A Study of Teacher Behaviours as Interpreted by Low Achieving Passive Students

Carolyn Crook

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A STUDY OF TEACHER BEHAVIOURS AS INTERPRETED
BY LOW ACHIEVING PASSIVE STUDENTS

by

Carolyn Crook

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Award of Bachelor of Education (Honours)

At the School of Education, Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley Campus.

Date of submission: December, 1999.
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

This study explores the nature of low achieving, passive students' interpretations of teacher behaviour towards them, how these interpretations cluster into specific categories and the possibility of a mis-match existing between a teacher's intended behaviour and the student's interpretations of that behaviour. The sample consisted of four year five students, one female and three male students, who were selected from two Perth metropolitan schools. Ethnographic-case study methods were used to conduct the investigation which included fieldnotes, observations, video-taped observations, student interviews and informal teacher interviews. The study revealed that low achieving, passive students have varying interpretations of teacher behaviour. As a result of these interpretations, the subjects seemed to develop passive behaviours which facilitated them avoiding work or participating in lessons. These interpretations clustered around categories that linked with Cooper's description of the 4-factor categories of teacher behaviour namely socio-emotional climate, teacher messages, student interaction and feedback. This is significant in that categorising low achieving, passive students' interpretations could help uncover the origins of passive behaviour in low achieving students. The most revealing finding was that these students had some significant mis-matches between their interpretations of teacher behaviour and the teacher's interpretation of their own behaviour, especially in the areas of socio-emotional climate and teacher messages. The findings of the present study provide new insights that may facilitate further research into the area of passive behaviour in low achieving students.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text or;

iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature

Date 03/12/2000
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The opportunity to ‘have a go’ at an Honours thesis would never have been possible if it were not for the love and support of my most precious husband Russell. Thank you my love for being my rock, my guiding light and for being that soft comfortable place in which I could hide my worries and fears. I love you very much. To my children Regan, Tamara and Rachel, thank you for being patient when mummy got grumpy. I appreciate the times you all pulled together to help me clean house and get dinner ready.

Hello Richard Berlach, my steadfast supervisor, how you never doubted me. I always will wonder at the faith you had in me. You were always supportive and constructive in whatever you had to say to me. So many times I came into your office ready to ‘throw it all in’. Yet, somehow the words never reached my lips. Even when I would disappear for months and return with a paltry offering of work, you received it with such enthusiasm and expectation. How could I quit? Thank you Richard for being my supervisor, none could compare with you.

Thank you Len King for your guidance, which facilitated my research proposal. I would also like to express my appreciation to Richard Fuller and Carmel Maloney for the valuable advice they gave about conducting my study.

My dearest darling Paula, my most treasured friend. You were my inspiration, prod in the back and listener of my ramblings. Our fellow friend and traveller Sarah, you were an example for us all. When my thesis was growing furry green stuff, you encouraged me to be brave and attack it before it grew legs and walked away. Thank you for sharing this journey.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Preamble

Early investigations (Brophy & Good, 1970; Cooper, 1979) into teacher behaviour in relation to passive students have been used to form the context and basis of this study. Later studies (Babad, 1990, 1996; Witty & DeBaryshe, 1994) involving the investigation of student interpretations about teacher behaviour support the significance of this study and the method used to carry out investigations about student interpretations of teacher behaviour. Much of the research pertaining to teacher expectancy vis-à-vis passive students has looked at the direct effects of differential teacher behaviour (Good, 1981). Not much however, is known about indirect effects of differential “teacher behaviour, student perception of teacher behaviour or their inferences about teacher behaviour” (Good, 1981, p. 416). After more than a decade, Babad (1990, 1996) and Witty and DeBaryshe (1994) surmised that research into the area of passive students needed to use naturalistic research methods to examine the interpretations such students have about teacher behaviour as such methods allowed the researcher to observe students in the natural setting of the classroom. This insight was significant as it mooted that students reacted to classroom events as a response to their own interpretations of those events (Babad, 1996). The present study investigates the interpretations that passive students may have of teacher
behaviour towards them. Models and theories generated from previous research form the basis of the proposed study.

Early studies were significant in that they presented models for the interpretation of passive student behaviour. According to Good's (1981) passivity model, passive behaviour in low achievers could be attributed to two factors. The first factor was that low achieving students are exposed to more varied teaching approaches. Teachers often try varied approaches to find something that will help these students improve their learning or achieve higher results. Low achievers may also be faced with having a variety of teachers be it for remedial or special education purposes. The variety of teaching approaches from one teacher or many teachers elicits greater variability in teacher expectations, which as Good, Slavings, Harel and Emerson (1987) suggest, can create passivity in low achieving students. Secondly, the effects of teacher behaviour on the students (Good & Brophy, 1994) can also facilitate passive behaviour in low achieving students. Certain teacher behaviours such as waiting less time for low achievers to respond to questions, providing answers for incorrect responses rather that helping low achievers to improve their responses, or criticising low achievers for their mistakes can lead to low achievers developing passive behaviours. The students find the risk of responding to classroom interactions too high as these situations often happen in public so they tend to refrain from responding to or participating in classroom interactions, thereby becoming passive in their learning behaviour (Good, Slavings, Harel and Emerson, 1987).
Rosenthal & Jacobsen (1968) classified teacher behaviours into four categories known as the 4-factor categorisation: climate, input, output and feedback. Cooper (1979) refers to these categories as socio-emotional climate, teacher messages to students, opportunities for student interactions and feedback. Researchers (Cooper, 1979; Good, 1981, 1993; Good & Brophy, 1994; Jones & Gerig, 1994) have theorised that teacher expectations influence teacher behaviour towards students, which in turn can influence student achievement and behaviour. These theories of the effect of teacher behaviour form the basis of this study.

Early research (Brophy & Good, 1970; Cooper, 1979) identified particular teacher behaviours and student behaviours developing as a result of teacher expectations. From this, Good (1981) developed specific criteria of teacher behaviours. Good’s criteria have been used as a guide for recognising teacher behaviours about which students may make interpretations. Good (1981) further explained that as a result of being exposed to these teacher behaviours, students may develop avoidance strategies, which allow them to remain passive. Such strategies included not volunteering or responding when called upon to do so; generally asking fewer questions; and approaching the teacher for assistance less frequently (Good, Slavings, Harel & Emerson, 1987, p183). Such student strategies have been used to help identify target students for the study.

Significance of The Study

As previously indicated, much research has been conducted in the area of teacher expectations and its effects on student achievement and behaviour. Not many studies, however, have investigated passive students’ perceptions of teacher behaviour in regard to the way in which students interpret such behaviours. It is
anticipated that the findings from this study will provide educators, in the school and in teacher training, with a deeper understanding of passive students' perceptions of teacher behaviour. From this, educators may be better able to determine ways of making changes in the area of both teaching and relationship formation in order to encourage passive students to become more active participants in the learning process.

**Research Questions**

This study addresses three research questions that look beyond teacher behaviour and students' passive behaviour to the underlying interpretations passive students have of teacher behaviour towards them. In the pursuit of a greater understanding about such behaviour, three research questions have been proposed, namely:

1. How do low achieving passive students interpret teacher behaviour towards them?
2. In what ways do such interpretations cluster in specific categories?
3. To what extent is there a mis-match between students' interpretations of teacher behaviour and the teacher's interpretation of their own behaviour?

**Definition of Terms**

The following stipulative definitions will apply to this study:

*Teacher expectations* – “are inferences that teachers make about the future behaviour or academic achievement of their students, based on what they currently know about these students.” (Good, 1993, p. 6107).

*Low achievers* – Students whose classwork and test results are consistently lower
than the "class average".

Passivity - Passivity has been defined, for the purpose of this study, as "retentive" behaviour in the sense that the student is withholding (consciously or unconsciously) a response. Such behaviours may include not volunteering or responding when called upon to do so; generally asking fewer questions; and approaching the teacher for assistance less frequently (Good, Slavings, Harel & Emerson 1987, p. 183).

Student perceptions - "Student perceptions are thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about persons, situations, and events." (Schunk & Meece, 1992, p. xi). In the context of this study student perceptions relate to the thoughts, beliefs and feelings students have about teacher behaviour towards them. Perceptions of behaviour lead to interpretations of that behaviour.

Teacher perceptions - In the context of this study, teacher perceptions relates to how teachers perceive their own behaviour towards students (i.e. the teacher's intentions or intended effect of their own behaviour towards students).

Ethical Considerations

Participants of this study were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participants. Participants have only been included in the study if they, their parents, their teacher and the school principal gave consent. Consent letters were obtained prior to the commencement of the study. A statement of disclosure was also attached with the school's consent letter (Appendix B), teacher's consent letter (Appendix
C) and the parent’s consent letter (Appendix D). Prior to commencement of the data collection, participants were informed of the general purpose of this study.

Ethics clearance was obtained from the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee before commencement of the study. All raw data have been stored in a locked metal filing cabinet and will remain in the possession of the researcher for a period of five years, after which time it will be destroyed.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

Overview

The review of literature includes relevant research that leads to the model of passive student behaviour. This is necessary, as it will, first, provide the reader with the background knowledge required for understanding the criteria used to select students for the study. Second, the literature forms a timeline to show the path the research has taken in developing an understanding of the passive student. Finally, the relevant studies used in the review highlight the gaps in research on passive students and demonstrate the need for further study.

A substantial body of research literature (Brophy, 1979; Brophy & Good, 1970, 1974; Cooper, 1979; Cooper & Good, 1983; Good, 1981; Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968; Weinstein, & Middlestadt, 1979) has demonstrated that there are links between teacher expectations and teacher behaviour; and student achievement and student behaviour. Rosenthal and Jacobsen's (1968) "Pygmalion in The Classroom", examined student performance and teacher expectations. Rosenthal and Jacobsen conducted an experimental investigation in which teachers were led to believe that one group of students were able to achieve at higher levels. The teachers of a second group of students, however, were led to believe that the students in the second group were not expected to achieve at the
higher level of the first group of students. The data from this investigation showed that the students who were expected to achieve at a higher level actually achieved higher levels. Rosenthal and Jacobsen concluded that student performance could be improved by creating higher teacher expectations. Even though the results were disputed on methodological grounds (Claiborn, 1969; Snow, 1969) much interest was generated regarding ways in which teachers interacted with low and high achieving students. The methodological issues concerning the Rosenthal and Jacobson study revolved around the absence of naturalistic classroom observations. As such, researchers disputed the applicability of findings to 'real' classrooms (Cooper & Good, 1983). Such deficiencies were corrected in subsequent studies (Brophy & Good, 1970; Good, 1981). In recent years, further studies (Babad, 1990; Witty and Debaryshe, 1994) were conducted to investigate how students perceived what was happening to them in the 'real' classroom from the children's own experiences (Babad, 1996).

**Teacher Expectancy Effect**

Early studies (Brophy & Good, 1970, 1974; Cooper, 1979) indicated that teacher expectations had a significant effect on the way teachers interacted with students. The influence of such interactions came to be known as the *teacher expectancy effect*. In 1970, Brophy and Good suggested a model of how teacher expectations affect student achievement and behaviour. The model was later refined by Good (1981, p.416) and consisted of the following five major, chronologically oriented, factors:
1. The teacher expects specific behaviour and achievement levels from particular students.
2. Because of these varied expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward different students.
3. This communicates to students the behaviour and achievement the teacher expects from them and in turn affects their self-concept, achievement motivation, and levels of aspiration.
4. If this treatment is consistent over time, and if the students do not resist or change it in some way, it will shape their achievement and behaviour. High-expectation students will be led to achieve at high levels, whereas the achievement of low-expectation students will decline.
5. With time, students' achievement and behaviour will conform more closely to the behaviour expected of them.

**Teacher Behaviour**

In further research, Rosenthal (1974 cited in Cooper, 1979) identified teacher behaviours which differed according to the expectations formed about students. Rosenthal summarised teacher behaviours using the 4-factor categorisation: climate, input, output and feedback. Cooper (1979) classified these categories as socio-emotional climate, teacher messages to students, opportunities for student interactions and teacher feedback. Both researchers were insisting that the milieu of the classroom was significant in sending messages to students, as were specific teacher behaviours, the number of opportunities teachers provided students for academic interactions, and the amount and type of feedback teachers give students.

Cooper's (1979) review of the research concerning Rosenthal's 4-factor categorisation model found evidence that teachers exhibited differential behaviours within these categories. Teachers tended to create a warmer socio-
emotional climate for students whom they believed were high achievers (Chaikin, Sigler and Derlega, 1974; Kester and Letchworth, 1972; Page, 1971). Non-verbal behaviours such as smiling, nodding, eye contact and leaning towards students, were displayed towards high achievers more often than towards low achievers. Teacher messages to students were communicated by giving low achievers less difficult material to learn and providing fewer opportunities to learn new material (Cooper, 1979). Brophy and Good (1970) found that teachers provided more opportunities for interactions with high achievers than with low achieving students. More time was allowed for high-achieving students to answer questions and the teacher persisted in pursuing the interaction by giving clues and rephrasing questions. Rothbart, Dalfen & Barrett (1971) proposed that teachers paid more attention to the responses high achievers give and Rowe (1974) found that high achievers were given a longer 'wait time' before questions were redirected to other students. Overall, teachers were found to be most supportive and friendly towards high achievers.

Cooper's (1979) review indicated that the frequency of teacher-initiated interactions was higher for high achievers. Cooper also found that teacher feedback was given more frequently and appropriately to high achievers after a response to a question. High achievers for example, were often praised for trying or given hints after responding incorrectly to a question and low achievers were often criticised after responding incorrectly to a question. Such conclusions have found support in other studies such as those of Cooper and Baron (1977) and Firestone and Brody (1975).
Specific behaviours which teachers tended to vary towards high achievers and low achievers were listed by Good (1981, p. 416) as follows:

1. Seating low achievers farther from the teacher or in a group (making it harder to monitor low-achieving students or treat them as individuals).
2. Paying less attention to low achievers in academic situations (smiling less often and maintaining less eye contact).
3. Calling on low achievers less often to answer classroom questions or make public demonstrations.
4. Waiting less time for low achievers to answer questions.
5. Not staying with low achievers in failure situations (providing clues and asking follow-up questions).
6. Criticising low achievers more frequently than high achievers for incorrect public responses.
7. Praising low achievers less frequently than high achievers after successful public responses.
8. Praising low achievers more frequently than high achievers for marginal or inadequate answers.
9. Providing low-achieving students with less accurate and less detailed feedback than high achievers.
10. Failing to provide low achievers with feedback about their responses more frequently than high achievers.
11. Demanding less work and effort from low achievers than from high achievers.
12. Interrupting the performance of low achievers more frequently than that of high achievers.

**Student Perceptions**

Student perceptions, as a topic of research, has become increasingly evident in the educational literature. Researchers such as Weinstein and Middlestadt (1979) examined students' perceptions using hypothetical scenarios. Weinstein and Middlestadt's study investigated whether high and low achievers perceived differential treatment by teachers. The sample consisted of two groups of students, one group from grades 1-3 and the other group from grades 4-6. The students were asked to rate sixty teacher behaviours in relation to hypothetical high and low
achievers. Although the results of this study indicated that students perceive
differential treatment of high and low achievers, it did not address the
interpretations students have of teacher behaviour towards them.

Good (1993) expressed concern about studies such as that of Weinstein and
Middlestadt which based conclusions on hypothetical scenarios. Studies such as
those conducted by Babad (1990) and Weinstein & Middlestadt (1979) used
hypothetical scenarios to investigate how students perceive teachers’ differential
behaviour. Babad (1990) asked 520 seventh grade students to rate how they
thought their classroom teacher would behave towards two hypothetical students.
The subjects were provided with a cover story describing two hypothetical
students, one being a high achieving student and the other a low achieving student.
The results showed that the subjects often perceived the same teacher behaviour
shown to both hypothetical students, as being different; i.e. calling on high
achieving students was seen as being supportive yet calling on low achieving
students was seen as demanding. Other studies such as that conducted by
Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani & Middlestadt (1982) surveyed students regarding
how they perceived teacher responses to high and low achievers. Studies
conducted by Brattesani, Weinstein & Marshall (1984) and Cooper & Good
(1983) used comparative self-ratings, where students rated the degree of specific
teacher behaviours exhibited towards them or the extent to which they received
certain behaviours in comparison to the other students in the class. These studies,
however, have “not included process interview data to determine students’
perceptions of differential behaviour... Thus, little is known about how students
interpret teacher behaviors and how those behaviors influence students’ motivation and effort” (Good, 1993, p. 6109). Uncovering student perceptions is central to understanding passive behaviour because “to understand an individual’s behaviour, we must know how he perceives the situation, the obstacles he believed he had to face, the alternatives he saw opening up to him” (Becker, 1970, p.64).

Witty and DeBaryshe (1994) argued that studies such as Babad’s (1990), were limited as hypothetical situations could not identify matches or mismatches between student interpretations of teacher behaviour and teacher’s interpretations of their own behaviour. Witty and DeBaryshe (1994) and Babad (1996) have both conducted studies investigating student perceptions of classroom/teacher interactions. The results from Witty and DeBaryshe’s study supported findings from previous studies, such as that of Babad (1990), which suggest students do interpret differential teacher behaviour between low achieving students and high achieving students. Babad’s (1996) further study also revealed that low achieving students and high achieving students interpreted teacher behaviours differently. As suggested previously, the method of data collection does not allow matches and mis-matches to be identified between student interpretations of teacher behaviour and teacher interpretations of their own behaviour. The research instruments in these cases were questionnaires and as such, the technique did not acknowledge the value of process interview data. Such data would enable the researcher to glean a deeper insight into how students interpret teacher behaviour. This study makes a small contribution to the research on passive behaviour by investigating
in some depth the interpretations passive students have of teacher behaviour.

*Good's Passivity Model and Student Behaviour*

Good's (1981) model suggested that teacher behaviours, such as those already mentioned can facilitate passivity in low achievers. Repeated differential teacher behaviour towards low achievers, over time, "may reduce the efforts of lows and contribute to a passive learning style." (Good, 1993, p. 6109). A study conducted by Good, Slavings, Harel and Emerson (1987) supported Good's (1981) passivity model, in that it also showed that differential teacher behaviour can facilitate passive behaviours in low achievers.

Good, Slavings, Harel and Emerson (1987) conducted a study, on the basis of Good's passivity model, examining the nature of student questioning behaviour in relation to differential teacher feedback. The researchers designed a coding system which identified nine question types that students would ask. Observations were made in twenty-two classrooms, grades K-12. The findings indicated that the frequency and types of questions (e.g. request for meaningful explanation and procedural questions) varied within grade levels. Further, in kindergarten, male students and low achieving students asked more questions than females. As age increased, male and female students asked a similar number of questions. It was found that over time however, question asking decreased significantly for low achievers. The researchers concluded that frequent questioning by low achievers could have an adverse affect, causing teachers to inadvertently provide feedback which undermined low achievers' initiative over time. The study suggested that
the effects of some teacher behaviours become evident as passive behaviour in low achieving students increases. Good, et al. (1987) speculated about how students might decide to take a passive role in their learning but did not explore the interpretations students have of these passivity facilitating teacher behaviours. The purpose of the present study is to discover what interpretations passive students have of teacher behaviours.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework provides a visual description of how the concepts associated with student passivity are related. Good’s (1981) model of teacher expectations suggested that the expectations that teachers hold about students can influence the way in which they behave towards students. Good’s (1981) model of student passivity described the relationship between teachers’ differential behaviours to high achieving students and low achieving students and the effect this has on, mainly, low achieving students. Good’s model further suggested that some students interpreted these differential teacher behaviours and as a result, developed avoidance strategies such as not volunteering or responding when called upon, asking fewer questions and approaching the teacher less frequently (Good & Brophy, 1994). The present conceptual framework, which informs the present study, is based on the research undertaken by Good and Brophy and is illustrated in figure 2.1.
Figure 2.1 – Conceptual Framework

TEACHER EXPECTANCY → TEACHER BEHAVIOUR

STUDENT INTERPRETATIONS

NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS DEVELOP IN SOME STUDENTS

PASSIVITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Self-fulfilling Prophecy</th>
<th>Learned Helplessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-concept</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHARACTERISTICS UNDER CONSIDERATION

AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOURS

OFF-TASK BEHAVIOURS

INCOMPLETE WORK

ASKS FEWER QUESTIONS
The conceptual framework indicates that teacher expectations about a student, derived from past student reports and impressions made by student behaviour, affects the way in which a teacher behaves towards that student. Students make interpretations about the teacher’s behaviour which leads to some students developing negative behaviours namely passivity. The framework also shows the behavioural characteristics of passivity which have been used in this study.

**Ethnography**

The current study is a qualitative study in which the researcher has employed some ethnographic techniques. “The purpose of educational ethnography is to provide rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities and beliefs of participants in educational settings” (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984, p. 17). Classrooms are, using Goodenough’s description of culture, made up of a set of concepts, beliefs and principles of action and organisation that are unique to them (cited in Wolcott, 1988, p.189). Therefore, “ethnography is a relevant method for evaluating school life, since the school is essentially a cultural entity” (Burns, 1997, p. 297). Ethnographic research is very relevant to the study of student passivity as “it focuses on how things are and how they got that way” (Wiersma, 1995, p. 278).

Despite its strengths as a research tool, ethnography is faced with some limitations. Methodological issues arise about reliability, validity and
generalisability. Reliability of ethnographic studies is difficult as ethnographic research deals with human agency and natural settings. Often what is observed is a unique situation and cannot be reconstructed precisely. Human behaviour is not static but changeable from one instance to another. Changing social conditions and situations can alter the context of the group being studied. What may feel safe or right to reveal in one situation may not feel safe or right in another situation. The information that is accessible to one person is unique, as it is dependent on their status or role/s within the context of what is being observed. Sometimes the informants who are most eager to volunteer information are atypical and do not represent the group. The extent to which researchers are members of the group studied and the status they hold in that group also affects reliability. In a school situation, for example, if a researcher was felt to be more of an equal within a student body he/she would be privy to different information about students' views and values towards schooling/education than would be a researcher who held a more authoritative position.

Employing several methods of data collection and keeping records of methodological procedures can enhance both external and internal reliability. Wiersma (1995) suggested that the use of a multimodal method of data collection such as triangulation would enhance internal reliability. In this study, a variety of data gathering devices has been used to provide information for analysis, namely, field notes, video taped observations, audio-tape recorded interviews with students and informal interviews with the teachers. Recording detailed descriptions of informants' physical, social and interpersonal contexts within which the data are
collected can increase external reliability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Procedures of data analysis and how the data were examined and synthesised, have been detailed in the present study in order to facilitate any future replication study.

It is important to note that “attaining reliability does not assure the validity of research” (Wiersma, 1995, p. 274). Validity has the same dimensions as reliability: internal and external. Internal validity poses the question: “Do scientific researchers actually observe or measure what they think they are observing or measuring?” (Goetz & LeCompte 1984, p. 221). For instance, the presence of the observer may affect the behaviour of the individuals being observed (Hawthorne effect). An example of a classroom situation would be children reacting in a way that is different to their normal behaviour because they feel privileged by the new attention received from the researcher. Throughout the duration of this study the researcher made use of “out of study” activities so that students could perform in front of the video camera and talk about themselves in a non-threatening atmosphere. Further, as the interpretations made by the observer may be tainted by the observer’s values, biases or misunderstanding, the researcher spent much time reflecting on her interpretations, checking understandings with the class teacher and questioning students about incidents and comments that may have been misunderstood in an attempt to minimise researcher bias.

Triangulation is an effective technique used to control for the internal validity (Burns, 1997). Triangulation means using two or more modes of data
collection as corroboration. This allows the researcher to check for inconsistencies in the findings generated from the data collected. Triangulation was used to enhance internal validity by employing three modes of data collection - fieldnotes, video taped observations and interviews with students and teachers. Observer bias can be monitored or acknowledged through self-reflection. The researcher needs to include self-changes that take place during an investigation and account for these as part of the ethnography. Such an awareness was brought to the present task.

External validity refers to the generalisability of the findings to other situations. "Ethnographic studies are generally case studies from a single setting and have difficulty in being able to translate to other similar settings" (Burns, 1997, p. 326). Participants and informants may come from a particular socioeconomic status, political background or racial background with such factors being irrelevant in a different situation. Making a site into a 'site under investigation' changes the context, so the constructs generated in that context may not be comparable to those found in another situation. The research was conducted and reported as a series of case studies, each case presenting a unique view about a low achieving, passive student's interpretations about teacher behaviour. Whilst the study is small and not generalisable, it will provide insights into the behaviour of four subjects. Such insights may be of value to the participating teachers.

LeCompte & Goetz (1982) suggest that the researcher must identify the characteristics of the population to be investigated and detail criteria for selection
of participants and informants. Although ethnographic studies have difficulties translating to similar settings, this study has carefully designed data collection methods, made constant comparisons of findings, used self reflection and engaged in logical observation-based argument to increase the external validity.

Case Study

Case study methodology strongly supports the use of on-site observations and interview techniques (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993). The case study approach looks at an individual person or group of people. In this study, a case account has been made of each of the four students under investigation. The data and findings are unique to each individual student as the research is based on the subjective perceptions these particular students have of their teacher's behaviour. Further, even though the findings may be unique, having multiple cases allows the researcher to search across cases for patterns and similarities.

In summary, the methodology used to address the research questions is qualitative in nature. The researcher has employed the ethnographic techniques and case study techniques of fieldwork, observations, fieldnotes, video recordings and interviews. Ethnographic methods and case study methods are deemed to be appropriate for gathering the rich data necessary for addressing the research questions. Further, ethnographic methods and case study methods enables the researcher to look at the individual subjects separately and see them as discrete and allows for limited between-subjects analyses to be made.
Conclusion

A substantial amount of research indicates that there is a significant relationship between teacher expectations, teacher behaviour, and student behaviour. Past researchers have identified differential teacher behaviour toward both high achieving and low achieving students. Good's (1981) passivity model describes student passivity as being facilitated by student interpretation of teacher behaviour. Although previous studies have examined teacher expectancy effects on student achievement, little is known about how students interpret teacher behaviour (Good, 1993). Later studies (Babad, 1996; Witty & DeBaryshe, 1994) have emphasised the need for research to investigate student interpretations of teacher behaviour in the naturalistic classroom setting. The current study investigates student interpretations of teacher behaviour through observations and in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how passive students interpret teacher behaviour towards them.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides details of the sampling and techniques adopted to gather data and the methods used to analyse the data. Subjects were selected purposively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collection involved classroom observations from which fieldnotes and video-taped observations were made about the subjects and classroom teachers. Following each classroom observation, the researcher conducted audio-taped student-interviews and informal interviews with the classroom teachers from which notes were taken. The data, consisting of video-taped observations, fieldnotes, transcribed student-interviews and teacher-interview notes were then analysed following the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Sample

Purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) has been used to select four students from two Perth metropolitan schools. The year level of the children was specified at year five because by this stage, their cognitive development and language skills should allow them to communicate their thoughts and feelings to the researcher (Maltby, Gage & Berliner, 1995). Younger children would not possess the same interpretive skills and possible preadolescent reactions of older children may affect both reliability and validity.
Schools have been chosen from middle class socioeconomic areas to alleviate confounding variables such as special programs in elite or priority schools. Students needed to satisfy two criteria namely to be low achievers who also exhibited passive learning behaviours. Both criteria had to be met as low achievers are not necessarily passive learners, just as not all passive learners are low achievers. Low achieving students were identified by their classroom teachers by referring to classroom records. Students were selected whose classwork and test results were in the bottom 10%. The teacher also referred to anecdotal notes which described the student as having difficulties grasping concepts from the learning areas. These students also had to satisfy the criteria pertaining to passive behaviours derived from Good’s (1981) passivity model. As a benchmark, students were required to exhibit at least five passive behaviours from the following list derived from Good’s (1981) passivity model:

- Reluctant to respond when called on to do so.
- Seldom volunteers to answer questions.
- Avoids participating in academic interactions such as discussions.
- Seldom asks questions for clarification.
- Seldom asks questions for information.
- Seldom completes set work.
- Frequently off task or
- Appears to be on task but has not commenced or completed set work.
- Avoids eye contact when teacher is speaking to the class or the group they are in.
- Exhibits avoidance behaviours when the teacher approaches them such as: sharpening pencils, looking for work books, asking to go to the toilet, cannot find their pencil/ruler/book, has to borrow something.

One teacher volunteered to participate in the study from school A. Two students, one male and one female, were selected by this teacher as they were the only two students who satisfied the selection criteria. In school B, two teachers
volunteered to participate in the study. Each teacher selected two male students, as again these were the only students who satisfied the selection criteria. From this sample it was found that a student in one class was leaving part way through the study in one class and a student in the other class was an ESL (English as a Second Language) student. These students were not included in the study. Consequently, the students being observed in school B were in different classrooms. The sample thus consisted of one male student (David) and one female student (Emily) from the same class in school A; and two male students (Matthew and Jeremy) from different classes in school B.

The risk of the teacher over-facilitating participating subjects has been taken into consideration. During student interviews, the researcher asked the subjects questions which referred to the consistency and regularity of particular teacher behaviours towards them. Also, to avoid potential stigmatisation of the selected subjects, several students of differing abilities were interviewed, either before or after the participating students.

Procedure and Data Collection

The research approach involved:

- Classroom observations (Observation Schedules are shown in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2).
- Fieldnotes of all observations, video-taping of all observed lessons.
- Student interviews after each observation.
• Audio-tape recordings and transcripts of all student interviews.
• Informal interviews with participating classroom teachers.
• Notes recording teacher responses to interview questions.

Observations were made engaging the observer as participant (Burns, 1997) and fieldnotes and video-taped data were accumulated. The researcher was a participant in the sense that she became a familiar face in the classroom milieu. To become familiar with the students and gain their trust, the researcher visited the classes prior to data collection as a student teacher observing and video-taping classroom practice. This proved to be a successful strategy for preventing the video-taping itself from becoming an intrusive variable into the study (Hawthorne effect). The students in each classroom were given the opportunity to "perform" in front of the video camera prior to data collection and at various intervals during data collection. They were then given the opportunity to view recordings. This strategy seemed to be successful in satisfying their curiosity and need to perform in front of the camera.

Observations of the participating students in school A took place over four mornings, each of approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes duration. Thus, a total time of 5 hours and thirty minutes was spent observing each student. Mornings were chosen to conduct observations as this allowed the researcher to observe the students during a variety of lessons which included the introductory morning routine, language, mathematics, science and health education. It was felt that observing the students over a variety of lessons would generally provide a richer
source for student–teacher interaction than would a single-learning area scenario. The days for observation were chosen by both the researcher and classroom teacher to accommodate the schedules of the classroom and the school. The initial plan was to observe one student, David, for the first and third mornings and the second student, Emily, on the second and fourth mornings to alleviate researcher distraction. During the first observation of David, however, it became apparent that significant interactions were occurring between Emily and the classroom teacher. In light of this, the researcher remained alert to any interactions that occurred between the both participating subjects and the classroom teacher. These were recorded in the field notes. The observation schedule for School A is shown in table 3.1.

**Table 3.1** Observation Schedule – School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| David   | Thursday  | 8:45-11:30 | News
          | 5/11/98   |             | Language
          |           |             | Science     |
| Emily   | Friday    | 8:45-11:30 | Homework
          | 6/11/98   |             | Science     |
| David   | Thursday  | 8:45-11:30 | Language
          | 12/11/98  |             | Mathematics |
| Emily   | Thursday  | 8:45-11:30 | News
          | 19/11/98  |             | Health Education
          |           |             | Mathematics |
Observation times for students in school B were similar to those for the students in school A. As the students in school B were in different classes, each student was observed individually for two mornings for approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes. There were many interruptions to the teaching timetable at school B, so much so, that the second observation day for Jeremy was only 1 hour and 45 minutes in duration. The lack of observation time was compensated for by the fact that students were being observed individually, therefore, enabling the researcher to be attentive to all key events and interactions involving the participating students and classroom teachers. The observation schedule for School B is shown in table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Observation Schedule – School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8:45-11:30</td>
<td>Mental Maths,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17/11/98</td>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>8:45-11:30</td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23/11/98</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8:45-11:30</td>
<td>Mathematics,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24/11/98</td>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>8:45-10:30</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25/11/98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During interactions that occurred between the classroom teacher and the participating student, the researcher looked for teacher behaviours listed by Good (1981) and recorded how the student responded verbally and physically (body-
language and behaviour) to these teacher behaviours. While observing, the researcher noted key points and events for later use in the interviews. These observations were recorded as fieldnotes.

Fieldnotes included specific observations, referred to above, as well as reference to contextual factors. Contextual factors helped set the scene and provided the researcher with an understanding of the culture of the classroom (Wolcott, 1988). Contextual factors included:

- The physical layout of the classroom.
- Demographic information about the students and the classroom teacher.
- A general description of the lesson.
- Movement of the teacher around the classroom.
- Description of student's verbal responses, behaviour and body language.

The researcher used repetitive observation by video-taping all participants during observations. As there is much activity at any one time in a classroom, video-taping helped minimise the likelihood of the researcher missing vital events, utterances and behaviours. In this way, the researcher was able to optimise the observations of a single incident or of a variety of incidents. The video-tapes were used to review incidents that had been recorded in the fieldnotes and to review any which may have been missed. While reviewing incidents, particular attention was paid to body language and verbal expressions made by participating students and classroom teachers to help the researcher categorise teacher behaviour and student responses. Key points were also recorded to assist the researcher in questioning
the student in later interviews about the student's interpretations of teacher behaviour during significant participant-teacher events.

The interview was one of the most important research tools in this study as it was crucial in gathering data from participating students' interpretations of the teacher's behaviour towards them. Interviews employed a mixture of semi-structured and open-ended interview techniques and were conducted with the students immediately after each observation. A series of question prompts, found in Appendix A, had been formulated to act as a guide when interviewing each student. Open-ended questions asked of each interviewee were along the lines of, "why do you think the teacher ...?" or "how did you feel when the teacher...?". As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested, structuring interviews too tightly may prevent the researcher from absorbing and uncovering potentially relevant data while having no structure may yield data of little significance. Student responses to interview questions were usually in the form of expression of emotions, beliefs and reasoning, which demonstrated the student's interpretations of the teacher's behaviour. All interviews with students were audio-taped and transcribed. Transcriptions enabled the researcher to match the student's responses to teacher behaviour and events recorded in fieldnotes and matched with video footage from classroom observations. This facilitated the process of triangulation.

Informal interviews were conducted with the participating teachers to obtain a clear picture of events. Interview questions were open-ended: "how do you encourage (student's name) to participate?" or "can you tell me what you were
doing during the discussion on flowers?" Teacher responses came in the form of teaching strategies and beliefs about the intentions of their own behaviour towards the student concerned. Due to the demands and constraints placed on the teacher's available time, interviews needed to be casual, brief and impromptu. Before and after observations were completed each morning, the teacher would often voluntarily approach the researcher to discuss intentions behind certain teaching strategies, reasons for behaviours towards the student, beliefs about the student's emotional make-up and academic performance, and information about the student's family background.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed inductively following the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This procedure combines inductive behaviour-coding with simultaneous comparison of all incidents observed. Initial analysis of the data consisted of reading and re-reading field notes and teacher interview notes, watching video footage to find significant events, observing teacher behaviours and student responses that supported the field notes, listening to and transcribing audio-tapes, looking for patterns of teacher behaviours and concomitant student responses.

Raw data were then analysed carefully. Four computer files were created in Microsoft Word. These were titled using the students' pseudonyms: Case Study – Emily, Case Study – David, Case Study – Matthew and Case Study – Jeremy.
Incidents noted in the field notes that involved the participating student and the teacher were transferred to the appropriate file. The researcher studied all incidents to look for key teacher behaviours. Several key teacher behaviours were apparent which included questioning, providing feedback, behaviour management, teacher-student conversations and the degree of physical proximity. Incidents were then labeled into categories of key teacher behaviours by cutting and pasting incidents under the relevant heading in the appropriate case study file. As the incidents in each case study were analysed, the key teacher behaviours seemed to cluster in categories similar to the 4-factor categorisation described by Cooper (1979), namely socio-emotional climate, teacher messages, opportunities for student interactions and feedback. Key teacher behaviours were thus coded according to the 4-factor categorisation.

Fieldnotes were re-read to look for student reactions that related to the key teacher behaviours noted in the case study files. Student reactions were then matched with the key teacher behaviours noted in the case study file. Student reactions included body language, behaviour or verbal comments. The researcher re-read the field notes and student interview transcripts and matched these with related key teacher behaviours. The effect of this was that the researcher now had a case scenario for each student which included significant incidents, key teacher behaviours exhibited in each incident, the student's reaction to the teacher's behaviour and the student's responses and comments about the teacher's behaviour.
The researcher continued to read the intact field notes and student interview transcripts to ensure all incidents, key teacher behaviours, student responses and comments had been accounted for and sorted into the appropriate categories. This also enabled the researcher to keep a holistic picture in mind so that key teacher behaviours and student responses, together with comments, could not be taken out of context. Once key teacher behaviours had been categorised and matched with student responses a new file was created titled 'student interpretations'.

Student responses and comments for each student, recorded in the case study files, were copied and pasted to the student interpretations file under the appropriate student's name. Student interview transcripts were re-read to ensure all responses and comments relating to key teacher behaviours were accounted for. The researcher then re-read through the field notes and case study files to check for any key teacher behaviours that might have been missed so that these could be recorded in the case study files with the related student responses and comments. Some student responses and comments described incidents and key teacher behaviours that occurred outside observation sessions which were then recorded in the case study files. Each student's responses and comments described the student's interpretation of key teacher behaviour. The student's interpretations were than coded using phrases such as teacher likes me; teacher is demanding; teacher wants me to pretend; teacher thinks my work is wrong and teacher has no time for me. This procedure enabled the researcher to identify student interpretations of teacher behaviour. Codes were entered, using a different coloured font to enable easy identification, under each student response and
comment. While coding students' interpretations of teacher behaviour, a pattern began to emerge.

Students' interpretations of teacher behaviour seemed to form a pattern that linked with Cooper's (1979) description of teacher behaviours, namely socio-emotional climate, teacher messages, opportunities for student interaction, and feedback. The researcher then cut and pasted coded student interpretations into categories, using Cooper's descriptions of teacher behaviours as category headings. It became noticeable as the researcher recorded the data, that some student's interpretations clustered around one category while others clustered around two or more categories.

The final part of the data analysis entailed linking teacher interpretations of their own behaviour with the interpretation students had about the teacher's behaviour. The researcher was looking for evidence which demonstrated matches or mis-matches between student's interpretations of teacher behaviour and the teacher's interpretations of their own behaviour. Notes taken during informal teacher interviews were read and re-read. Comments the teacher made about certain classroom incidents involving the teacher and student, teaching strategies and behaviour management used, and beliefs about the student's abilities or emotional well-being were matched with incidents, teacher behaviours and student responses, and comments recorded in the case study files for the appropriate student. These teacher comments were then sorted, by copying and pasting, into the student interpretations file. Teacher comments described how the teachers
interpreted their own behaviour towards the participating students.

Summary

Employing ethnographic techniques collected much rich data. The inductive analysis of the data using the constant comparative method aided rigorous analysis of the data. During the analysis, a case scenario was developed for each child. As the data were analysed for each case, the data revealed students' interpretations of teacher behaviour and that these interpretations clustered in categories similar to the 4-factor categorisation described by Cooper (1979). Recording the teacher's interpretations of their own behaviour under the student's interpretations of the teacher's behaviour showed there were some matches and some gross mismatches between student's interpretations of teacher behaviour and teacher's interpretations of their own behaviour. These are discussed in the chapters which follow.
CHAPTER 4

Case Studies and Interpretation

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and interpretations of the data in the form of four individual case studies namely Emily, David, Matthew and Jeremy. The scene is set for each case by a description of contextual factors which include the physical features of the classroom and class size. In addition, a general description of the classroom teacher is provided as well as an outline of the teacher's beliefs and concerns about the student. Finally, the findings and interpretations have been presented for each subject.

Case Study 1 - Emily

Classroom

The class consisted of 32 students. There was a higher ratio of girls to boys. Students were seated in rows with the teacher's desk in a corner at the back of the classroom. Student's work was displayed on the limited pin up boards. Teams and scores for "Learn Ball" were written on a blackboard. The teacher used "Learn Ball" as a behaviour management tool and an incentive to take on responsibilities and complete work. A free standing basketball hoop stood in one corner of the classroom. Teams worked towards obtaining shot cards, which allowed students to
take a shot at getting a basketball in the hoop. Behaviours such as co-operation, being ready for the next lesson and completing homework earned students a shot card. The daily timetable was written on the blackboard.

**Teacher**

The classroom teacher, Mrs Jansen (pseudonym), was a mature-aged married female. Mrs Jansen talked about her own interest in children’s thinking and participation in their learning. Mrs Jansen described Emily as being a low achieving student who was reticent in participating during class/student discussions and who did not finish the work set in lessons or for homework. She seemed to think that Emily lacked the ability to concentrate. The teacher was also concerned with Emily’s low confidence and self-esteem. She also suggested that Emily’s low achievements were more to do with lack of ability, which compounded Emily’s low confidence and low self-esteem. Mrs Jansen believed that she could help Emily build her confidence and self-esteem by taking the time to talk to her on a personal level. She felt that she encouraged Emily to participate by choosing Emily to answer questions and calling Emily’s name when Emily did not appear to be paying attention. Students also had some contact with a relief teacher during the researcher’s observation times.

**Emily**

Emily, was a 10-year-old girl in year 5, who had a happy disposition and was a polite and friendly student. She came from a family of four: mother, father
and an older sister in year eight. She was in a class of 32 students and sat in the second row from the front of the classroom next to her friend. Emily liked her teacher and felt the teacher liked her. Emily made several comments during student interviews, which suggested that she interpreted that the teacher liked her.

"Oh ... I'm not being the greatest person in the class or anything but like she usually umm she usually talks to me after school and sometimes like I brang in a rose for her last time and umm she just like umm I'm her pet ... likes she's really nice and my mum really likes her. Like she's the best teacher I've had."

"Sometimes I just have a little talk with her. I like when - we had this project to do ... the fruit and vege. I was the only one that said like after school I said, 'Oh I like ... I enjoy doing this project and then she goes, 'Oh that's the music of teacher's ears.

"And then she was talking to me and all that. She's really nice. I get along with her."

Emily saw the teacher's acceptance of the compliment she gave, as the teacher showing that she liked Emily. It was important to Emily that the teacher talked to her personally. This behaviour towards Emily confirmed, in Emily's mind, that the teacher likes her. While Emily was being interviewed, she made some comments about another student in the class who was always being reprimanded for fiddling or doing something wrong. Emily said, "But the teacher likes him still. Like like when he's coming back from PEAC and stuff and he says hello to the teacher and she says hello." This comment supported Emily's belief that when the teacher acknowledges what students say and speaks to them personally it means that the teacher likes them.

During class time, Emily tended to sit quietly. She would look at whoever was talking, either the teacher or a student, during questioning, discussions and
instructions. She would often rest her elbows on the desk with her chin cupped in her hands or lean to one side with her cheek resting on her fist. Sometimes she would look away and stare. At other times, Emily would fiddle with her hands or an object. When asked what the teacher did when she was staring away, Emily made a comment “I’m sometimes looking away but still listening the teacher calls my name.”

Emily was further questioned as to why the teacher calls her name at other times. She seemed to think “... because she wants me to look toward the board” or “... because she thinks I am not listening.” Emily feels that by the teacher calling her name, the teacher wanted her to listen and show that she was listening by looking at the board. Mrs Jansen had explained in prior conversations that she would call to Emily to encourage her to participate in discussions and question answering. Apparently Emily had missed this message the teacher was trying to convey.

An incident arose during one of the observation sessions that demonstrated how the teacher behaved towards Emily when she did not complete her work. Homework relating to a science activity required the students to complete an activity sheet and to collect and label the parts of various flowers. Emily, David and another boy in the class had not finished their homework. Mrs Jansen asked the students who had not completed their homework to stand up. David and the other boy stood up, however, Emily did not stand. Mrs Jansen spoke in a loud and firm voice to the boys. She seemed rather cross as she was frowning and had her
hands on her hips. During this time Emily was looking away, staring at the wall. The students who had not completed their homework worked on the activity while the rest of the class held a discussion about flowers that had been collected. Emily was still staring at the wall when the teacher called her name and asked if she was listening. Emily sat there quietly. After a while Mrs Jansen asked "Emily, did you get any flowers on your sheet?" Emily replied in a quiet voice, "No, I forgot." Mrs Jansen then asked Emily, in a calm voice, to get some for Monday because they needed it for their science books.

The teacher's behaviour towards Emily seemed contrary to how she behaved towards David and the other boy who had forgotten their homework. In a following interview Emily was asked why Mrs Jansen had growled at David and the other boy and not at her. At first she answered "Oh umm she sometimes gets us to do it like on Monday ... because lately I've been busy." and "... but it was raining yesterday." These were reasons for not completing her homework that Emily felt Mrs Jansen accepted. Emily was further questioned and answered "Maybe because I didn't stand up." Probed again, Emily started to sound a little confused "Umm because didn't stand up ... I don't know." The inconsistency of the teacher's behaviour seemed to confuse Emily. It appeared that the teacher had not noticed that Emily had not completed her homework initially and because of that, the teacher had not reacted towards Emily in the same way she had towards the other students who had not completed their homework. When the teacher was asked about this incident she seemed to feel that if Emily was reprimanded it might discourage her since Emily had tried to do some of the homework. From the
above incidents, it seems that Emily has interpreted the teacher’s behaviour to her own advantage. That is, she sees the teacher as not noticing her when she does not stand up and therefore does not get into trouble for not completing her homework. Instead of feeling encouraged to do her homework, Emily may be seeing this as a way of getting out of doing her homework without getting into trouble.

Emily usually sat quietly during class discussions and teacher questioning, though sometimes she would raise her hand. While making observations during various lessons, it was noted that the teacher behaved in different ways when calling on students and replying to answers. On one occasion, when the teacher was asking students questions, Emily sat quietly and did not put her hand up. She seemed to be observing what was going on as she looked at whoever was talking or answering questions. The teacher then called to Emily after asking a question. When asked why the teacher may have done this Emily replied “so that you have to think and try to work out the answer.” Here Emily sees the teacher’s behaviour as trying to get her to participate, which is in accordance with what Mrs Jansen had said in earlier conversations with the researcher.

Sometimes Emily would have her hand up and the teacher would not choose her to answer a question. Emily seemed to think the teacher did this because there were too many people wanting to answer the question. When the researcher asked “I noticed that at other times when you have your hand up the teacher does not pick you. Why do you think she does that?” Emily replied “Oh ...because there are too many (students).” This suggested that if there were many students wanting
to answer questions the teacher would ignore her. The teacher’s behaviour seemed to say to Emily that she was not important enough (or not good enough) to answer questions. When Emily was given the opportunity to answer a question the teacher would reply in different ways, then carry on explaining about the topic in question. Emily was asked how she knew the teacher was pleased with her answer about where the pistil was in the discussion about flowers. “Oh she says ‘Oh that’s a good answer’ or she usually says umm umm ‘Yes that’s the right answer’. She usually says ‘Yes’ then talks about it to us all or says ‘that’s right’.” An affirmative action by the teacher conveys a message of being pleased with the answer Emily has given.

Emily was further questioned and cited a particular instance when the teacher said ‘yes’ to an incorrect answer that Emily gave and then corrected her. Emily described the teacher’s behaviour as, “She goes yeeaaah but something different.” When asked why she thought the teacher said that Emily explained, “Umm so I won’t have to umm ...Oh cause she wanted to get on with the activity.” It was found during observations that very little wait time was allowed by the teacher for the student to correct or re-think her answer. Often another student was picked to answer the question. The following extract typifies how the teacher behaved towards Emily in that situation and how Emily interpreted the teacher’s behaviour.

Q: And sometimes does she wait for you to get the right answer?
A: Umm yes sometimes or sometimes she just picks someone else.
Q: And why do you think she picks someone else?
A: Just to make time go quicker...She probably want us to get the answer quickly.
Q: And why do you think she wants you to get the answer quickly?
A: So we won't take up all her time.

The observations of the teacher's behaviour and Emily's comments about the teacher's behaviour suggests that Emily interprets that the teacher does not have time to help her and will not spend time to help her. Mrs Jansen, from later conversations, seemed to believe that picking up the pace of discussions by randomly selecting students to respond to questions would enable students to stay focused and not lose interest in the task or discussion.

During one of the observations, a relief teacher took the class for a health lesson. The objective of the lesson was to discuss aspects of boat safety. The students, including Emily, showed much enthusiasm and interest. Emily was eager to answer questions and was given numerous opportunities to answer them by the relief teacher. Emily's reason as to why the relief teacher chose her to answer the question so many times was, "Oh, because I was putting my hand up a lot and I knew about it and probably not much people put their hands up." Even though Emily had a different teacher in this case, she still believed that her answers were only important because there were not many other students to choose from.

Emily described the classroom teacher as being a good teacher and appreciated how the teacher made activities 'really fun'. When asked why the teacher was more fun than other teachers Emily provided some examples. "Oh well if we get our sports shirts on and like if our group for sport gets the most
shirts like for our sports shirts she gives us a lolly." Emily seemed to interpret this as meaning, if you are good you will get good things. Another instance Emily described was, "...we go down to the oval and play sport and whoever wins gets a lolly." Emily interpreted the teacher's behaviour as saying you will be rewarded if you are a winner. Later in the interview, Emily gave another example of why she thought Mrs Jansen was a good teacher.

_A:_ "When we were playing down there I slipped and got these really nasty cuts on me and also it was only on the grass there was no sticks or anything there and I got this really bad cut and we didn't know what it was from umm then umm I went and got an ice-pak with my friend then she goes 'Emily would you like to join in or would you like to just sit there' and then I wanted to try and join in and then she asked everyone to clap(giggles) and then I got embarrassed (giggles)."

_Q:_ Why do you think she got everyone to clap for you?
_A:_ Probably wanted me to play and that ... instead of sitting there.

Emily's recounting of the event suggested that she saw the teacher's behaviour as encouraging. Emily's interpretation of the teacher's behaviour was in accordance with the belief the teacher had about the message she wanted to convey to Emily.

Emily interpreted that the classroom teacher liked her. It seems the teacher has created a positive socio-emotional climate (Cooper, 1979) for Emily. According to Rosenthal (cited in Cooper, 1979) a positive socio-emotional climate encourages students who are usually high achievers, participate in learning and continue achieving high academic results. In Emily's case, her classroom teacher Mrs Jansen, has been successful in creating a positive socio-emotional climate for
Emily. Mrs Jansen achieved this by talking to Emily on a personal level and by making affirmative comments such as ‘yes’ to Emily’s responses in class discussions. It seems, however, that Emily only participates in learning when she chooses to please Mrs Jansen. Emily also uses the positive relationship with her teacher to manipulate the teacher’s behaviour to her own advantage (i.e. not being reprimanded for having her homework incomplete).

The discourse suggests that Emily interpreted certain teacher messages (Cooper, 1979) about the way Emily should behave, the teacher’s value of Emily’s abilities and the degree to which the teacher saw Emily as important. The messages that Emily interpreted seem to indicate that the classroom teacher requires Emily to look and listen but there seems to be no urge to participate. Further, Emily interpreted that the teacher did not consider her contributions to class discussions as important as other students’ contributions. Also, Emily seems to interpret the classroom teacher as not regarding her as being important or significant. Although Emily interprets the teacher’s behaviour as positive in some instances, Emily’s negative interpretations seem to prevail, and so her passive behaviour persists.

**Case Study 2 - David**

**Classroom and Teacher**

David was in the same class as Emily. Initially he was seated at the end of
the back row next to his friend. Later he was moved to the second row, a few seats away from Emily. The teacher explained to David that the move was not a punishment but a solution to the problems his friend caused by talking to him. Mrs Jansen said the problems were that David was not able to concentrate on lessons and complete his work with his friend talking to him. The teacher described David as being a low achiever that needed to put more effort into his work. She used the words “lazy” and “unenthusiastic” to describe his attitude towards school and school work. While chatting casually, Mrs Jansen said that she did not know how to enthuse him. She had tried “all sorts of things” without success. Mrs Jansen made the comment that she found it easier to motivate and encourage Emily. She found she was exhausted with trying to find ways to get David to participate. Lately, she had been working on taking a personal interest in David by asking about his weekend and yachting.

David

David is a 10-year-old year five student who comes from a family of four - mum, dad and older brother in year 8. He seemed very laid back and casual in his manner, talked in a monotonous voice, and tended to slouch in his chair or fiddle with his ponytail. His face seemed to lack expression, which gave the impression that he was not interested in anything that was being said or that was going on. The only activities he liked were watching television, playing the Sony Playstation and yachting. David belonged to a junior yacht club with his brother, and his father had bought them their own yacht. Yachting was his only hobby/interest, however, as it is a weekend event, his free time during the week was spent in front
of the television or Playstation.

During the first observation, David was moved away from sitting next to his friend where he had only been seated for a couple of days. Mrs Jansen explained that morning to David that she was not punishing him, however, he could not sit next to his friend because his friend was distracting him and preventing him from getting his work done. She said that he would be monitored to see how he worked, then could try sitting next to a friend again. This conversation took place away from the other students with the researcher present. Later, when David was interviewed, the reason he gave for Mrs Jansen moving him was "coz, we weren't getting our work done." David’s interpretation of the teacher’s behaviour seemed to match the reason that the teacher gave for moving him away from his friend, however, when asked how he felt about the move he replied, "oh well. I don't really care. Cause she won't move us back." This seemed to suggest David felt the teacher’s behaviour as being final and no second chances would be given.

As a result of further questioning, David reasoned, "because like we weren't getting our work done. We were just talking more than getting our work done, we weren't like rushing it." This comment brought a new perspective about the teacher’s behaviour. The teacher’s behaviour seemed to suggest to David that there was an emphasis on the time involved in getting his work completed. Conversely, though, such thinking on the part of David may have reflected his way of expressing ideas (i.e. ‘not rushing it’ may be idiomatic for applying oneself properly). It seems, however, that the reason David gave for not completing his
work was because of his talking rather than the care in which he took to complete his work. The message, according to David's interpretation of the teacher's behaviour seemed to suggest that the quality and thought that went into David's work was not as important as the time in which he completed it. The effect of this message could be seen in the way David refrained from contributing ideas to class discussions. David's interpretation of the teacher's behaviour did not match with Mrs Jansen's belief, that she was encouraging him to put more effort into his classwork.

It was noticed that during 'news telling' David was extremely preoccupied, constantly fiddling with his ponytail, tying and untying it. The teacher called out "David are you awake?" David was asked about this incident and could not remember it. He was asked if the teacher called out to him at other times which he could remember. David replied, "Well umm if I'm not paying attention." His reason for her calling to him was "Oh so I'm listening." David felt that when the teacher called out to him she wanted him to listen. Mrs Jansen had said, during an interview, that she would try to get David to pay attention during 'news telling' as she wanted to encourage him to participate in 'news telling' and feel that he had interesting news to share with the class. David's responses to questions about 'news telling' seem to indicate his interpretation of the teacher's behaviour does not match the teacher's interpretation of her own behaviour in that she wanted David to participate verbally and David thought she just wanted him to listen to the other students' news.
David was one of the children who was spoken to by the teacher for not finishing the set homework. Mrs Jansen seemed very angry, speaking in a loud voice and telling them to stand up. She then said how it was the children’s responsibility to ensure their homework was completed and that if anybody had problems with the homework they should have asked her for help. The teacher did not accept any excuses given by the students and promptly wrote the students’ names on the board. The students, including David, were told to complete their homework over the weekend. David was asked, during an interview, why the teacher expected him to do all his homework. His reply was, “uhh, well cause she just asks us to do homework.” When asked if he knew the reason for having to do his homework, he replied shrugging his shoulders, “ohh, no.” David sees the teacher’s behaviour concerning the homework incident as a demand and one which has no intrinsic value associated with it.

Further questioning pushed his thoughts about why the teacher asked him to stand up in class and why she had been so angry. According to David, the teacher made him stand up because “Yeah so yeah like because she put our names on the board. That means we got to finish it.” This seems to suggest that David sees the teacher’s behaviour as another demand. When asked why she was so angry he replied, “ummm because lots of people normally forget,” “because no-one went and asked her how to do the work and everyone was saying they didn’t understand.” David interpreted that the teacher gets angry when students do not do as they are told, however, when asked why the teacher got angry David shrugged and said “oh I don’t know.” This comment seemed confusing, as it is
not clear whether David could not be bothered answering the question or if he saw himself as separate from the other students. After some wait time and further questions, David still replied that he did not know. This line of questioning led to David sharing his feelings about news telling. "Oh I hate news like cause you have to do new, it's annoying." When asked why he replied, "because I haven't got anything interesting to say." He was asked why Mrs Jansen made him tell news. After a pause David shrugged and said, "I'm not sure, she just makes everyone tell news." Here again, David sees the teacher's behaviour as being demanding and as initiating a task which for David, seems to have little or no relevance.

There were several instances during discussions and questioning for which David either put his hand up then down or leaned on his elbow with his finger in the air. During these sessions, the teacher often did not choose David to answer the questions. Perhaps such body language was deliberate in an attempt not to be chosen to answer. An extract from the interview reveals precisely such reasoning.

Q: How come you only put your finger up?
A: Oh I don't know. I just don't wanna. I don't like answering questions.
Q: Oh that's interesting. You don't like answering questions but then you put your finger up. What do you think putting your finger up will do for you?
A: Umm, cause she asks questions and she said put your hand up it you got whatever she asked the question about but I don't want to like ... I don't want her to ask me anything. I hate umm answering questions cause it makes me think.
Q: When you go like that (putting my finger up) it looks like you want to answer the questions. Are there some questions you want to answer?
A: Not really. She'll tell us off if you don't answer a ..or like... any
questions during the lesson.

Q: Oh I see.
A: Cause she wants us to make it look like we are interested when we're not.

Q: That's interesting, very interesting and umm if she doesn't pick you but she's picking other people, what are you thinking then?
A: I don't care. I'm happy.

These comments are significant as Mrs Jansen had made a point of explaining how she encouraged students to answer questions by waiting or asking them to put up their hands to have a go. After asking a question, Mrs Jansen would wait until most students had their hands up, she would then verbally encourage David to put his hand up. David possibly interpreted the teacher's behaviour as meaning, 'if you put your hand up I'll know you are interested but you do not have to participate in the discussion'.

It was noted that Mrs Jansen often did not move around the classroom to check students' work. Mrs Jansen had made comments during informal interviews that she tended to ask students to come to her desk for help or sometimes she would move around on her typist's chair to see students as she had back problems. According to David the work she checked individually was mathematics, however, he came up with an interesting observation about the teacher's use of the typist's chair.

"Well usually during maths she like yeah, cause she can't really be bothered walking so she slides around about in that wheel chair and comes up and looks at the work."

David saw the teacher's use of the typist's chair as being lazy. This was an
interesting comment as David also categorised himself as being lazy which seems to indicate his feelings about the teacher’s behaviour, ‘if you can be lazy so can I’.

Mrs Jansen would also invite students to ask her for help. David was aware of this, however, he chose not to ask for help. On occasions, he preferred to ask Robert.

Q: And does she sometimes come and see if you need help?
A: Oh no most people just go up and tell her if you need help.
Q: And do you?
A: Umm Sometimes.
Q: What do you do if you’ve got a problem?
A: Well I just I don’t normally go up. I just ask Robert cause he’s like really smart. Like he makes it really easy to find out the answer although he doesn’t like probably tell you he just explains it real good.

David was able to understand Robert’s explanation more easily than the teacher’s. As Maheady (1998) suggested, children are powerful instructional resources. David seemed to feel that the teacher’s explanations were inadequate or incomprehensible. This made it necessary to observe the teacher’s explanations more closely. While watching re-runs of the video it became apparent that the teacher would stand close to the student to whom she was explaining a concept, about a foot away and talk face-to-face with the student in a very loud voice. If the student did not understand, she would talk louder and ask something like ‘now do you understand?’ or ‘understand?’ Robert, however, explained quietly while sitting next to David. Though David would not comment any further on the teacher’s behaviour, it seems as if he felt intimidated during her explanation. This
finding not only supports the notion of peer tutoring in the classroom but implies positive outcomes for the use of peer tutoring in helping minimise passive behaviours in students.

It seems that the teacher's behaviour conveyed certain teacher messages (Cooper, 1979) to David. David's interpretations of these teacher messages were different to the teacher's intended message. It seems that David interpreted the teacher's behaviour to his own advantage, for instance, he developed a way of 'keeping the teacher happy' by putting his finger up in the air when she was asking questions while being able to avoid participating in a discussion. It seems that, because of the teacher's behaviour, David found Mrs Jansen's feedback about his learning inadequate. Subsequently, David resorted to asking for feedback from a friend. Classroom observations suggest that Mrs Jansen responded to this in a negative way, as she was unaware of the nature of David's and his friend's conversation, thus further limiting David's participation in learning. Interviews with Mrs Jansen indicate that she chose to act and behave in a way that would encourage David to participate in his learning, however, David did not interpret her behaviour that way.

Data indicates that David's interpretations of the teacher's behaviour are based on the teacher messages he receives which imply that quality and effort in David's schoolwork is not important, that he must do things because the teacher says to and about the way he should behave. Further, the interpretations David has about the teacher's behaviour form a model of behaviour for David to copy. In
David’s mind the teacher exhibits lazy behaviours, therefore, David believes that he can be lazy. The interpretations that David has of the teacher’s behaviour do not support active learning, on the contrary, David’s interpretations of the teacher’s behaviour sustain passive behaviour.

Case Study 3 - Matthew

Classroom

There were 35 students in Matthew’s class, seated in groups of 4 – 6. The students chose their own group members, which they seemed to accomplish with minimum fuss. Pinup boards which were small and few, were covered with student’s work with student’s projects hanging on lines strung across the ceiling of the classroom. The school’s emphasis was on student achievement and excellence. Each year students from all year levels were tested in English and mathematics learning areas with the highest achievers being given awards.

Teacher

Mrs Mason (pseudonym) is an energetic person who always smiled and was welcoming and friendly in her manner. She was a mother of two teenage children and had a vibrant attitude towards life and teaching. Matthew was a particular worry for her. She described him as being “off with the fairies.” She said that Matthew came from a disturbed background, his mother was a schizophrenic and his father worked away at the mines, so Matthew and his younger brother were
often "rescued" by their grandparents. Mrs Mason explained that Matthew's mother would not take her medication when the husband was away working. This caused extreme problems where the grandparents felt obligated to intervene and take the children away. The teacher had grave concerns about Matthew. According to Mrs Mason, Matthew rarely put his hand up to answer questions or participated in class discussions. He would often not be aware of what was happening in class and tended to be overly quiet. Mrs Mason saw herself as a nurturing person who cared about her students. She described herself as a warm-fuzzy person who had a habit of showing that she cared about her students by ruffling their hair or patting them on the shoulder. Students also had contact with a student teacher and the deputy principal who came in to assist the teacher so that small-group or individual work could be conducted with lower ability students.

Matthew

Matthew appeared to be a quiet child who would often commence his work late. He was a rather awkwardly built boy who had long limbs and wore glasses. Matthew sat with his friends in a group of four. His seat was situated at the front corner of the classroom away from the teacher's desk. He seemed quite comfortable in his group and commented in a later interview that he liked being in a group with his friends.

During the first observation, it was noticed that Matthew did not contribute to class discussions or volunteer to answer questions very often. He would be
either looking down at his work or desk. At other times, he would be talking to the student seated next to him. His attention would wander from what he was doing to looking up every now and then to whoever was talking to the class. When interviewed, Matthew was asked whether he was asked to answer questions and indicated that he was rarely chosen. "Rarely ever. I rarely get picked. I sometimes get picked but rarely ever." This comment seemed to contradict the teacher’s concerns about Matthew not participating and rarely raising his hand during discussions as Mrs Mason would try to encourage him to answer questions. Mrs Mason would often have to call on Matthew to answer questions as he rarely volunteered by raising his hand. When asked why he thought the teacher did not pick him, Matthew was unsure. When asked if he raised his hand to indicate that he wanted to answer a question, Matthew was sure about the fact that he had put his hand up and felt that he was unable to do anything to get the teacher to choose him. He said "yeah, I have my hand up ... umm not upset but well I like to answer questions but if I don’t there’s nothing really I can do about it so just umm I usually get missed out and I wished I’d get chosen."

When interviewed, Matthew felt that the teacher did not choose him because she either did not see him or there were too many other children to choose from. He reasoned "maybe because she doesn’t see me or there’s quite a few other kids that put their hands up." It seems that Matthew interpreted the teacher’s behaviour as meaning he is not noticeable – a case of the invisible child. While students were getting ready for mental maths, the classroom teacher was very prompt in going over to Matthew when he needed help. She then stopped to help
the student next to him. When Matthew was asked if he found it easy to get help from the teacher, he said that it was sometimes easy and sometimes hard.

"Sometimes, sometimes when they are helping other kids they go right 'round the classroom. You have to wait for quite a long time."

When asked why the teacher did this he replied, "because there's quite a few people that need help." Matthew's reasons for the teacher's behaviour seem to indicate that he believes he is not very important, or perhaps he was being realistic about the amount of teacher attention he could get in a whole class situation. Matthew was then asked about an incident where he answered a question correctly but used a different word to what the teacher expected. The teacher went on to ask another student to get the correct word. Matthew reasoned that this was because the other students wanted a turn. Again, Matthew's response suggested that he interpreted the teacher as giving preference to other students and leaving him out.

It was noted during observations, and agreed to by the teacher, that she believed in contact reinforcement and being in close proximity to the students. Contact reinforcement meant, ruffling their hair, resting her hand on their shoulder or patting them on the back. Asked if she did that all the time Matthew responded, "ummm yep." He was asked why he felt the teacher did that and Matthew explained that it was "like you've done something right." Matthew conjectured that the teacher would initiate physical contact when someone had done something right. Although the teacher often was physically close to the students, Matthew felt that
she did not do this often with him. This seemed to suggest that her behaviour
towards him told him that either he himself, his efforts, or his behaviour were not
acceptable. Initial classroom observations confirmed his answer, as it was noticed
that the teacher did not have as much physical contact with him as she did with the
other students. In later observations, however, it was noted that the teacher gave
Matthew the same contact reinforcement as she did with other students in the
class. Mrs Mason said that she tried to pay particular attention to Matthew because
of his tragic family circumstances. She felt that he needed extra nurturing and
emotional support. Yet, there was evidence that she gave him less attention early
in the study.

During a language lesson, Mrs Mason explained to the class the marking
criteria for assessing a narrative recount the students had been working on. After
the lesson, Mrs Mason showed me her student records file. Much of the students'
work had marking criteria. All criteria had detailed feedback of what the students
had done well and what needed improving. Matthew was asked how the teacher
usually marked his work and provided a rather surprising answer. "Oh, they just
check it then they write their signature and give it one tick." His answer seemed
confusing to the researcher, as it contradicted the assessment practices witnessed
in the classroom. Pursuing this interpretation Matthew had about the teacher's
assessment behaviours he was asked what he thought the teacher should do.
Matthew commented that the teacher should give more feedback by indicating
what students get wrong and what they get right. When asked why he thought the
teacher just ticked and signed his work he replied, "cause it's easy, there's lots of"
"kinds to mark." The idea that he seemed to get lost among the children arose again. It seems that Matthew has decided to interpret the teacher's behaviour as being neglectful and non-accepting of him. His interpretation seems to pervade his perceptions of much behaviour exhibited by the classroom teacher.

While the teacher was going through the narrative for the recount, Matthew was either talking to the student next to him or staring into the air. The teacher called out, "Matthew are you all right?" as she was concerned that he might not have understood what was being said. Matthew said that she called to him because "... I was day dreaming." Rather than seeing the teacher's comment as an invitation to ask for clarification, he was perhaps employing an effective strategy to gain attention.

Mr Offer (pseudonym), the deputy principal, was quite an enigma. He had a support role in the school, helping teachers with student remediation or extension of students' abilities. When he entered the classroom, everyone noticed his presence. Mr Offer greeted the class with a cheerful voice in French. French was the 'Language Other Than English' taught in the school. He asked the classroom teacher where he could sit. Mrs Mason pointed to a bench at the back of the classroom. Sitting down he said with a grin, "I'm getting my knives sharpened for my very special student." This was directed at Matthew. Matthew looked up in Mr Offer's direction, grinned and pretended to duck for cover. It seemed that Matthew enjoyed this exchange of witticism. Mrs Mason walked across to Matthew, leaned over him (as she did with the other students) and spoke seriously
and firmly to him about not having his ten spelling words written. Matthew had a sheepish grin on his face. Mr Offer called Matthew to his bench "Matthew Roberts get your roller skates on." Matthew's work on his narrative was then discussed. When Mr Offer finished talking to Matthew, he made a joke about not having to yell at Matthew for having incomplete work. As Matthew was grinning and walking back to his seat, Mr Offer commented on how well Matthew had worked on his narrative.

During the interview, Matthew was asked about why Mr Offer came to the class and what he thought about Mr Offer's behaviour towards him. Matthew explained that Mr Offer was the Deputy Principal and that he helped some of the students because the teachers could not get around to all the students all the time. Mr Offer's role, in Matthew's classroom, was to take the special group, which consisted of students who could not spell very well. Matthew described Mr Offer as "... funny, sometimes most of the time he's grouchy." Matthew's reason for Mr Offer being grouchy was "... when we make a lot of easy spelling mistakes that really puts him in a grouchy mood." Matthew was then asked about the initial comment Mr Offer made to him about the knives for his special friend. Matthew explained that "oh, cause I'm not a very good speller and he usually tells me off for making all the mistakes but I didn't make many mistakes so he umm just said that."

Matthew seemed to interpret Mr Offer's comments about knives and hurrying up as angry statements as was revealed in subsequent conversations with
Matthew. Mr Offer’s behaviour seemed to suggest that he gets angry with people who make mistakes. When asked why Mr Offer told him off for making mistakes he replied, “He doesn’t actually tell us off but he yells at us, I don’t know why but he just does.” Matthew seemed confused with the understanding he had about Mr Offer’s role, being someone who is there to help, and Mr Offer’s behaviour, which suggested anger.

Initially, it appeared that Matthew interpreted Mr Offer’s behaviour as funny and friendly. Matthew’s body language suggested that Mr Offer had an amicable relationship with him. The comments Matthew made during the interview, however, suggested the opposite. There seemed to be some confusion for Matthew about his actual response to Mr Offer’s behaviour which was different to his desired response to Mr Offer’s behaviour. Whether Matthew’s family background is a factor that can affect Matthew’s interpretations of people’s behaviour and happenings around him is unclear.

Matthew’s perceptions have many mis-interpretations about the classroom teacher’s intended behaviour. According to Matthew, the teacher has created a negative socio-emotional climate through behaving in a way that tells him that his work or he himself are not acceptable. Matthew felt ignored and rejected by his teacher from the messages and feedback he received from the teacher. He felt that he did not get the same opportunity to interact in classroom activities as other students. Classroom observations and interviews with his teacher, however, confirmed that Mrs Mason tries to make Matthew feel wanted and accepted. The
way in which Matthew interpreted the teacher’s behaviour was often unrealistic, for example, Matthew thought the teacher just ticked and signed his work when in fact she provided him with a detailed marking criteria. Reasons for this are unclear, however, the way in which Matthew sees people and the world around him could be attributed to the unstable family circumstances in which he is being raised. It may also be attributed to inattentiveness or disinterest.

Case Study 4 - Jeremy

Classroom

Jeremy attended the same school as Matthew. In this class of 33 students, Jeremy was seated in the middle of the front row. The classroom had very limited space to display student’s work. What little space was available was taken up with photographs for the school newspaper. Students’ schoolbooks were stored on shelves at the back of the classroom rather than in their drawers and desks. The teacher organised this because he believed that the students could not be left the responsibility of looking after their own books. The teacher’s desk was situated at the front of the classroom in the corner near the door. The classroom schedule was interrupted on numerous occasions, more so than in Matthew’s classroom. Much of the time was taken up by testing for the Dux of the class award and contributing to the school newspaper.
Teacher

Mr Davies (pseudonym) was a single male teacher in his forties. He was a tall man who spoke with a loud voice who would joke with the students although much of the time the students did not know what he was joking about. They would have a confused look on their faces and shrug their shoulders at many of Mr Davies' jokes. Mr Davies was eager to be involved with the children and the school, however, he seemed to get bothered when several things were happening at once. The school newspaper was a major source of worry as the deadline for the paper, marking of student's projects and the testing for the Dux award, were all happening simultaneously. He said that he had been “up till all hours of the morning trying to get on top”. Mr Davies believed that the students in his class were dis-organised and required a definite structure. He organised the storage of their schoolbooks in class and made sure they remembered things by following up with reminders. Mr Davies described Jeremy as being inattentive and said that he ‘loses him’. Mr Davies explained that Jeremy would often ‘drift off’ and lacked attention in class. He would try to get Jeremy to participate in classroom activities and concentrate on what was happening by calling on him to answer questions.

Jeremy

Jeremy was a ten-year-old boy in year five. His birthday was towards the end of the year. He was slightly built and looked younger than his age. Jeremy came from a family of four: mum, dad and an older brother in year seven. Jeremy tended to sit quietly during lessons and often fidgeted with his fingers, mouth, ruler or pencils.
While the researcher was interviewing Jeremy, a group of students were taking a test. When asked why he did not have to take the test, Jeremy said "cause we're in this reading group that Mr Davies wants us to do all this stuff" (referring to the reading his group had to do). "He doesn't want us to do really hard stuff cause we're not good at stuff. Like we're not very good at some hard stuff cause he's giving out really hard work for the extension group." It seems that Jeremy saw Mr Davies as categorising him as someone who was not as good at doing schoolwork as the other students. Another message that seemed to come through was that students only get to do things if they are good at doing them.

Jeremy referred to the group he was in as "Mr Davies' group" and the other group as "the extension group". Mr Offer, the Deputy Principal, would come in to help with the groups during language lessons, as he did in Matthew's class. In Mr Davies' class, Mr Offer would take the extension group while Mr Davies took Jeremy's group. Jeremy explained that "...when Mr Offer came in umm Mr Davies said 'Can my reading group come out' and we came out and he gave us this sheet and he explained it to us and then when we got back, the class dun it. So he told us first." When asked why Mr Davies took their group out separately he replied, "cause we're just like ahh another group." Jeremy looked a bit confused at the question. He then clarified that both groups were doing the same work, however, their group was taken out to get a head start. This caused a misunderstanding in the conversation so Jeremy explained that "sometimes we don't really get (understand) much things you know like you know what to do."
Jeremy appeared to be indicating that this treatment made him different from the others in that his ability to learn and understand things was less than that of the students in Mr Offer's group.

Jeremy has been seated at the back of the class in previous terms. This term Mr Davies moved Jeremy to sit in the middle of the front row. When asked why Mr Davies had sat him at the front of the class, Jeremy initially said that he did not know. After some wait time he said, “I dunno ... just to see the board better”. Mr Davies had actually sat Jeremy at the front of the classroom so he would concentrate on his schoolwork, however, Jeremy did not see the agenda pertaining to Mr Davies’ actions. Mr Davies often ‘taught’ from the front of the classroom in a typically traditional teaching style. He would stand in the middle at the front of the classroom where Jeremy was seated and would rest his foot on the desk. The only reason Jeremy could think of for this kind of behaviour was to “oh umm rest his leg.” This used to annoy Jeremy as sometimes Mr Davies would move his foot and knock over the books and pencils on his desk. In later conversations, Mr Davies seemed unaware that he was resting his foot on Jeremy’s desk. Jeremy did not like the way Mr Davies took no notice of the inconvenience this behaviour was causing him. Mr Davies’ behaviour seemed to indicate to Jeremy that his feelings could be discounted.

Mr Davies would often ask questions directly of Jeremy when discussing topics or answers in class. When asked why, Jeremy answered, “I dunno he just asks me .. he always asks me.” After further questioning Jeremy said “ohh to see
If I'm learning." Mr Davies would also keep a check on Jeremy's work by having a look over Jeremy's shoulder or walking past Jeremy's desk. Jeremy said that Mr Davies did that to see if the work he had done was correct. Jeremy seemed to believe that Mr Davies wanted him to learn and this meant getting things right. Mr Davies would also attend to students needing help and according to Jeremy, all one had to do was raise a hand and Mr Davies would come over to help. Jeremy felt that sometimes he took a bit long in getting to students if everybody needed help. Jeremy seemed to think that this was one of the reasons why Mr Offer came in to assist. Jeremy's comment suggested that he understood that the teacher had limited time to help students.

Overall, Jeremy interpreted the teacher's behaviour as labeling him as someone who was different, treated differently, and not good at doing things. It seemed to Jeremy that to be able to do things one had to be good at doing them. These teacher messages have been relayed to Jeremy through the teacher's behaviour. Jeremy interpreted the teacher's behaviour as sending messages about his lack of learning abilities, the degree to which the teacher saw Jeremy as important and being different to the other students in his class. It seemed that Jeremy could not find a way of changing the label he has been given, 'you are not good at doing things'. How Jeremy interpreted this situation, possibly did not give him much hope or incentive to change and start participating more actively in his learning.
CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

According to Good (1981), teacher behaviours relay messages to students that induce passive student behaviour. In response to the first research question “How do low achieving, passive students interpret teacher behaviour towards them?”, the results of this study found that students received varying messages. Subtle and often unconscious messages directed by the teacher’s behaviour were interpreted by the students in a variety of ways. For instance, Emily’s interpretations of the teacher’s behaviour tell Emily that the teacher liked her but would not spend time helping her. David interpreted the teacher’s behaviour as saying ‘act as if you are interested’ and ‘do as I say’. In Matthew’s case, he interpreted the teacher’s behaviour as meaning rejection and saying ‘if you get things right you get noticed and treated nice’. Jeremy interpreted his teacher’s behaviour as telling him ‘if you are not good at doing things you don’t get to do more challenging things’ and ‘you are different from the other students’.

Good’s (1981) model of student passivity shows how teacher behaviour can facilitate passive behaviour. The results of this study not only support Good’s model of student passivity but suggest that the way in which students interpret
teacher behaviour is significant in facilitating student passivity. It seems that even though the teacher may adjust his/her behaviour towards low achieving, passive students, students may still interpret teacher behaviour in a negative way. The results of this study place emphasis on the interplay between student interpretations and teacher behaviour; student behaviour and ultimately, low achieving students' passive behaviour. The conceptual framework illustrates student interpretations as being the conceptual link between teacher behaviour and the students' passive behaviour. The results suggest that students rely on their interpretations of teacher behaviour to determine how the teacher wants them to behave and ultimately use this knowledge to decide how they will behave. Although the teacher may have expectations of a student and behave in a way to change or enhance the student's learning behaviour, the way in which the student interprets the teacher's behaviour significantly affects the way in which the student will alter or reinforce his/her own behaviour. The results of the present study indicate that students will adapt their behaviour to comply with the messages they have deduced from the teacher's behaviour.

The descriptions of the subjects' interpretations then leads to the second research question, “Do such interpretations cluster in specific categories. Subjects' interpretations fell into categories similar to those categories described by Cooper (1979) as socio-emotional climate, teacher messages to students, opportunities for student interactions and feedback. Categorisation of the subjects’ interpretations of teacher behaviour can be found in Table 5.1.
Table 5.1: Low Achieving, Passive Students’ Interpretations of Teacher Behaviour in Relation to Cooper’s 4-factor Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Jeremy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Socio-emotional Climate** | *The teacher likes me.*  
*My teacher talks to me because she likes me.*  
The teacher likes me so I won’t be reprimanded for not doing my work.*  
The teacher encourages me when she wants me to participate.*  
*My teacher is a good teacher.*  
*My teacher won’t spend time with me to help me.*  
*If I give my teacher compliments she will like me.* | *My teacher is lazy.*  
*My teacher is angry.*  
*My teacher doesn’t keep promises.* | *My teacher rejects me.*  
*My teacher is ignoring me.*  
The teacher will put me on the back or ruffle my hair if I do something correctly.*  
*My teacher does not think I’m important.* | *My feelings can be discounted.* |
| **Teacher Messages** | *I have to look at the board to show I am listening.*  
*I don’t need to participate.*  
*I am not important enough or good enough to answer questions.*  
*Winners are rewarded.*  
*Good people get good things.* | *If I don’t do my work I can’t sit next to my friends.*  
*I don’t get second chances.*  
*I must do as I’m told.*  
*I just need to appear that I’m doing as I’m told.*  
*I need to pretend to look interested to please the teacher.* | *I am unacceptable.*  
*If I get things right I will get treated nicely.* | *I am different from the other students.*  
*I’m not good at doing things.*  
*I am not good at learning and understanding things.*  
*I need special instruction.* |
Table 5.1 cont’d Low Achieving, Passive Students’ Interpretations of Teacher Behaviour in Relation to Cooper’s 4-factor Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Emily</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Jeremy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher messages cont’d</td>
<td>Speed important not the quality of my work.</td>
<td>My teacher is lazy so I can only get to do things if I am good at doing them.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I will only get to do things if I am good at doing them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interactions</td>
<td>I only get chosen if there aren’t many other students with their hands raised.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The teacher doesn’t give me opportunities to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>My teacher says ‘Yes’ when my answers are good.</td>
<td>My teacher’s feedback is intimidating</td>
<td>Giving feedback is too hard for the teacher.</td>
<td>Getting things right is learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Each student seemed to focus on one aspect of teacher behaviour. Emily's interpretations of teacher behaviour seemed to focus on socio-emotional climate factors. She believed that the teacher's behaviour was significant in conveying acceptance and friendship. Discussions held with David indicated that he believed that the teacher's behaviour demanded certain behaviours from him. This was supported by David's description of how he behaved in a way that would satisfy the demands he perceived from the teacher's behaviour. It is important to note that Emily and David had the same teacher, yet, they interpreted her messages differently. This may be due to gender factors, personality development, previous classroom experiences or general maturity.

Matthew's case was quite unusual. He seemed to view the world from his own perspective which was sometimes "unrealistic". He sometimes imagined things happening, such as raising his hand, which were not evident in observations and which seemed to play an important role in how he interpreted teacher behaviour. Matthew's interpretations seemed to link with all four categories of teacher behaviour described by Cooper (1979):

- Socio-emotional climate - he felt rejected and neglected when the teacher did not have the same physical rapport with him as she did with other students.
- Teacher messages – he felt that the teacher’s actions were saying ‘if you get things right you get noticed and treated nice’.
- Opportunities for student interactions – he felt he was not he was not given opportunities to participate.
- Feedback – he felt that the teacher did not give appropriate feedback because it
is easier not to do so.

Jeremy's interpretations of his teacher's behaviour seemed to link with the category of teacher messages in that he was in a 'group' of people who were not good at doing things. Other messages were interpreted as you need extra help to do things, and you cannot do things that are more challenging because you are not good at doing things.

The data indicate that students' interpretations of teacher behaviour towards them cluster into Cooper's (1979) 4 - factor categories. This raises the question of whether students focus on one or more aspects of teacher behaviour. Being able to identify the aspects of teacher behaviour on which a student focuses, could provide insights into which teacher behaviours are significant for the student. Such knowledge could lead to identifying a single motivating factor which could then be harnessed for the purpose of engaging the student in active learning.

Further queries arise about where and why students focus on certain aspects of teacher behaviour. Possible reasons for students focusing on certain aspects of teacher behaviour could relate to negative or positive experiences with significant others, experiences in previous schools or experiences with previous teachers. Psychologists such as Erickson (cited in Malby, Gage & Berliner, 1995) suggest that children develop a sense of themselves and others partly as a result of the way in which their needs are met. Other reasons explaining why students focus on certain teacher behaviours may relate to the student's priority regarding what is
important or salient to them when relating to teachers. Categorising student interpretations of teacher behaviour may provide further insights into the origin of such interpretations if further researchers use more refined strategies of eliciting reasons for student perceptions.

Previous studies such as those of Babad (1990), Witty and DeBaryshe (1994), and Babad (1996) have found that students do have perceptions of differential teacher behaviour. Not much is known, however, about matches and mis-matches between student’s interpretations of teacher behaviour and the teacher’s interpretation of their own behaviour. With regard to the third research question, “Is there a mis-match between students’ interpretations of teacher behaviour and the teacher’s interpretations of their own behaviour?” the data supports the suggestion that students can have a different interpretation of teacher behaviour to that of the teacher’s interpretations of their own behaviour. Witty and DeBaryshe’s (1994) concern about being able to identify matches and mis-matches between teachers’ and students’ interpretations is therefore justifiable.

In the present study, sometimes the messages the teacher believes he/she is conveying to the student through words or actions have been significantly misconstrued. Emily interpreted Mrs Jansen’s behaviour as suggesting that Emily is not important enough to spend time with giving hints to answers and encouraging participation. Mrs Jansen, however, felt that she was holding the students’ attention by raising the pace of discussions, which meant jumping from student to student until the correct or expanded response was given. David’s
interpretation of the teacher wanting him to look as if he was interested is entirely opposite to the belief the teacher held about her behaviour. The teacher saw her behaviour as encouraging David to be active in his learning. Matthew’s interpretations of his teacher’s behaviour indicated that he believed the teacher rejected and ignored him, however the teacher believed her behaviour to be encouraging and nurturing. Jeremy felt that he was made to stand out as being different and not being able to achieve any higher, whereas his teacher was merely grouping students with like abilities in order to better cater for their needs. These are significant findings as they open new paths of inquiry concerning the teacher expectancy effect and student passivity.

**Limitations**

As the sample size was small, results cannot be generalised. Rather, the study has found more threads of inquiry that lead to the understanding of student passive behaviour. The scope of the study has not allowed the researcher to investigate other variables such as the teacher’s beliefs and intentions in detail, the student’s cultural background, previous teachers, previous school experiences, gender differences and age differences. These variables will play an important role in future studies aimed at further understanding the nature and scope of passive behaviour in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

Many studies have been conducted on passive student behaviour. Early
studies such as those of Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968), Good (1981), Brophy (1979) and Cooper (1979) emphasised the effect of teacher expectations and behaviour on students and how these contributed to passive behaviour. Later studies conducted by Weinstein, Marshall, Brattesani and Middlestadt (1982), Babad (1996), and Witty and DeBaryshe (1994) focused on students' perceptions of teachers' differential behaviour. This study revealed that there are discrepancies between student and teacher interpretations. The study also highlighted the intricacies existing in the relationship between teacher behaviour and student interpretations. Results of this study indicate that although research has encouraged and taught teachers to be reflective about their actions and the consequences, there is a need for teacher behaviours to be translated to students in a manner which allows for their accurate interpretation. As Witty and De Baryshe (1994) suggest, there is a need for both teachers and students to "improve their abilities to track and understand feedback that they give and receive" (p. 7).

**Implications For Further Research**

Further research is needed in the area of low achieving, passive students' interpretations of teacher behaviour if the nature of student passive behaviour is to be better understood. Larger sampling would enhance generalisability, enabling researchers to take on a more global perspective of the relationship between student interpretations and student passive behaviour. Longitudinal studies would further facilitate understanding of how low achieving, passive students' interpretations develop and change over time. This may help lead to understanding
the cognitive and emotional process students utilise when developing passive behaviours. Subsequent research should also include more data on teacher's interpretations of their own behaviour to strengthen the link between teacher behaviour and student interpretations. Meaningful understanding of the relationship between teacher behaviour, student interpretations and student passive behaviour would make it possible for teachers to select teaching strategies and utilise interpersonal skills aimed at reducing passive behaviour in low achieving students.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Sample Question Prompts

- Did you choose your desk?
- [If the teacher chose the student's desk – Why do you think the teacher sat you there?]
- Why do you think the teacher came over to look at your work? Or
- I noticed the teacher came to help you. Why do you think the teacher did that?
- I noticed the teacher did not check your work. Why do you think the teacher didn’t check your work?
- I noticed that you didn’t put your hand up. Why?
- But then the teacher asked you to answer – Why do you think the teacher picked you?
- Why do you think the teacher asked you that question?
- I noticed that the teacher finished answering the question for you/ gave you the answer/ asked somebody else. Why do you think the teacher did that?
- I noticed the teacher said ...... to you. Why do you think the teacher said that?
- I noticed the teacher made a comment .... – Why do you think the teacher said that?
- I noticed the teacher frowned/ rolled eyes/ pointed/ sighed/ looked away. Why do you think the teacher did that?
- The teacher chose you to show your work. Why did the teacher do that?
- I noticed that the teacher didn’t choose you when you had your hand up. Why do you think the teacher didn’t choose you?
- Why do you think the teacher said {praised} ..... to Joe?
- I noticed that the teacher said .... about your work. Why do you think the teacher said that?
APPENDIX B

Sample Consent Letter for The School

Dear ......................

My name is Carolyn Crook and I am currently undertaking an Honours Degree in Education at Edith Cowan University. I am writing to invite your school and students to participate in a research study entitled 'A Study of Teacher Behaviours as Interpreted by Low Achieving, Passive Students'.

I have enclosed a statement of disclosure regarding the research. After you have had time to read this I will contact you to see if you are willing to grant me an interview and to arrange a mutually convenient appointment.

Yours faithfully,

Carolyn Crook
Dear ........................................

My name is Carolyn Crook and I am currently undertaking an Honours Degree in Education at Edith Cowan University. I am interested in how children, who are passive in the classroom, interpret the way teachers speak to them, act towards them and teach them, and the research study I wish to undertake is entitled 'A Study of Teacher Behaviours as Interpreted by Low Achieving, Passive Students'.

I would be grateful if you would allow your class to be involved in this study, which would involve the children being (i) observed and video taped during six maths lessons, and (ii) interviewed about their interpretations of the teacher's behaviour. The children participating in this study are assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Any further queries regarding this study can be directed to me on 9405 4773 or my supervisor, Dr Richard Berlach on 9273 8402.

Yours sincerely,

Carolyn Crook
APPENDIX D

Sample Consent Letter for Parents

Dear .........................

My name is Carolyn Crook and I am currently undertaking an Honours Degree in Education at Edith Cowan University. I am interested in how children, who are passive in the classroom, interpret the way teachers speak to them, act towards them and teach them, and the research study I wish to undertake is entitled ‘A Study of Teacher Behaviours as Interpreted by Low Achieving, Passive Students’.

I would be grateful if you would allow your child to be involved in this study, which would involve the children being (i) observed and video taped during six maths lessons, and (ii) interviewed about their interpretations of the teacher’s behaviour. The children participating in this study are assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Any further queries regarding this study can be directed to me on 9405 4773 or my supervisor, Dr Richard Berlach on 9273 8402.

Please complete the slip below and return it to your child’s teacher, to inform me of your consent for your child to partake in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Carolyn Crook

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To Carolyn Crook

I, __________________________, understand my child’s role as a participant in the aforementioned study, and give consent for my child __________ to be included in this study. I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided that my child is not identifiable.

Parent/Guardian’s Signature __________________________

Date _______________