities or do not necessarily derive less pleasure from them, when students' initial level of emotional engagement is kept equal. This finding may be due to the temporal stability of emotional engagement across the school year (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). Indeed, students' enthusiasm for French activities tends to decrease slightly within the school year, but the inter-individual stability of this construct is rather high (Skinner et al., 2008). As a result, students, including those with oppositional behaviors, who begin the year with lower levels of emotional engagement still show less interest and enthusiasm toward French activities than their peers at the end of the year. However, this construct in and of itself is so stable within the school year that it might be scarcely influenced by individual factors such as students' degree of oppositional behaviors.

**Closeness and Conflict in the Student-teacher Relationship and the Prediction of Students'
School Engagement**

Our second hypothesis proposed that the degree of closeness in the student-teacher relationship would predict students' behavioral and emotional engagement. As such, students'

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participation and compliance to rules during French activities, as well as their interest for that academic subject would increase as a function of the warmth and open communication found in their interactions with teachers. Results partly confirm this hypothesis, since closeness does predict students' engagement, but only the behavioral dimension. This suggests that students do use their teachers as a secure base from which to explore the school environment and take part actively in French activities (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Furthermore, the emotional bond linking a student and his teacher seems to allow the transmission of competencies necessary for students to remain engaged behaviorally (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Pianta, 1999). Indeed, if a student is emotionally attached to his teacher, the latter is likely to serve as a model of desirable behavior. Furthermore, a teacher is certainly more able to employ explicit teaching or give a student feedback about his behavior when exchanges with that student are harmonious.

It is noteworthy to mention that the presence of open communication and warmth between a student and a teacher does not promote students' interest for French activities by the end of the school year. The stability of emotional engagement could again explain that result (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997). Indeed, a personal factor such as the presence of an emotional bond between a student and his teacher might not be enough to affect students' enthusiasm for French activities. Instead, other teacher characteristics such as their pedagogical strategies and the activities they propose might constitute better predictors of students' appreciation for French activities.

Our second hypothesis also suggested that conflict in the student-teacher relationship would be associated with lower levels of both behavioral and emotional engagement. Hence, the more discordant the interactions between a student and his teacher became, the less that student would participate in French activities and display an interest towards them. Again, that hypothesis

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is partly confirmed. Student-teacher conflict only predicts students' level of emotional engagement, but contrary to our expectations, conflict does not relate to students' behavioral engagement.

According to our findings, a student's enjoyment of French activities diminishes as struggles with his teacher increase. It would appear plausible that negative exchanges cause harmful emotions such as anger, resentment and anxiety in students (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Yet, it is more difficult to be interested in reading or writing when those activities are associated with negative feelings.

The lack of association between conflict and students' active participation and implication in classroom activities could be explained by the shared variance that exists between the oppositional students' initial level of behavioral engagement, and their tendency to argue with teachers. First, our results show that oppositional students reported lower behavioral engagement at the end of the year than their non-oppositional counterparts. At the same time, from the beginning of the school year, children's behaviors play an important role in shaping the relationship they will share with their teacher (Birch & Ladd, 1998). Indeed, students who start the school year with externalizing behavior problems are more likely to challenge their teachers, which makes it harder for the latter to build harmonious relationships with students, and contributes to students' disengagement. In sum, because oppositional students are more prone to be disengaged and to report conflicts with teachers, the shared variance that exist between these characteristics might hide the contribution of student-teacher conflict, which seems to have a lower long term impact on student participation and investment in school than early disengagement and opposition.

**The Moderating Effect of Closeness and Conflict on Students' School Engagement**

We also postulated that closeness in the student-teacher relationship would serve as a protective factor regarding the behavioral and emotional engagement of students with oppositional behaviors. Therefore, we expected that oppositional students who maintain pleasant interactions with their teachers would behave more appropriately and be more involved during literacy activities than other oppositional students who do not benefit from such relationships. They would also have greater appreciations for those tasks. Our findings prove otherwise.

Indeed, the engagement of students with oppositional behaviors remains the same, whether or not they built a strong emotional bond with their teacher. This conclusion is surprising, because research indicates that supportive classrooms improve the school adjustment of students who display externalizing behavior problems, such as opposition (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). There is a possibility that children with oppositional behaviors did not form secure relationships with their primary caregivers because of their challenging temperament. As a result, even if oppositional students manage to build a positive relationship with their teacher, they might have more trouble investing themselves in relationships with their teachers, and may be unable to use them as a source of support to explore the classroom environment, or to internalize the values transmitted by teachers regarding the pleasure brought about by French activities (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Bowlby, 1982). Furthermore, students with oppositional behaviors start the school year with numerous risk factors, such as their self-regulation deficiencies and the repeated failures they experience and as a result, they have an increased risk of disengagement. Consequently, sharing a positive relationship with their teacher might not be sufficient to boost their behavioral and emotional engagement.

On the contrary, our findings suggest that a high degree of warmth in the student-teacher

relationship is associated with better levels of behavioral engagement for non-oppositional students.  When non-oppositional students form a strong emotional bond with their teacher, they participate more actively and behave better during French activities  than when there is less affection expressed between them and their teacher.  Hence, those students might possess internal models of positive adult-child relationships, which allow them to take full advantage of the skills and values put forth by their teachers.  Indeed, when they invest themselves in relationships with their teacher, non-oppositional students are more likely to use them as models of acceptable behavior.

Our hypothesis regarding the aggravating effect of conflict on the engagement of oppositional students was also invalidated.  Specifically, we expected that oppositional students who had discordant exchanges with their teachers would conform even less to the demands of the classroom, maintain a lower level of participation during French activities, and show even less interest for such tasks, than oppositional students who were not in conflict with their teacher.  Contrary to expectations, our results indicate that students who display oppositional behaviors behave better and are more involved during French lessons, when conflict with their teacher is high.  Before trying to make sense of those findings, two elements are worth mentioning.  First, the level of behavioral engagement reported by oppositional students when conflict is high does not differ greatly from the engagement of their low-conflict peers.  Second, the effect discussed here remains marginally significant, and it disappears from the last model, when the three-way interactions are introduced.

Those results still appear quite surprising, and they could be explained in one of two ways: with students' mistaken perceptions of their relationship with their teacher, and with the schools' reactions to demanding students.  Generally, oppositional students usually have discordant

interactions with their teachers. However, holding a biased and idealistic vision of those relationships might be a characteristic of students who possess the more problematic profiles. Hence, in the current study, some oppositional students might have reported that their exchanges with their teachers are low in conflict, when it is actually not the case. Since those students present with the more problematic profiles, it would explain why they are more disengaged. In that sense, future studies are needed to examine the congruence of teachers' and students' perceptions, especially when reports of relational conflict focus on specific teacher-child dyads. It would also be wise to gather more information on the personal characteristics of oppositional youths who do not have conflict with their teacher, in order to understand which characteristics of these students explain why they are disengaged and seen as defiant by their teacher, but do not experience antagonistic interactions with the latter.

Another explanation for this unexpected finding would lie in the resources schools offer to students and teachers in need. Typically, defiant students who maintain discordant interactions with their teachers end up disrupting classroom activities, and may affect the learning of their peers as well as the work of their teachers. As a result, numerous measures are often put in place shortly after the start of the school year to help those students function better in school. It is quite possible that such measures modify students' compliance and participation in French activities so that their engagement at the end of the year exceeds what they reported when school started.

**The Role of Sex in Predicting Students' School Engagement**

According to our next hypothesis, girls would be more engaged than boys, both behaviorally and emotionally. In addition, we predicted that girls would display more compliance and participation during French lessons compared to boys, and that their appreciation for French activities would be greater than boys'. This hypothesis was confirmed. Results might be due to

the way children are socialized, or to the expectations teachers hold for each sex (Marks, 2000; Martin, 2003). Indeed, girls are expected to be docile, patient and obedient. They are also supposed to perform better in school and to work well autonomously (Kedar-Voivodas, 1983). Those beliefs might act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and cause girls to follow classrooms rules more closely, or participate more actively in class. The fact that girls show more interest and enthusiasm for French activities could also be explained by the nature of the tasks proposed by teachers. In general, curriculum activities and material, particularly in literacy, tend to suit the learning interests and preferences of girls better than those of boys (Brozo, 2002).

We also expected to find gender-related patterns for students who display oppositional behaviors. In fact, we predicted that oppositional girls would be less engaged both behaviorally and emotionally compared to oppositional boys. This hypothesis was invalidated. Our results suggest that boys and girls who display oppositional behaviors do not differ in terms of behavioral or emotional engagement. One explanation for this might be that those girls are already labelled "oppositional" hence, at-risk for disengagement, at the beginning of the school year. Yet, we controlled for that risk by keeping students' initial level of behavioral and emotional engagement equal. Hence, the cumulative effect of opposition and depression on those girls might not be visible in our results. An alternative justification could be that oppositional boys face added risk factors, though different ones, and might be as equally disengaged as oppositional girls.

As a final hypothesis, we predicted that closeness would be more helpful to girls and would be more beneficial for their behavioral and emotional engagement than it would be for boys'. This hypothesis was confirmed, but only regarding girls' behavioral engagement. Research reveals that, in mixed classrooms, the teacher constitutes a key factor in encouraging

girls' participation (Thorne, 1992). Thus, if a teacher is caring and reassuring with his female students, their involvement and participation are encouraged to a greater degree. In contrast, boys did no react to closeness with their teacher, probably because they are less affected by social desirability and their need to please their teacher is not as strong.

We also postulated that conflict would be more detrimental for girls' behavioral and emotional engagement than it would be for boys'. Yet, contrary to our expectations, boys' interest toward French activities is significantly lower when they entertain more discordant interactions with their teacher, while girls' emotional engagement remains the same, regardless of the level of conflict between them and their teacher. On the one hand, boys might be more sensitive to perturbations in their school environment because the elementary classroom is more adapted to girls' needs, and because literacy activities are better suited to girls' interests (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Brozo, 2002; Connell, 1996). Hence, it might be easier for girls to appreciate French activities, even if they do not get along with their teacher, because they are intrinsically interested to them. Another explanation could be that girls' initial level of enthusiasm toward French activities is higher than boys'. Consequently, it is less susceptible to noticeable decrease during the school year.

### Strengths and Limitations

The current study has four major strengths. First, it combines multiple sources of respondents, that is students and their teachers, which decreases the bias associated with the use of only one type of respondent. Second, this study is based on a longitudinal design that makes it possible to examine the temporal evolution of engagement across the school year. Third, the current study focuses on oppositional students, a category of students that is scarcely considered in

the literature.  Finally, it investigates the school engagement of elementary students, which has rarely been done.

This study also has several limitations.  To start, the participants of the current study are part of a convenience sample, which is not representative of elementary school students in Quebec.  Moreover, they come from a rural region in which the proportion of ethnic minority groups is rather small.  As such, the generalization of our findings is restricted to elementary students of that particular region.  Since the sample used in the current study is not a clinical one, the proportion of participants with oppositional behaviors is rather low.  As a result, the opposition variable was dichotomized.  However, the findings might have differed if the variation in degree of opposition had been larger.  Finally, our model solely focuses on the affective quality of the student-teacher relationship.  Other research would be needed to further examine those aspects, and integrate them with others that relate to the practices put forth by teachers, such as the communication of expectations and values, as well as provision of autonomy and structure.

## Implications for Practice

### Teaching appropriate behaviors to oppositional students

Our findings confirm the importance of working on the behavioral engagement of students who display oppositional behaviors.  However, this study also reveals that interventions aiming to favor the behavioral engagement of students with oppositional behaviors should not necessarily focus on the formation of an emotional bond between those students and their teacher, because teacher-student closeness does not influence the engagement of oppositional students within the school year.

Instead, to ensure oppositional students participate better and behave more appropriately during French lessons, we should maybe teach them the adaptive behaviors expected in the classroom. According to Walker (1995), the behavioral approach is one of the most efficient ways for a teacher to promote the development of appropriate behaviors in students who display oppositional behaviors. Scaffolding desired behaviors, and providing a model to promote positive gestures, whether it is the teacher or other students, are all methods that are recognized for yielding good results. Using positive reinforcement through token systems or behavioral contracts is also recognized as a method for behavioral modeling. Furthermore, including the teacher in the learning process ensures that the teacher-student relationship also benefits from the intervention.

Diminishing the occurrence of undesirable behaviors is also a good way to improve oppositional students' compliance and implication during French activities. Extinguishing the negative behavior by not providing the usual consequence to that behaviour, and reinforcing a behavior that is opposite and incompatible with the undesirable one are all efficient methods (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). The use of logical consequences and the imposition of a cost for every undesirable behavior is also an efficient method. The reprimand can also be helpful if it is transmitted directly to the child with a soft voice, because it serves as a model of appropriate communication and might calm the student.

**Reducing student-teacher conflict**

Although student-teacher interactions do not specifically appear to be highly important in regards to the school engagement of oppositional students, it is still a key factor for students as a whole, and deserves to be considered. Our results indicate that student-teacher conflict is

detrimental for all students' interest and enthusiasm toward French activities of all students. Hence, to increase students' enjoyment of literacy lessons, we need to concentrate on diminishing the discordant interactions linking students, particularly boys, to their teacher.

Teachers often hold the false belief that spending time with students with whom they share conflict will reinforce the student's negative attitudes and worsen their exchanges with him. Teachers also tend to disengage from discordant interactions, because they severely tax their time and resources (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999). However, the most efficient way for a teacher to build and maintain harmonious relationships with his students is to spend quality time with each of them, and provide them unconditional attention (Pianta, 1999). Indeed, according to Greenberg et al. (1991), negative adult-child interactions are characterized by the adult's difficulty in following the child's lead. Those principles apply to all students, but they appear particularly important for boys.

One way to decrease student-teacher conflict is to use the "banking time" technique. This method decreases the frequency and degree of antagonistic interactions by allowing students and their teacher to spend quality time with each other and build an emotional bond with each other (Pianta, 1997b). It is also designed to help the teacher interact indirectly with the student, hence creating a different set of interactions between them. During short periods that are included regularly to the classroom schedule, the teacher spends time with an individual student or with small groups of students, and he takes advantage of those moments to transmit positive messages to students regarding their competencies and his availability to help. As time goes on, students and their teacher will internalize those messages, and they will allow for greater flexibility in interactions.

**Implications for Research**

These data have clear applications for future research. First, it would prove interesting to replicate this study with a clinical sample of students who present various levels of oppositional behaviors, because the association between opposition and engagement might vary as a function of the severity of the behavior. Indeed, students who display more severe oppositional behaviors might have different personal characteristics or experience different risk factors than students who are less oppositional. Consequently, we might see diverse patterns of disengagement across the school year within that group of students. In addition, the relationships oppositional students share with their teacher might not influence their level of engagement in the same way depending on their degree of inappropriate behaviors or the risk factors they experience. Second, complementary research on the correspondence between teacher and student-report of relationships is also needed in order to isolate the effect of student-teacher relationship quality on students' engagement. Students' perceptions of their relationship with their teacher might be contingent to the behavioral problems they experience, while teachers' perceptions of the same relationship could be influenced by the disruptiveness of their student. As a result, the report of each party is highly likely to differ. However, information from a student and his teacher might also be complementary and form a complete portrayal of the relationship. Consequently, such a rich portrayal might give us a better idea of the effect student-teacher relationship quality has on students' engagement. Finally, future research including equivalent numbers of male and female teachers could explore whether teachers' sex influences the impact positive or negative interactions have on students' engagement. A male teacher probably does not express warmth toward his students in the same way a female teacher does, and conflict might not take the same form when a male or a female teacher is involved. As a result, harmonious or antagonistic

student-teacher interactions might not have the same influence on students' engagement depending on the sex of the teacher with whom they take place. Also, it is possible that oppositional boys respond differently to a male teacher who could serve as a role model for good behavior.

Student-teacher conflict remains an area of importance for anyone who is interested in improving the school engagement of students in general, but of boys more specifically. This study contributes to the growing body of research documenting the influence of the student-teacher relationship on various school outcomes. First, by illustrating that having an emotional bond with a teacher does not act as a protective factor regarding the behavioral engagement of oppositional students, but that it favours girls' participation and compliance during French activities. Second, by demonstrating that conflict with a teacher constitutes an aggravating factor for the behavioral engagement of oppositional students. Finally, by showing that conflict with a teacher is highly damaging to boys' interest towards French activities.

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Table 1. *Correlation Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics of the 13 Variables Studied (N = 385).*

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Behavioral eng. in French Language Arts (T2) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Emotional eng. in French Language Arts (T2) | .60** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Student's degree of oppositional behaviors (T1) | -.29** | -.17** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Behavioral eng. in French Language Arts (T1) | .50** | .37** | -.27** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Emotional eng. in French Language Arts (T1) | .43** | .58** | -.19** | .52** | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Academic support offered by parents (T1) | .11* | .01 | -.32** | .15** | .08 | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Average income of the DA's household (T1) | .03 | .01 | .03 | .02 | -.03 | -.00 | | | | | | | |
| 8. Education of the DA's adults (T1) | -.11 | -.10 | -.01 | -.09 | .03 | .03 | -.59** | | | | | | |
| 9. Students' academic achievement (T1) | .19** | .06 | -.26** | .25** | .11* | .19** | -.05 | .02 | | | | | |
| 10. Classroom type (T1) | -.18** | -.07 | .22** | -.24** | -.19** | -.19** | .00 | .00 | -.12* | | | | |
| 11. Closeness in the student-teacher relationship (T1) | .32** | .28** | -.13* | .33** | .38** | .02 | -.01 | .03 | .09 | .03 | | | |
| 12. Conflict in the student-teacher relationship (T1) | -.10 | -.14** | .22** | -.26** | -.22** | -.08 | -.05 | .02 | -.17** | .25** | -.03 | | |
| 13. Students' sex (T1) | .24** | .30** | -.26** | .21** | .28** | .15** | -.04 | .03 | .03 | -.13* | .22** | -.10 | |
| $\bar{x}$ | 4.33 | 3.66 | 0.35 | 4.26 | 3.80 | 2.87 | 56458.05 | 26.47 | 3.15 | 0.03 | 3.38 | 1.77 | 0.45 |
| E.T. | 0.84 | 1.11 | 0.47 | 0.85 | 1.06 | 0.47 | 10907.71 | 10.78 | 0.80 | 0.19 | 1.05 | 0.89 | 0.50 |

*Note.* * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. *Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Students' Behavioral Engagement from their Degree of Oppositional Behaviors.*

| Step | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variables | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β |
| Model 1 (*n* = 385) | | | | | | | | | | |
| | .25*** | | .02** | | .04*** | | .03** | | .00 | |
| Control variables | | | | | | | | | | |
| Behavioral engagement | | .47*** | | .44*** | | .39*** | | .40*** | | .40*** |
| Parental support | | .02 | | -.03 | | -.03 | | -.02 | | -.02 |
| Classroom type | | -.05 | | -.05 | | -.07 | | -.08 | | -.08 |
| Academic achievement | | .05 | | .03 | | .04 | | .04 | | .05 |
| Predictor | | | | | | | | | | |
| Opposition | | | | -.16** | | -.15** | | -.15** | | -.16** |
| Moderators | | | | | | | | | | |
| Closeness | | | | | | .15** | | .12 | | .17* |
| Conflict | | | | | | .06 | | -.08 | | -.08 |
| Students' sex | | | | | | .09 | | .07 | | .08 |
| Interaction terms | | | | | | | | | | |
| Opposition * Sex | | | | | | | | -.01 | | -.01 |
| Opposition * Closeness | | | | | | | | -.10 | | -.16* |
| Opposition * Conflict | | | | | | | | .15** | | .17 |
| Closeness * Sex | | | | | | | | .14* | | .08 |
| Conflict * Sex | | | | | | | | .06 | | .07 |
| Opposition * Closeness * Sex | | | | | | | | | | .08 |
| Opposition * Conflict * Sex | | | | | | | | | | -.02 |

*Note.* * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. *Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Students' Emotional Engagement from their Degree of Oppositional Behaviors.*

| Step | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variables | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β | $\Delta R^2$ | β |
| Model 1 (*n* = 385) | | | | | | | | | | |
| | .34*** | | .01* | | .02** | | .02 | | .00 | |
| Control variables | | | | | | | | | | |
|   Emotional engagement | | .58*** | | .58*** | | .52*** | | .52*** | | .52*** |
|   Parental support | | -.03 | | -.05 | | -.06 | | -.06 | | -.06 |
|   Classroom type | | .03 | | .03 | | .04 | | .03 | | .04 |
|   Academic achievement | | -.00 | | -.02 | | -.01 | | .00 | | .00 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Predictor | | | | | | | | | | |
|   Opposition | | | | -.09* | | -.05 | | -.05 | | -.06 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Moderators | | | | | | | | | | |
|   Closeness | | | | | | .04 | | .04 | | .08 |
|   Conflict | | | | | | -.02 | | -.21** | | -.21* |
|   Students' sex | | | | | | .15** | | .14** | | .15** |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interaction terms | | | | | | | | | | |
|   Opposition * Sex | | | | | | | | -.01 | | -.02 |
|   Opposition * Closeness | | | | | | | | -.05 | | -.10 |
|   Opposition * Conflict | | | | | | | | .11 | | .12 |
|   Closeness * Sex | | | | | | | | .06 | | -.00 |
|   Conflict * Sex | | | | | | | | .17** | | .18* |
|   Opposition * Closeness * Sex | | | | | | | | | | .09 |
|   Opposition * Conflict * Sex | | | | | | | | | | -.02 |

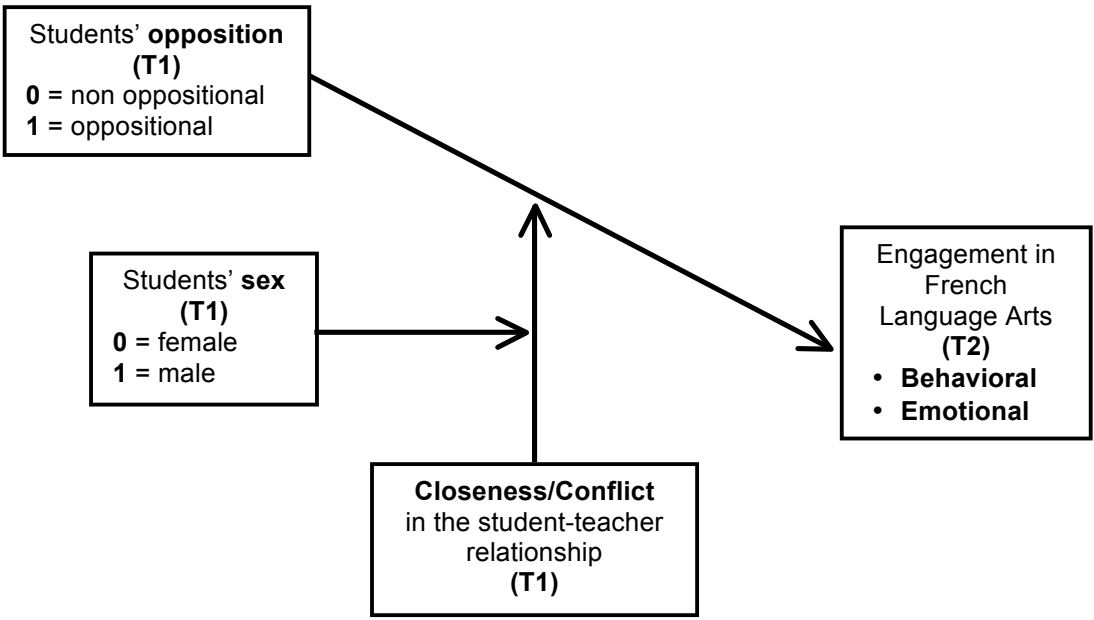*Note.* * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

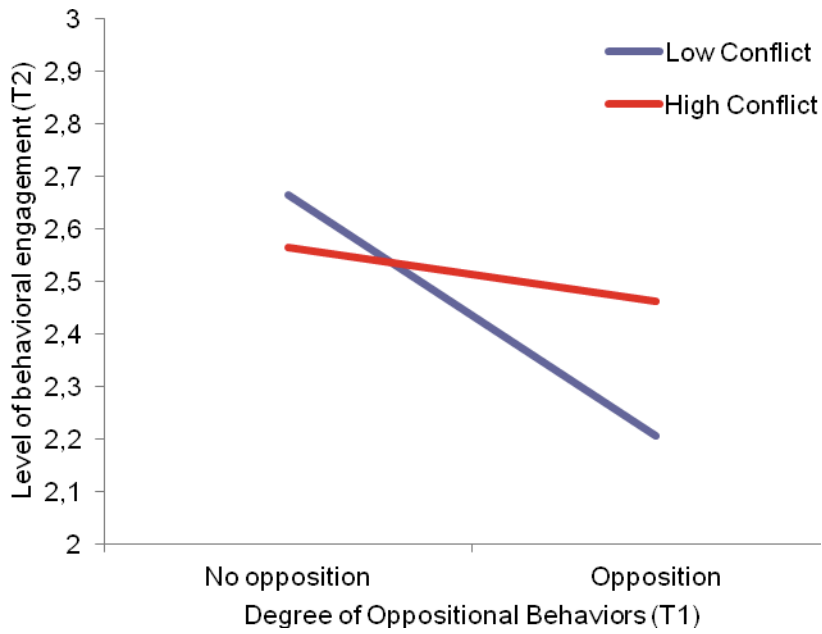Figure 1. *Links between the Variables Investigated in the Current Study.*

Figure 2. *Interaction between Students' Degree of Oppositional Behaviors and the Level of Conflict in the Student-Teacher Relationship (T1) to Predict Students' Behavioral Engagement (T2).*
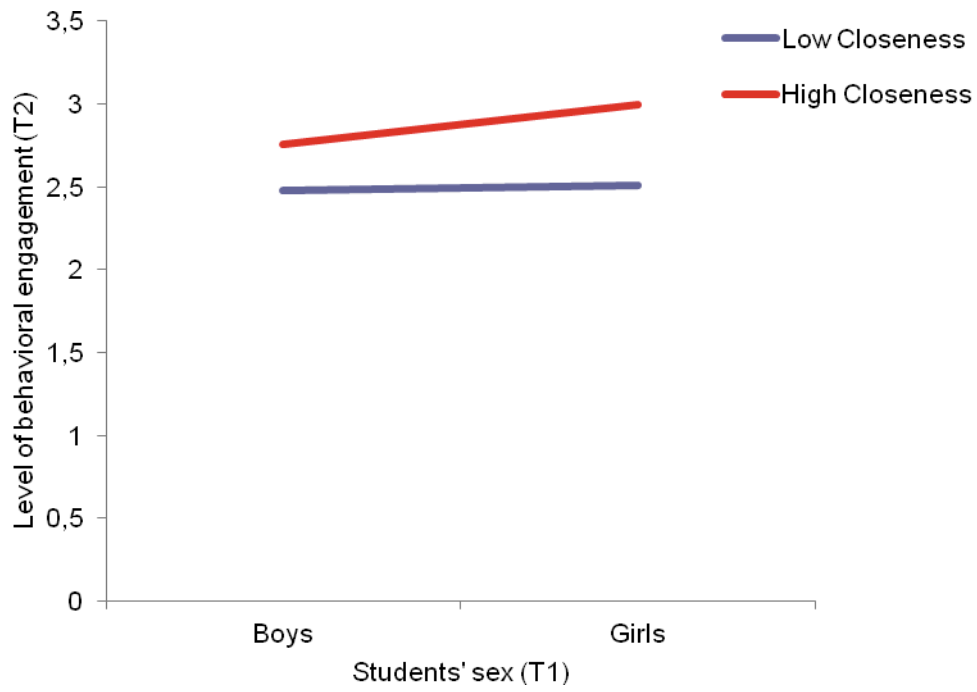
Figure 3. *Interaction between students' sex and the level of closeness in the student-teacher relationship (T1) to predict students' behavioral engagement (T2).*
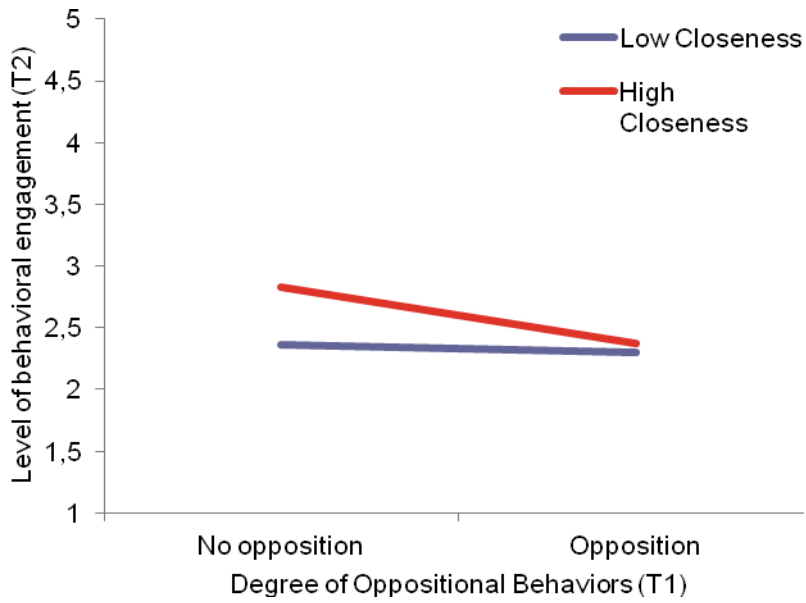
Figure 4. *Interaction between Students' Degree of Oppositional Behaviors and the Level of Closeness in the Student-Teacher Relationship (T1) to Predict Students' Behavioral Engagement (T2).*
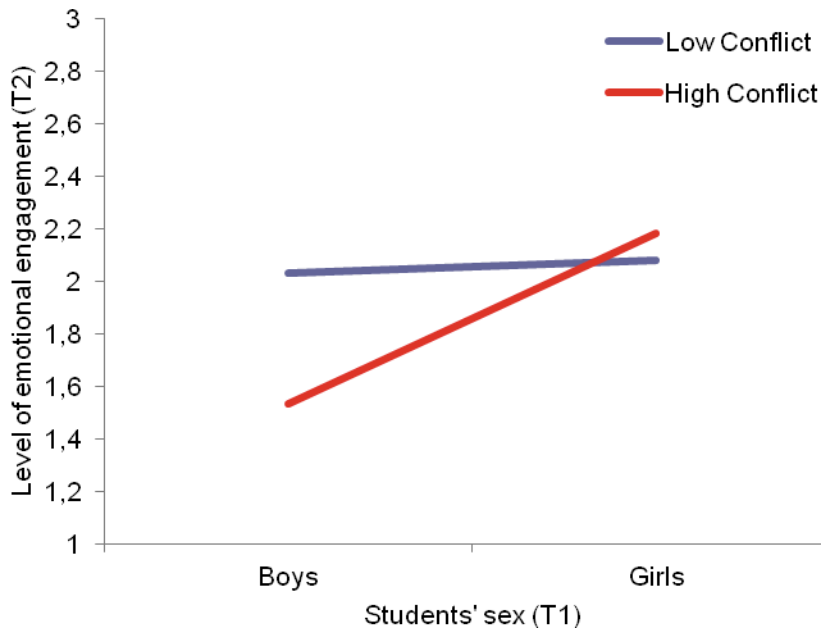
Figure 5. *Interaction between Students' Sex and the Level of Conflict in the Student-Teacher Relationship (T1) to Predict Students' Emotional Engagement (T2).*

Chapitre 3

Discussion Générale

**Discussion Générale**

Le but de la présente étude était de déterminer de quelle façon la qualité de la relation maître-élève influe sur l'engagement comportemental et affectif des élèves aux comportements oppositionnels. Conformément à la littérature, de grands constats émergent de nos résultats : 1) les élèves oppositionnels présentent une plus faible participation et conformité aux règles durant les activités de français que leurs pairs; 2) les élèves qui ont une relation chaleureuse avec leur enseignant sont davantage impliqués durant les activités de français ont une meilleure conduite durant ces activités que leurs pairs; 3) les élèves qui ont des interactions discordantes avec leur enseignant démontrent moins d'intérêt et d'enthousiasme envers les activités de français que leurs pairs; 4) les élèves oppositionnels qui sont souvent en conflit avec leur enseignant participent plus aux activités de français et respectent davantage les règles durant ces activités que les élèves oppositionnels qui ont moins d'interactions discordantes avec leur enseignant; 5) les relations maître-élève chaleureuses sont bénéfiques pour l'implication et l'obéissance des filles durant les activités de français; 6) les conflits maître-élève nuisent particulièrement à l'intérêt et à l'enthousiasme des garçons envers les activités de français. À la lumière de ces constats, deux grandes pistes d'action apparaissent. Ainsi, au-delà des interventions traditionnelles qui ciblent plus spécifiquement les comportements perturbateurs des élèves oppositionnels, l'intervention dans la classe et l'intervention auprès des enseignants sont à envisager.

**Intervenir dans la Classe**

Intervenir dans la classe sur la structure et l'organisation de l'environnement peut aider à promouvoir l'engagement de tous les élèves, et plus particulièrement des élèves

oppositionnels. En effet, lorsqu'un système de gestion des comportements perturbateurs est introduit de façon efficace dans une classe, on assiste à une amélioration des relations entre les élèves et leur enseignant. Un tel système permet d'établir des limites claires, ce qui contribue au sentiment d'efficacité et de contrôle des enseignants quant à la gestion des comportements dérangeants, augmente leur niveau de tolérance en ce qui concerne les interactions dans la classe (Walker, 1995) et peut influencer les perceptions qu'ils ont de leurs élèves tout en favorisant le développement d'interactions harmonieuses (Brantley & Webster, 1993). L'établissement de limites claires aide aussi les élèves à auto-réguler leurs comportements, ce qui est particulièrement bénéfique pour les élèves oppositionnels pour qui la présence d'un cadre clair et d'un environnement structuré s'avère souvent sécurisant. En somme, l'instauration d'un système de gestion des comportements est bénéfique pour l'engagement comportemental des élèves puisque ce système leur permet non seulement d'utiliser l'enseignant comme une base solide afin d'explorer l'environnement scolaire et de s'y impliquer, mais également parce qu'il permet d'outiller les élèves afin qu'ils puissent mieux se conformer aux demandes de l'enseignant. Ultimement, ces efforts comportementaux et motivationnels chez l'élève contribueront à l'amélioration constante de ses relations avec l'enseignant et donc encore une fois à son engagement scolaire.

**Implanter un Système de Gestion des Comportements Perturbateurs.** Selon Gendreau (2001), l'éducateur est responsable « d'orchestrer les composantes du milieu de manière à ce qu'elles aident le jeune à atteindre ses objectifs ». C'est exactement ce que le psychoéducateur effectue en misant sur l'implantation d'un système de gestion des comportements perturbateurs dans les classes. Lors d'une telle intervention, le rôle de psychoéducateur en est un de conseiller. En adoptant cette position, le psychoéducateur peut

expliquer aux enseignants les principes de conditionnement opérant et de conditionnement classique. Il peut également leur décrire de quelle façon la gestion des comportements peut influer sur la qualité de la relation maître-élève. Le psychoéducateur se doit aussi de communiquer aux enseignants l'importance de la rétroaction faite aux élèves, puisque c'est grâce à celle-ci que les élèves peuvent modifier leurs comportements. C'est également par le biais de la rétroaction positive que l'enseignant peut solidifier le lien d'affection construit avec l'élève. Or, en augmentant la fréquence des interactions élève-enseignant positives, on diminue l'occurrence de conflits nuisibles à l'engagement scolaire des élèves, et plus particulièrement des garçons.

En tant que conseiller, le psychoéducateur peut aussi sensibiliser les enseignants à l'impact négatif du retrait de privilèges ou de récompenses sur la relation maître-élève. Les enseignants peuvent prendre l'habitude d'employer cette pratique, puisqu'elle est reconnue pour augmenter l'efficacité des programmes d'intervention comportementaux (Walker, 1995). Néanmoins, lorsque l'on désire également travailler la relation maître-élève, retirer à un élève une récompense déjà accordée peut faire naitre de la colère et du ressentiment chez celui-ci, et altérer sa confiance en son enseignant (Pianta, 1999).

**Intervenir auprès des Enseignants Vivant des Relations Difficiles**

L'intervention directe auprès des enseignants vivant des difficultés d'interaction avec certains élèves peut également faire partie du rôle du psychoéducateur. Selon Gendreau (2001), lors de l'intervention psychoéducative, « c'est l'éducateur, en tant que personne, par son savoir-être, son savoir-faire et par son savoir, qui accompagne le jeune d'une façon plus spécifique lors de chaque intervention ponctuelle ». Ainsi, lorsqu'il vise à améliorer la qualité de la relation liant un élève à son enseignant, un psychoéducateur devrait intervenir

systématiquement auprès des enseignants qui partagent des relations difficiles avec certains élèves, de manière à épauler indirectement l'élève en difficulté. Afin de favoriser l'engagement scolaire des élèves, le psychoéducateur peut dans un premier temps outiller les enseignants afin qu'ils développent des relations moins conflictuelles avec leurs élèves. Pour ce faire, il peut à la fois les aider à reconnaître les situations problématiques, mais également travailler avec eux leurs attitudes et la représentation mentale qu'ils se font des élèves plus difficiles.

**Aider les Enseignants à Reconnaître les Relations Problématiques.** Afin de miser sur la qualité de la relation maître-élève en tant que facteur de protection pour tous les élèves de manière globale, mais plus spécifiquement pour les garçons, le psychoéducateur devrait tout d'abord outiller les enseignants pour qu'ils puissent reconnaître les relations maître-élève problématiques. Pour ce faire, le psychoéducateur peut guider l'enseignant dans l'observation de ses propres comportements ainsi que de ceux des élèves avec qui les interactions sont plus difficiles. Cette première intervention nécessitera beaucoup de savoir-être de la part du psychoéducateur, qui devra entamer une relation de confiance avec chaque enseignant. Il devra également faire preuve de considération et démontrer à chaque enseignant qu'il le perçoit comme un professionnel au même titre que lui-même. Finalement, le psychoéducateur devra demeurer empathique afin de comprendre les réactions de l'enseignant face à certains élèves.

Afin d'aider les enseignants à s'exprimer davantage à propos de leurs problèmes avec certains élèves, le psychoéducateur peut aussi employer un outil plus systématique, et demander aux enseignants concernés de remplir le *Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)* (Pianta, 2001) à propos des élèves avec qui leurs relations sont moins harmonieuses. Les

résultats de ce questionnaire pourront être matière à discussion durant les rencontres avec l'enseignant et permettront de cibler plus directement les aspects problématiques de la relation.

**Modifier les Représentations Mentales des Enseignants.** Les enseignants ont tendance à se concentrer sur les aspects négatifs des interactions avec un élève difficile, ainsi qu'à blâmer l'élève pour les problèmes relationnels. Dans un tel contexte, même si l'élève modifie son comportement, les attentes de l'enseignant quant à l'attitude dérangeante de l'élève sont si ancrées, que l'enseignant est incapable de percevoir les intentions bienveillantes de son élève. Une telle attitude tend à exacerber le désengagement d'un élève, peu importe qu'il soit oppositionnel ou non. Cependant, il est important de mentionner que l'élève n'est pas toujours étranger à ces situations. Au contraire, il peut contribuer aux perceptions défavorables de son enseignant en se montrant désobéissant, résistant ou passif, surtout s'il possède déjà des difficultés comportementales telles que l'opposition. Cette combinaison de comportements et de perceptions négatives qui se renforcent mutuellement est caractéristique d'une relation en *« lock up »*, et l'une des seules façons de la désamorcer est de transformer les perceptions de l'adulte (Pianta, 1999). Afin de parvenir à modifier ses représentations mentales, l'enseignant doit pouvoir décrire comment il perçoit ses interactions avec ses élèves, comprendre de quelle manière ses propres croyances et attentes peuvent influencer ses réactions, et concevoir de quelle façon ces interactions peuvent être reliées à ses propres expériences dans d'autres relations. Une telle prise de conscience est susceptible de remotiver un enseignant afin qu'il s'implique auprès de ses élèves de façon positive (Pianta, 1999).

**Conclusion**

En somme, la relation maître-élève est un facteur clef pour diminuer le risque de désengagement des élèves de façon générale, mais plus spécifiquement celui des élèves oppositionnels et des garçons. Les élèves qui font preuve de défiance sont généralement moins engagés que leurs pairs. De plus, les garçons ont davantage de risques de voir leur participation en classe ainsi que leur conformité aux demandes de l'enseignant diminuer lorsqu'ils entretiennent des relations conflictuelles avec celui-ci. En l'occurrence, les interventions visant à améliorer le lien de confiance unissant ces élèves et leur enseignant, ainsi qu'à diminuer grandement les interactions discordantes entre ces deux partis sont susceptibles d'altérer le désengagement des élèves oppositionnels et des garçons.

En tant que « chef d'orchestre » des composantes du milieu (Gendreau, 2001), le psychoéducateur en milieu scolaire est le professionnel tout indiqué pour amener les enseignants à questionner leurs façons de faire et de penser pour ultimement parvenir à améliorer les relations problématiques qu'ils entretiennent avec certains de leurs élèves plus difficiles. Il est également en position d'introduire de nouvelles pratiques dans les classes afin d'assurer que chaque élève bénéficie du support et de l'affection de son enseignant et puisse s'engager au maximum dans ses apprentissages.

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