

From

## **Classroom Interactions and Achievement**

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Studies have found that students' perceptions of the classroom environment can have a direct impact not only on their achievement but also on their personal-social behaviors (Vasquez, 1988). Furthermore, depressed rates of student classroom participation predict lowered achievement as early as the first three grades (Finn & Cox cited in Cohen & Lotan, 1995). In the words of Scott-Jones and Clark (1986), "Academic achievement is dependent on more than individual abilities and aspirations. The social environment in which learning takes place can enhance or diminish the behaviors that lead to achievement" (p. 523).

These examples clearly illustrate the complexities of teacher and student interactions in classrooms. A single teaching episode or an isolated interaction between the teacher and a student or between a student and his or her peers can influence the student's perceptions of the learning environment and his or her motivation to achieve. What a student comes to expect from the teacher and peers is a consequence of behavior based on the interactions between the student and teacher, as well as between the student and his or her peers. That consequence may affect future behavior or life options.

The power of expectations in the lives of children begins long before they come to school. Through socialization in the home and community, children learn of expectations for their lives. What they come to believe about themselves is a result of the messages from significant others such as parents and other adults. During the past two decades we have learned that teachers do, indeed, form expectations for student performance and that teacher expectations influence student performance (Baron, Tom & Cooper, 1985; Dusek, 1985).

### **The Communication of Expectations through Classroom Interactions**

Expectations are assumptions or inferences that teachers (or parents and administrators) may make about the academic achievement or future behavior of their students. The powerful influence of expectations in our lives was demonstrated by Rosenthal and Jacobson (cited in Good & Brophy, 1987) who manipulated teacher expectations for student achievement to see if these expectations would be fulfilled. When teachers were told that randomly selected students had been identified as "intellectual late bloomers," teacher behavior changed enough to have a significant positive effect on student performance, both in the classroom and on achievement tests. Results were explained in terms of the powerful effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy effects of teacher expectations.

The work of Rosenthal and Jacobson created controversy and interest in how teachers form expectations and how they are communicated to students. Despite the criticism of their work, it has been well documented that teacher expectations are communicated to students during teacher-student interactions (Dusek, 1985). Researchers (Good and Brophy, 1987) studied the ways teachers communicate their expectations to high

achievers and low achievers. Their observations of classrooms revealed that teachers treat low achievers differently than they treat high achievers. The following behaviors indicate differences toward students perceived to be low achievers:

- providing general, often insincere praise;
  - providing them with less feedback;
  - demanding less effort;
  - interrupting low achievers more often;
  - seating them farther away from the teacher;
  - paying less attention to them;
  - calling on them less often;
  - waiting less time for them to respond to questions;
  - criticizing them more often for failure; and
  - smiling at them less or giving them fewer other nonverbal indicators of support.
- (p. 10 )

Cooper (cited in Winfield, 1986) believes that these behavioral differences indicate the existence of sustaining expectation effects that would make learning by low-expectation students relatively more difficult. Cohen (cited in Cohen & Lotan, 1995) supports this view, stating that "differences in classroom interactions can lead to differences in learning outcomes--that is, those who talk more, learn more" (p. 100).