

## TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE COMMUNICATION APPREHENSIVE CHILD IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Two studies are reported indicating that teachers form negative expectations of children who are high communication apprehensives. These expectations are discussed in terms of their probable effect on learning and the need to provide intervention programs for both children and teachers to overcome the potential negative impact of teachers' expectations on the learning of high communication apprehensive children.

Since the publication of *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), there has been increased interest and attention paid to potential effects of teachers' expectations of their students on the achievement of those students. This research has indicated that teacher expectations are highly predictive of student learning, particularly in tutorial or semitutorial learning environments (Beez, 1968; Dusek, 1975). While some studies have found that an external agent (i.e., experimenter, school administrator) can induce positive or negative expectancies which result in differences in both teacher behavior and student learning (Beez, 1968; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), such induced effects have failed to appear in other studies (Dusek, 1975).

Although the impact of artificially induced expectancies is of more than passing interest to anyone attempting to develop a theory concerning the association between teacher expectation and student learning, of even more concern is the impact of expectancies generated in the natural teaching-learning environment and the causal agents which lead to these expectancies.

While many studies have investigated the effects of induced teacher expectations on student learning, very few have examined causes of expectations in the natural environment. While sex and skin color (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rubovits & Maehr, 1971, 1973) have been found to have an impact, it may well be that other variables could have as strong or stronger impact. Since the way an individual communicates has been found to have a major effect on other people's perceptions of the individual (Daly, McCroskey & Richmond, 1974;

McCroskey, Hamilton & Weiner, 1974; McCroskey & Richmond, 1975; McCroskey, Daly, Richmond & Cox, 1975), it is likely that habitual communication behaviors of children can affect their teacher's perceptions of them and, as a result, the teacher's expectations concerning that child. The particular communication behaviors with which we have been concerned in our research program are those behaviors related to communication apprehension.

Our attention was drawn to the possible relationship between communication apprehension and teacher expectations as a result of research concerning communication apprehension and academic achievement. Although no correlation has been observed between communication apprehension and intelligence (McCroskey, Daly & Sorenson, in press) substantial differences in achievement have been noted, both in terms of grade-point average and in scores on standardized achievement tests (Bashore, 1971; McCroskey & Andersen, 1976). High communication apprehensives maintain significantly lower grade-point averages and obtain lower scores on standardized achievement tests than do low communication apprehensives.

While the previous research concerning communication apprehension and achievement has involved high school and college students, the observed results may be only the culmination of a pattern developed much earlier in the student's academic life. Since the previous research concerning teacher expectations and student achievement has illustrated that negative expectations may retard learning and positive expectations may enhance

learning, if it were found that teachers form differential expectations as a result of children's communication behaviors, this finding would provide a possible explanation for the previously observed differing achievement levels of high and low communication apprehensives. Our research was designed to investigate this possibility.

#### COMMUNICATION APPREHENSIVES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Communication apprehension is a broad-based fear or anxiety related to the act of communication held by a large number of individuals. The individual high in this apprehension is a person for whom apprehension about participating in communication outweighs the projected gain from communicating in a given situation (Phillips, 1968; McCroskey, 1970). He or she anticipates negative feelings and outcomes from communication, and will avoid communication if possible, or suffer from a variety of anxiety-type feelings when forced to communicate.

The most characteristic behaviors of high communication apprehensives include avoidance of communication and creation of a life environment that requires as little communication contact with other people as possible (McCroskey & Leppard, 1975). They prefer to work alone rather than with other people and generally are described by others as "quiet."

Because of the current lack of availability of an adequate measure of communication apprehension that can be administered to children below the seventh-grade level, the exact extent of communication apprehension among elementary school children has not been established. Observation of elementary school children and consultation with elementary school teachers, however, clearly indicates that the phenomenon is widespread at this level, possibly even more common than among older children and adults. Once they understand what is meant by "communication apprehensive," almost every teacher with whom we have talked (over 1200 in the past three years) can readily identify several of these children in their classes.

Since the previous research has clearly indicated that high communication apprehensives are perceived negatively by other people in their environment, even by other high communication apprehensives, teachers of apprehensive children probably form negative perceptions of them. These negative perceptions are likely reflected in differential expectations for the academic success of high and low communication apprehensive children. As a result, we hypothesized that teachers' expectations of academic success for low communication apprehensive children are more positive than are their expectations for high communication apprehensive children.

#### METHOD

In order to test our hypothesis, we constructed descriptions of two hypothetical elementary school children, Jimmy T. and Billy G. The descriptions, allegedly written by the child's teacher, included information which indicated characteristic behaviors of either high communication apprehension (Jimmy T.) or low communication apprehension (Billy G.). Other information was constant for both children. The descriptions were as follows:

Jimmy T. was born in this community and has lived here all his life. His parents own and operate a local business. Jimmy is a very quiet child who seldom volunteers to participate in class. In fact, some days I hardly know he is in class, since he sits in the back of the room. However, his attendance is very good except when he is scheduled to make a presentation before the class. He seems to prefer to work alone rather than with a group. His written work is almost always turned in on time. I have found it hard to get to know Jimmy because he is so reticent with me. His previous teachers have also commented about what a nice, quiet boy Jimmy is.

Billy G. was born in this community and has lived here all his life. His parents own and operate a local business. Billy is a very outgoing child who participates extensively in class. You always know that Billy is present, because he sits right in front of the room. His attendance is very good. Billy seems to enjoy making presentations to the class and working on group projects. His written work is almost always turned in on time. I have found it very easy to get to know Billy because he likes to talk with me. His

TABLE 1  
 Mean Teacher Expectations for High and  
 Low Communication Apprehensive Children  
 (Pilot Study, N=52)

Area	High Apprehensive (Jimmy T.)	Low Apprehensive (Billy G.)	Difference	F	Probability
<u>Manipulation Checks</u>					
Anxiety about Communication	7.94	1.90	6.04	448.43	<.0001
Class Participation	1.11	8.83	7.27	268.05	<.0001
<u>Success Variables</u>					
Reading	5.81	7.85	2.04	32.94	<.0001
Arithmetic	5.81	6.40	.59	1.92	<.20
Social Studies	4.54	7.08	2.54	28.26	<.0001
Science	6.23	7.19	.96	6.57	<.05
Art	5.54	5.98	.44	.84	<.40
Department	7.54	6.92	.62	1.71	<.20
Relationships with Other Students	2.37	7.94	5.57	195.91	<.0001
Overall Achievement	4.75	6.81	2.06	23.79	<.0001
Success in Future Education	4.60	6.71	2.11	22.41	<.0001

previous teachers have also commented about what a nice, outgoing boy Billy is.

These descriptions are typical of the short notes from teachers included in children's files in many school districts, although some schools no longer retain such comments in permanent files. They also represent the kind of information likely to be passed from teacher to teacher by word-of-mouth in an informal way.

To determine the impact of information concerning a child's communicative behavior on teachers' expectations of the child's success in school, two studies were conducted. The first study was designed as a pilot to determine whether perceptions of high and low communication apprehension could be induced in teachers by our brief descriptions noted above, and to determine the number of Ss required in the main study to provide reliable results.

Ss were 52 teachers representing seven school districts in Ohio and West Virginia who were enrolled in graduate extension classes. Data were collected the second class period prior to instruction related to communication apprehension. Each teacher was provided one of the two descriptions (determined randomly) and asked to estimate the child's success in nine areas on a 10-point scale (ranging from 0 to 9) and bound at the extremes by "very poorly" and "very well." To avoid response bias the extreme positions were randomly reversed for four of the areas. The areas to which the teachers responded were as follows: reading, arithmetic, social studies, science, art, department, class participation, relationships with other students, and overall achievement. In addition, the teachers estimated, on a 10-point scale bound by "very high" and "very low," the child's "likelihood of success in future education" and "level of anxiety about

TABLE 2  
Mean Teacher Expectations for High and  
Low Communication Apprehensive Children  
(Main Study, N=462)

Area	High Apprehensive (Jimmy T.)	Low Apprehensive (Billy G.)	Difference	F	Probability
<u>Manipulation Checks</u>					
Anxiety about Communication	7.56	2.38	5.18	538.09	<.0001
Class Participation	1.83	7.61	5.78	548.59	<.0001
<u>Success Variables</u>					
Reading	5.95	7.27	1.32	60.90	<.0001
Arithmetic	5.02	6.17	1.15	34.41	<.0001
Social Studies	4.32	6.53	2.21	128.97	<.0001
Science	5.41	6.84	1.43	70.52	<.0001
Art	5.61	6.69	1.08	31.68	<.0001
Department	7.49	7.31	.18	1.14	<.50
Relationships with Other Students	2.40	6.93	4.53	630.82	<.0001
Overall Achievement	4.42	6.64	2.22	152.98	<.0001
Success in Future Education	4.31	6.91	2.60	215.47	<.0001

communication." The items concerning class participation and level of anxiety were included as checks on our manipulation of perceived communication apprehension.

The data on each scale were subjected to analysis of variance. The results are reported in Table 1. Significant effects were observed on all of the variables except arithmetic, art, and department. The manipulation checks indicated the descriptions employed were perceived as intended. On each scale, where significant results were obtained, the low apprehensive child (Billy G.) was projected to do better than the high apprehensive child (Jimmy T.).

Although the results of the pilot study for the most part were clear, and it might be argued that further research was not necessary, we decided to continue with our original plan for the main study. Power analyses indicated that a sample size of 400

would provide a power ratio of .90 at alpha .05 for the effect sizes observed for all of the variables in the pilot study (Cohen, 1969). Thus, a sample of 462 teachers was employed in the main study. The teachers represented 137 schools in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia. The same procedures for data collection and analyses employed in the pilot study were employed in the main study.

## RESULTS

The results of the analyses of the data from the main study are reported in Table 2. Significant differences were observed in all areas except department.

The manipulation checks indicated that the de-

scriptions of the children were perceived as intended. Jimmy was seen to have much poorer class participation than Billy ( $F=543.59$ ) and to have much more anxiety about communication ( $F=538.09$ ).

The expectations of the teachers as reflected by these data were that the low apprehensive child (Billy) would do better in all academic areas than the high apprehensive child (Jimmy). In addition, Billy was seen to have much greater likelihood of positive relationships with other students than Jimmy. Simply put, the results suggest positive expectations for the low apprehensive child and negative expectations for the high apprehensive child, as hypothesized.

#### DISCUSSION

On the basis of these results, in conjunction with the previous research, we should project that Billy may have more success in school (both academic and social) than Jimmy. The teachers we studied clearly showed that expectation, and as has been demonstrated before, such expectations may become self-fulfilling prophecies.

A major question that needs to be raised is *why* the teachers in our samples formed the expectations they reported. Is it because of an unspoken bias against quiet children among teachers? Or are the teachers only accurately reflecting what they have seen happen to quiet children in their schools? We can not, of course, answer this question on the basis of the present data.

It is clear that communication apprehension among elementary school students can result in negative teacher expectations. Unless something is done to alter the normal course of events, these expectations can lead to negative impact on the learning of the highly communication apprehensive child. Two courses of action are open to us if we wish to overcome this potential impact.

The first solution to the problem is to eliminate the communication apprehension itself. Several treatment methods have been developed for reducing communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1972; Fremouw & Harmatz, 1975), but these have

been implemented in only a tiny fraction of the elementary schools. The second approach is working with teachers to familiarize them with the potential problems caused by communication apprehension and negative teacher expectations in the hope that such awareness will prevent teachers from forming negative expectations or, at least, stimulating them to attempt to avoid producing negative results as a result of their expectations. As a part of this process teachers would need instruction concerning the impact of required oral communication in the classroom and alternate teaching methods which can be employed with communication apprehensive children. Unfortunately, little training of this type currently is being provided for teachers.

The problem of negative teacher expectations which are generated by communication apprehensive behavior is a serious one that undoubtedly affects many children in the schools. Greatly increased attention to providing solutions to this problem on the part of communication scholars and faculty concerned with teacher preparation is badly needed.

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