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# Giving the Spoon Back: Higher Teacher Expectations of Achievement for Students Who Are Deaf

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## Giving the Spoon Back: Higher Teacher Expectations of Achievement for Students Who Are Deaf

### **Abstract**

This single case study examined a Deaf teacher's behaviors and beliefs that reflect her expectations of her deaf students. Primary modes of communication used were American Sign Language and written English. Data were collected via videotaped observations and interviews. Analysis was done by coding utterances of the participants using a deductive framework and using an inductive approach to find patterns among the coded utterances. Teacher behavior and student reactions revealed high expectations for student achievement. The overarching factor that reflected teacher expectations was the positive classroom climate established by the teacher. Recommendations for further research to examine teacher expectations with other settings and participants are included

### **Keywords**

Deaf, Teacher Expectations, Deaf Teacher, Case Study, and Deductive and Inductive Coding

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## **Giving the Spoon Back: Higher Teacher Expectations of Achievement for Students Who Are Deaf**

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### **Introduction**

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) there has been increased pressure nationwide on K-12 programs to meet the accountability standards set for student achievement. All states were required to develop standards of learning measurable by standardized testing (NCLB, 2001). Some states are also requiring their students to pass an exit examination to receive a high school diploma. Students who are disabled, including those who are deaf and hard of hearing, are not exempt from these standards. Only the 1% most severely cognitively disabled are not required to participate in these assessments. These mandates that are in effect require a higher standard of teaching. For some time now, standards in the education of the deaf have been impacted by lowered expectations for student achievement (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989; Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996; Marschark, Lang, & Albertini, 2002). Nevertheless there are teachers in the field who have high expectations for their students to meet current academic standards. It should be noted that these teachers who have high standards have students who succeed because they expect them to do well. To them, deafness is not seen as an excuse for poor performance or behavior. This is especially true for teachers who are Deaf<sup>1</sup> themselves (Compton 1997; Whitesell, 1991).

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<sup>1</sup> Using a practice common among researchers in this field, the capitalized "Deaf" is used to refer to cultural aspects as opposed to the lower case "deaf" which refers only to the audiological condition. Those who are Deaf use American Sign Language and follow the cultural norms of the community (See for example Mindess, 2006).

Before discussing teacher expectations, a clear point of reference for what high and low expectations look like is needed. Studies of teachers who have higher expectations show the following patterns: a warm positive attitude toward students, the provision of ever more difficult coursework, frequent opportunities for students to respond, and positive feedback towards student's responses (Harris & Rosenthal, 1985; Rosenthal, 1974). They also have a tendency to make their students show effort to learn and to find the answers they need (Weinstein, 2002). Teachers with lowered expectations frequently exhibit differentiated behaviors towards perceived "low achievers" such as less waiting time for answers, giving answers without eliciting effort from students, rewarding incorrect answers, giving overt praise for marginal answers, giving overly critical feedback, demanding less effort from students, and exposing students to an impoverished curriculum (Good & Brophy, 2003).

There have been numerous studies, including the ones above, done on the topic of teacher expectations in various educational settings during the past three decades. The idea that teacher expectations can affect student achievement was first suggested in a research project focused on experimentally induced self-fulfilling prophecy effects by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). The results of this study popularly known as *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, while controversial, created wide interest and further studies on the topic. These studies lead to the consensus that while complex in nature, expectations can influence student outcomes (Brophy, 1998; Good & Brophy, 2003; Weinstein, 2002). Jussim, Eccles, and Madon (1996) found that the strongest effects for expectations occur with stigmatized groups, such as ethnic minorities, students with low socio-economic status, students in transition, and students in special education. These socially stigmatized groups are especially vulnerable to lowered expectations from teachers. Diagnostic labels given to students in special education have been found to be an even more significant basis for teacher expectations effects (Rist & Harrel, 1982).

Evidence exists that children who are deaf are a stigmatized group and can be affected by negative expectations of teachers. Marschark (1997) notes that deaf children who are partially segregated from the rest of the student body in public school settings acquire a stigma similar to that of students in remedial classes. Keane-Dawes (1997) showed in a study that children who are deaf have been categorized as a stigmatized population and that they can perceive stigmatizing attitudes directed at them. These children also acquire at least one diagnostic label as a result of their enrollment into special education programs and participation in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. Thus it can be inferred that children who are deaf are a vulnerable group and potentially subject to increased teacher expectations effects. While there are no current studies on teacher expectations in deaf education that have been done, but there are reports of practices and beliefs in the field that reflect low expectations and low achievement as will be seen below.

A document that created controversy in the field of deaf education titled *Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access in Deaf Education* (Johnson et al., 1989) gave reasons for low student achievement. These included a lack of linguistic access to curricular content and the cycle of low expectations in deaf education. In this monograph and in a follow-up summary (Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1994), the authors contend that the idea is perpetuated that low academic achievement is an inevitable consequence of deafness. They also added that the blame for the failure was

placed on the students rather than the system or the practices of the educators. As an illustration of this practice, Schleper (1995) reported finding his old college notes from a lecture in which a “distinguished expert” in the field of deaf education outlined the abilities of deaf students. According to this “expert,” they could do concrete operations such as math computation, express concrete ideas, and do arts and crafts. They could not do more abstract word problems, use passive voice in English, or grasp complex ideas. Schleper added that the underlying message from professional literature is not to expect much from deaf children. Also compounding the issue are teacher attitudes that if a deaf child is doing somewhat better than her deaf peers, but not as well as her hearing peers, then they are doing “pretty well” for a deaf child.

Low expectations have been found across topic areas in deaf education such as writing and reading (Wood, 1998) and mathematics (Pagliaro & Kritzer, 2005). Lower expectations can also cross different types of classroom settings and even teachers who had training in deaf education fared no better (Vaille & Paterson, 1998). These examples are supported by Lane et al. (1996) who presented examples of teachers giving deaf students simplified instruction, and repetitious work of low complexity. They stated that lowered curriculum content is a consequence of the low expectations teachers have of their students. Parents have also expressed concerns about low expectations found in residential school settings (Meadow-Orlans, Mertens, & Sass-Lehrer, 2003).

Not all educators of the deaf have lowered expectations of their students. Several programs that serve children who are deaf have emphasized the need for increased expectations for performance (Ahern, 2001; Fernandes, 1997). Some programs have explicitly stated policies on higher expectations for deaf students on a par with hearing peers (Allen, 1998; OCM Board of Cooperative Educational Services, 2001; Rocky Mountain Magnet School for the Deaf, 2002). In some studies involving teachers, teacher behaviors and statements reflect high expectations of student achievement (Bailes, 2001; Compton, 1997; Ramsey 1997; Smith & Ramsey, 2004; Whitesell 1991). However, the issue is much more complicated than just setting high standards.

Given the number of students that present themselves at educational programs for the deaf with a wide variety of academic and social skills, mostly below average, it is not surprising that educators feel challenged. Nevertheless, spurred by NCLB and state departments of education, schools and programs for the deaf are working towards setting higher standards and expectations (Johnson, 2004). Problems are more likely to be found in the pedagogical approaches and what is expected from deaf students than in the deaf students themselves (Marschark et al., 2002). While most programs can align their curriculum with state mandates, the question remains as to how teachers can communicate higher expectations to their students.

The purpose of this study is to present an in-depth description of deaf teacher/deaf student classroom interactions in order to document higher teacher expectations and the communication patterns that convey these expectations to students. For this study, communication patterns are defined as sets of observed behaviors that convey a certain type of implicit and/or explicit message. Because the motivations behind expectations are not directly observable, follow-up interviews with the teacher were critical in eliciting and examining the intentions of communication behaviors observed. The students were also interviewed to assess their perceptions of teacher communication behaviors and their interpretations of her expectations.

## Research Questions

For this study, one focal research question was developed with sub-questions designed to focus on various aspects of the communication of, and interpretations of, teacher expectations. The focal question was: “How does a teacher communicate her expectations to deaf students?” There are four sub-questions:

- What types of expectations does the teacher hold for the students?
- What patterns of communication cues does the teacher use?
- How does the teacher exhibit differentiated behaviors with the students?
- How do the students respond to these cues and behaviors?

## Theoretical Framework

Classrooms are complex environments where teachers and students are often interpreting the communicative intent of the actions of others. Teacher expectations are a natural phenomenon and so are student reactions to these expectations. One of several models that exist related to the mediation of teacher expectations was selected for this study to provide a framework, a priori, for categorizing teacher and student behaviors. The use of an a priori template of codes is an approach outlined by Crabtree and Miller (1999) as a way to make use of existing theory in qualitative studies. This methodology has also been labeled as “Template Analysis” (King, 1998). The model selected for this study was Rosenthal’s four-factor theory (Harris & Rosenthal, 1986; Rosenthal, 1974, 2002). It is general in nature with just four factors, but able to distinguish specific behaviors into discrete observable patterns. Rosenthal’s theory and its modifications for this study are discussed below.

Rosenthal (1974) identified four factors as being influenced by teacher expectations: climate, input, output, and feedback. Rosenthal developed these four factors through meta-analysis of the findings of more than 40 studies of teacher expectations. Further support came with a follow-up meta-analysis of over 200 studies (Harris & Rosenthal, 1986). Climate is the provision of emotional support, warmth and attention or a lack thereof by teachers through cues indicating support and approval. Input is the amount and quality of teaching effort given to the child, including opportunities to learn new material and its difficulty level. Output is opportunities given by teacher for students to respond and the teacher’s persistence in pursuing responses. Feedback is the teacher’s response to a child’s answers or comments.

In addition to Rosenthal’s four factors, which have focused primarily on the area of academic instruction, three other specific areas of concern in expectations research have been noted in the literature. The areas are classroom behavior, language use, and social and cultural issues. Most studies on expectations to date have already focused on the two areas of academic content and classroom behavior as seen in compilations of these studies (Brophy, 1998; Dusek, 1985). In addition, the other two areas of language use, and social/cultural issues are also relevant because of the cultural values that teachers bring with them to the classroom, as will be seen below.

Irvine (1990) identified teacher perceptions of both appropriate language use by students and adherence to cultural/social norms as important issues. Her meta-analysis of

studies on students who were Black noted that there were differences in teacher behavior across language use and social and cultural issues depending on whether the culture of the teacher was the same as the students. This was also noted by Cazden (2001) in a study of classrooms with Hawaiian and Native American children. These issues of language use, and cultural and social norms were extrapolated to this study to highlight the questions of how the influence and knowledge of Deaf culture can impact teacher expectations of deaf students. In sum, there are four issues to examine. Each of these four areas (academic content area, classroom behavior, language use, and cultural and social norms) has been labeled an *Area of Focus*.

Rosenthal's four factors can be laid across the four areas of focus of expectations to categorize specific communication behaviors in a matrix as seen in Table 1. Rosenthal's factors, combined with the four foci, create 16 possible categories where expectations can be communicated. The table provides a framework to code specific behaviors that may mediate expectations. The framework was not meant to provide evaluative data about the appropriateness of a teacher's expectations but rather to provide a template to break down and categorize behaviors<sup>2</sup>. For example, a teacher praising or scolding a student for behavior is an instance of Rosenthal's Feedback combined with the focal area of classroom behavior. This framework will also provide a means of deconstructing classroom events using a coding process as described in the methods section.

Table 1

*Framework for Mediation of Teacher Expectations*

<b>Rosenthal's Four Factors</b>	<b>Areas of Focus</b>			
	<b>Language Use</b>	<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Classroom Behavior</b>	<b>Cultural and Social</b>
<b>Climate</b>	Behavior towards certain language use by student	Behavior to establish learning of subject matter	Behavior relevant to classroom behavior	Behavior relevant to students with certain social norms
<b>Input</b>	Instruction on language use	Subject Lessons and Units	Classroom rule instruction and enforcement	Types of social norms referred to and taught
<b>Output</b>	Student expression of language	Student Academic response	Student classroom behavior	Student social behavior
<b>Feedback</b>	Comments about language skills	Comments about academic performance	Comments about classroom behavior	Comments about appropriate social norms

<sup>2</sup> However, given that Rosenthal has documented the types of behaviors related to the level of expectations in each of the four factors, it may be possible to use this as a model for evaluative purposes across different classrooms.

### **Situating the Deaf Researcher**

As a Deaf person, I obviously bring some of my own personal experiences into the study. My exploration of this topic is not just merely an attempt to achieve some sort of catharsis. There were plenty of people who expected me to do well, as well as those who thought I would never amount to much. I have seen plenty of other anecdotes by other Deaf people who had similar experiences. It is more to be able to show the possibility of how success can be achieved by children who are deaf given the right environment and role models. While I believe Deaf teachers are more likely to expect better of their students, there is no assumption on my part that all Deaf teachers will have higher expectations. In fact some of the worst offenders I have known were Deaf. There are also plenty of hearing teachers who do have high expectations. This I know from my own experience since I never had the privilege of having a Deaf teacher until I reached college. To that end, when I sought out a teacher for this study, I did not specify the hearing status of the teacher. I only specified that the teacher be fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) so that my Deaf research assistant and I would be able to have direct access to communication taking place.

As can be inferred, I came into this study with “insider” status based on my experience as a Deaf individual, and as someone who taught children at the school and community in this study for several years. Prior to starting the study, I had been gone and not visited the area for at least three years. During my absence there had been an almost complete personnel turnover of the high school department where I taught. This afforded a level of objectivity since I did not know the teacher. At the same I retained inside knowledge of the school and community culture that enabled me to access people and information would have taken longer for an outsider to obtain. Being Deaf did apparently also afford the ability to obtain the trust of the teacher and the students, which was critical for getting open and honest answers to my questions while they did not have a clear idea of what exactly I was looking for until the end of the observation period. My role as a participant for the most part was that as an observer as I videotaped events in the classroom. I did not actively solicit information from the participants during observations although the teacher would sometimes make comments to me as will be seen in the findings. My most active involvement with the students and teacher was during interviews.

### **Method**

This investigation was a field study conducted using case study methods in a classroom. Case studies are a preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over the events and it involves a phenomenon that takes place in a real-life context (Yin, 1994). This study includes data collected from observations, videotaping, photographs of the setting, and interviews at the school for the deaf, with deaf students and a teacher who is deaf. The sample was purposely selected for cultural diversity among students old enough to describe their feelings and with a teacher who was identified as having high expectations by her students, parents, and peers. The subject taught was U.S. History, and the students were all in their junior year of high school. All names used here are pseudonyms.



## **Setting and Participants**

### **Accessing the Setting**

Prior to conducting this study permission and a letter of support was obtained from the school administration and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured from the university. The teacher, students, and the students' parents were asked to sign a consent form prior to data collection. They understood that I was collecting data on classroom activities without revealing what exactly I was looking for and that they would be informed after data collection. They retained the right to withdraw permission at anytime including after data collection.

### **The School**

All observations and interviews for the study took place at a State School for the Deaf. This was a residential school for the deaf with a K-12 enrollment of approximately 500 students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. The high school department at this school had an enrollment of approximately 150 students. The student body was nearly equally divided between Mexican American and Caucasian students, with smaller percentages of African American, Asian, and Native American students. The classes had between three to ten students in size who were usually tracked according to academic achievement level.

### **The Classroom**

The site for this study was a first period U.S. History classroom for juniors that met once daily from 8:00 to 9:00 AM. The classroom generally had an atmosphere that one could call "busy." There were 13 student desks arranged in an open semi-circle facing towards the front. This arrangement ensured that students could see each other and the teacher at all times. In front of the semi-circle was a large teacher's desk. Between this desk and the white boards that covered nearly the entire front wall, was a space where the teacher stood and traversed during most of the time she was teaching. Two small tables, a computer, and a chair occupied the right front corner of the room where the teacher conducted her paperwork and planning. The remaining walls of the classroom were covered with bulletin boards two large color maps of the U.S. and inspirational quotes. There was a television/VCR mounted on the wall in the right rear corner of the classroom.

### **The Teacher**

The author queried the staff, administration, parents, and students from the high school leadership class for students involved in student government at the school in order to recruit an individual who had the attributes of a teacher with high expectations (Good & Brophy, 2003; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985; Rosenthal, 1974; Weinstein, 2002). The teacher nominated for this study was willing to participate and had a good comprehension of what would be involved. She also understood that purpose of this study could not be revealed until after the observations so as not to influence her behavior. The teacher was Deaf, a

fluent user of American Sign Language, and a member of the Deaf community. This teacher, whom I will call Ms. Geils, had more than 7 years of teaching experience at residential schools for the deaf. She had a Bachelor's degree in History and a Masters Degree in Deaf Education. At the time of this study she was teaching history at the high school level. She taught at two other residential schools for the deaf before moving to her current position. She was in her second year of employment at the school. Her previous teaching experience had been in Language Arts.

### **The Students**

The class had seven students and was a diverse group reflective of the surrounding region. This group had been selected because the students were tracked as "average students" based on the school administration's assessment. This was to reduce the possibility of more differentiated behavior shown toward higher or lower achieving classes as seen in the literature. All of the students had fluent ASL skills. Four of the students were Mexican American, three males and one female. One of each of the remainder were African American male, Asian American male, and European American female. All were between the ages of 16 to 18. It should be noted that in each case these students were asked about their hearing status. Each one of them described themselves as Deaf in both the cultural sense and audiologically. The only exception was one who said he was hard of hearing but considers himself to be culturally Deaf.

### **Data Collection**

Data collected included videotaped observations and interviews, observation notes, and photographs of the setting. The participant class was observed and videotaped daily for two weeks in the middle of the first month of the school year followed up by two more weeks of observation a month later. I kept observation notes in a journal to record events, dates and times as well as interpretations of these events that were written immediately following classroom observations. Digital photographs were taken of the classroom and school in order to provide data for description of the setting. The teacher and each student were interviewed on video when classroom observations and videotaping were complete. Two semi-structured interview protocols were developed, one for students, and the other for the teacher (Appendix A). Interviews used open-ended questions based upon Rosenthal's four factors, one question per factor. It may be noted that none of the participants were aware of the exact nature of this study prior to the classroom observations and interviews in order to reduce responses that they believe the researcher wanted to see or hear. Interviews were translated from ASL to written English transcripts and given back to participants to read to validate the translations.

### **Data Analysis**

This study sought to identify communication behavior patterns that mediate expectations. These patterns consist of *communication events* from case study data, which are coded and sorted into thematically related sets (Yin, 1994). The start/end boundaries of these communication events were defined by what linguists term "utterances." Allan

(1994) confirms the intuitive nature of utterances. He notes that people are able to recognize utterances on the basis of innate perception regardless of whether or not they were fluent in the language or communication modality used. For the purposes of this study, a definition of “utterance” from *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Asher & Simpson, 1994) was used. It is defined as any stretch of speech by a single speaker preceded and followed by silence or pause.

A research assistant, who is Deaf, and the author who is also Deaf, transcribed all of the videotaped data from ASL into written English. This was done in chronological order much like a transcript. These transcriptions were reviewed later by the classroom teacher in this study, and also by another researcher who is a certified ASL interpreter for accuracy. Using the 16 codes from the framework for this study, the research assistant and author developed a codebook as data management tool for organizing utterances from the text to assist in interpretation (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Each utterance was given at least one code and some utterances were given more than one code if there appeared to be more than one communicative intent. All coded data were organized in loose-leaf binders for later retrieval and verification as needed.

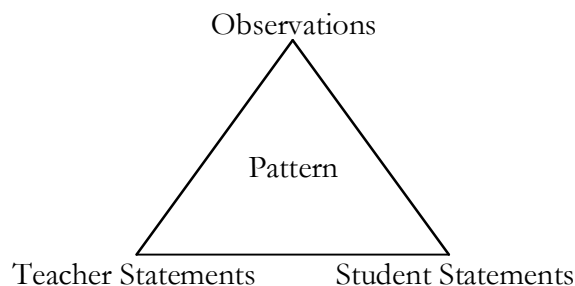
### Pattern Matching

Yin (1994) describes pattern-matching as a way of linking data to propositions and to increase validity of a study along with the use of multiple sources of evidence, having a chain of evidence from questions to data to conclusions, and participant review of the study. After all of the utterances (from observations and all interviews) had been placed within the 16 coded categories, behavior patterns in each of the categories were identified and classified using an inductive approach. One example is in the category across Input and Content. Behavior patterns were noted for direct teaching, elicitation attempts (e.g., questions), provision of work, and role modeling. These and other patterns are described in the results below.

### Triangulation

This is where at least three sources of evidence are used to corroborate a theme or pattern (Creswell 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The sources of corroborating evidence used here (i.e., the three “legs” of the triangle) include the classroom observations, teacher statements, and student statements from interviews. Each of these kinds of evidence has been used in constructing the descriptions in the results section of this study. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. *Diagram of triangulation.*



One example of triangulation consists of teacher statements during the interview about being friendly but having role boundaries in the classroom, the students saying the teacher is friendly but “strict,” and coded observations that show she has a pattern of friendly but professional demeanor in the classroom. Here there are two other sources of evidence to support the first leg of the “triangle,” which was the teacher’s statement.

### **Inter-rater Agreement**

Inter-rater agreement was established for the coding process. There was a training period during which the research assistant and author worked together to identify what constituted significant utterances and which code to apply to them. The data used for training covered two of the last class periods that had been videotaped. After this training, two randomly chosen class periods that represented just over 11% of the data were independently rated. Together, both raters coded a total of 682 utterances in these class periods. The coding of utterances that both raters agreed upon was 510 or 74.8%. The probability of an utterance being given the same code from both raters by chance is 0.3%. This gives an inter-rater reliability coefficient of 0.75 using Cohen’s Kappa. Ambiguities or conflicts in the coding were clarified and resolved before coding proceeded further.

### **Other Strategies**

There were some other methods used to increase the validity of this study. The use of the framework in Table 1 by the research assistant and author as a source of codes helped to increase objectivity in analysis of the data rather than rely on subjective categories or themes developed independently by the raters themselves. Having the teacher review a draft of the investigator’s translations and also the interpretation of events in the findings aided accuracy as a form of member checking. Increasing the replicability of the study is done by making the research design and framework model of teacher expectations developed in this study available to others as a design for future research on this topic in other classrooms.

### **Findings**

The results of this study have been organized into four sections, one for each of the four expectation factors: input, output, feedback, and climate. They have been arranged in order of the frequency of their occurrence in the data. See Table 2. Within each of these factors, the behavior pattern themes that were identified by myself and my research assistant are summarized. As would be expected in a classroom, most had to do with academic content.

Table 2

*Frequency of Utterances by Factor and Focus*

Factors	Areas of Focus			
	Content Area	Language Use	Cultural and Social	Classroom Behavior
<b>Input</b>	1,374	497	488	141
<b>Output</b>	994	180	463	182
<b>Feedback</b>	767	110	265	48
<b>Climate</b>	463	91	245	71

This has the largest number of coded entries from the data. There were themes noted in Ms. Geils' input behavior; direct teaching and elicitation, provision of work, and role modeling.

Table 3

*Input Behavior Patterns Across Focal Areas*

Content	Language/Communication	Cultural/Social	Classroom Behavior
Direct Teaching Interesting and Detailed. Uses real life examples. Follows State Standards. Elicitation Knowledge Questions. Asks for Expansions/Defend. Discussions. Provision of work Daily homework and quizzes. Make-up work and Extra Credit. State Standards. Students feel challenged.	Direct Teaching & Elicitation Use of ASL to explain written English. Three strategies to teach vocabulary. Emphasis on root words from other languages. Simplification of reading materials. Compels students to read aloud from text to get help. Will not spoon feed.	Direct teaching Connects lessons to real life. Uses popular culture. Boundaries in Deaf culture. Role Modeling Social registers. Deaf culture. Gallaudet. Student/teacher roles.	Direct teaching Boundaries. Respect. Ignores negative behaviors. Attention control.

## Direct Teaching and Elicitation

Ms. Geils, like many teachers, spent most of her time involved in both direct teaching and attempts at eliciting answers. Direct teaching was more easily noted during lectures. But there were times when both happened. This was apparently due to Ms. Geils' approach to teaching reading skills where she helps her students derive meaning via elicitation from the text rather than just telling them the answer. First I will describe her direct teaching approach.

While lecturing, the teacher was often able to expand upon and make the content interesting and relevant for her students. In fact, she was sometimes so interesting that I would nearly forget to follow her with the video camera. She shared stories from her own family history and her own experiences. The students were attentive and responsive to Ms. Geils while she was speaking. As for the students' perspectives, most commented that she was an interesting teacher. The following comment is illustrative. "She's a good teacher, the first teacher I had who lectures well. She's detailed. Other teachers are boring. I like her way of using ASL and explaining things deeply."

Not only did Ms. Geils like to use detailed descriptions to connect the content with the students' real life experiences, she also taught them using a variety of styles. A remark from one of the students about this,

Before as a freshman, I had Mr. Brown. He taught us nothing. Just let us play games, sit and chat, laugh, walk around the classroom. As a sophomore, Ms. Vasquez didn't show and explain history, it was just lectures and movies. I was lost and learned nothing. Ms. Geils shows, explains, uses movies, a variety of things. I have learned a lot. I'm happy I have her.

Ms. Geils also remarked that if she encountered difficulty in getting students to grasp a concept after several tries, she would ask another student to explain. This was observed on several occasions. Ms. Geils' approach to direct teaching did not appear to be limited to one-way communication. She was open to student participation and also tried to get her students involved in a dialogue via elicitation.

Elicitation is the use of questioning and other conversational cues to get students to expand on their contributions. Many times while introducing new topics, the teacher asked simple knowledge-comprehension type questions as an evaluation strategy that guided her teaching. She also used knowledge questions when reviewing previously covered material. In this latter context, they were often followed by attempts to get students to expand. Post-quiz discussions, given almost daily, were an event where students reviewed previously covered material. As Ms. Geils herself stated, she tried to have more discussions and to ask students to defend their answers.

I want them to become independent, because that's what their lives will really be like. Not depend on their moms, dads, or teachers. So I really try to step out of it as much as I can. Have more discussions, or ask them how to do that, give them quizzes and then discuss it later. Ask them for the answers. "Oh? Why answer that way?" Then explain and give them some

more background. Then try to have them do it on their own. Mostly I push them to be independent. I can fill in the gaps. I think that's the only thing I really expect from them. To think for themselves. That's neat. I enjoy that. I want that from them.

Two students indicated that even if they gave a correct answer, more details, and expansions were expected. A third student remarked that the teacher repeats the answer back to the class to make sure they saw it. Yet, another student commented on what happens if she does not get involved. "Me...if I'm not involved, she will ask me why, 'What do you think?' Makes me feel a bit 'on the spot.'"

The pattern of elicitation also extended to reading. On several occasions Ms. Geils was observed asking students to recite the text aloud to help them work through difficult words or passages. Her teaching style particularly in terms of language requires students to derive meaning and actively learn rather than be "spoon-fed" passive recipients. "Spoon-feeding" first came up one day in the library while some of the students were getting frustrated about finding books, but the teacher was only willing to help so much. She turned to me and said something about not wanting the students being so dependent on "spoon feeding." When I asked her later to explain this further, not only did she apply it to finding books, but also to reading.

OK. Spoon-feeding. It's the same with reading, could be students don't think for themselves. Wait, it's different if they don't know how to do something or if they don't think for themselves. Those two are different. Like, if they're working hard and can't find a book, that's when I'm willing to get books, to help them search. Not just find it for them. They need to understand that life is about that. It's never about, "I understand. The answer is right there!" like magic. Same with reading. A lot of them will hold the book and ask me "What's this say?" I'll say, "Tell me what's it say?" They tell me and I check, "Wait, you missed one part, let me explain that part." They say, "Oh, I see." Let them make mistakes. I'm tired of hearing that they're not allowed to make mistakes. That's what I mean by spoon-feeding.

In addition to not pampering her students, Ms. Geils also expected her students to be able to do a good amount of course work on their own as seen through her actions and words.

### **Provision of Work**

Homework was assigned on a daily basis. Students were expected to be prepared to take a quiz on the homework material almost daily. Besides the daily homework, one long-term and one short-term project were assigned during the observation period. When asked about how much work she tried to give her students, Ms. Geils said that she gives them homework almost everyday to "keep them on their toes." She also tried to be reasonable about it by giving about an hour's worth of work. She was aware that they have other classes and that they need a life outside school. She also gave her students

some opportunities to keep their grades up through the use of extra credit opportunities. Here are some student perspectives on the amount of work they got.

I learn a lot, she tends to give us outlines, paper worksheets related to what she is talking about today and ... she's not easy and I learn something, a lot. And I have to remember many, many things because we will have a quiz everyday most of the time.

She gives me enough homework. She knows how we feel if she gives a lot. There are other classes with lots of homework. She gives us a limited amount of homework. It's fine. Gives us paperwork about what she recently explained to see if you can remember, or to prove that we did pay attention in class.

When asked about the quality of the work provided, Mrs. Geils said,

I have to follow state standards. So now I'm going through changes myself as a teacher. I have a lot of experience as a reading teacher... and I think the biggest thing I try to do is to teach them to be independent in whatever subject they are. Reading, History, English, it doesn't matter what subject. I want them to not feel like they can't make mistakes. I want that habit put into them (of not being afraid to make mistakes). Of course, I have to follow the standards, so a lot of what I do is to ask them to read whatever, or write. I struggle with that because I want them to become critical thinkers. I'm trying different avenues, still haven't really found a perfect way. I think the biggest thing is to teach them independence.

Nearly all of the students seemed to find the course work challenging and made these comments, "I like her way of teaching, gives us more challenging work and provides work, one chapter with a quiz, I like her way of doing things." "I feel challenged. It's a good reading level, comfortable. I learn the meanings of words, and draw pictures. I feel challenged." "All the work she gives me is very challenging, whew, I learned a lot from her." "Ms. Geils' homework is my very, very first challenging class. More than my other history teachers."

### **Role Modeling**

In addition to encouraging her students to be more independent she was also concerned about teaching her students to conduct themselves as morally responsible citizens. Since the teacher and all of the students consider themselves culturally Deaf there is at least one common link in an otherwise ethnically diverse classroom. In terms of teaching her students about cultural issues, she said,

I like teaching them where the boundaries are. I think in the Deaf World, I think it is more important because they think, "You're deaf, I'm deaf, we're the same." I need to draw the line. Teach them about what it's like



when they go out into the world. With their boss, can they swear? They need to know their place, what is acceptable in Deaf culture, what's acceptable language. Deaf culture has levels of what language you can use. Give (the students) education. Teach them something. Maybe their parents never did teach them that. I always explain, you know, that ASL has levels (socially appropriate for the context) the same as English. You need to expand your vocabulary.

Ms. Geils did use different social registers depending on either who she interacted with or where inside and outside of the classroom particularly with her students. With adults like myself and other teachers who were her friends, she was quite open and frank. With her students she was professional, polite, and frequently used the words "please" and "thank you." Ms. Geils mentioned role modeling as part of a response to the question about teaching input.

I show role modeling a lot ... many Deaf people who are adults have to be role models. There are varying levels (role models), so it's hard to teach. But I do what I can within my limits. So that's how I teach them about culture, by action, showing.

One student commented about Ms. Geils attitude towards them inside and outside the classroom. "She is neutral, calm, tells us 'Do your job,' she's friendly. Out of class she is friendly! In class, less so."

In one illustrative moment, Ms. Geils made a comment about her role as a teacher and that of the student's role. She was lecturing the class about her disappointment and frustration with their lack of effort on a project that was due to be presented in class that day. She made the following remark to the class about her role and their own roles.

You're lucky you are not working in a job and I can fire you. I can't, lucky for you right? I work hard! I don't work here because I like to work, no. I work because I want to see you get something. You all need to work a little bit, too.

It should be noted that Ms. Geils' demeanor while saying the above statements was generally calm if a bit emphatic. Some of the preceding events also gave some hint at what kind of output the teacher expects from her students as well.

### **Output**

Output had the second most frequently observed and coded utterances from the data. Output is the opportunities provided by the teacher for the students to express their knowledge either by course work, question and answer sessions, or via verbal interactions. There were two themes for output: written content and verbal expression.

## Written Content

Based on observations, most of the written content consisted of short answer homework questions and quizzes that required one word answers or were multiple choice. There was one long-term project, a European Immigrant “scrapbook” where students use what they learned about immigration and imagine themselves as immigrants in the process of making the scrapbook. Also there was a short-term project where students had to prepare a presentation for the class on the Spanish-American War using multimedia sources. Three of these short-term project presentations were observed. Two of them were done by students using Power Point and the third was done using Microsoft Word. The Power Point presentations showed a lot of creativity on the part of the students, although they were sparse in terms of content. The Word presentation done was verbose in comparison to the Power Points. When this student admitted that he was not familiar with Power Point, Ms. Geils made the suggestion that the three students combine their talents to make a presentation that was informative as well as creative. It should be noted that Ms. Geils was not happy with the results from the class as a whole since many of them were unprepared (this will be illustrated in the section on feedback below). However, the point here is that she encouraged the use of technology and multimedia as a form of creative expression by her students.

Table 4

### *Output Behavior Patterns Across Focal Areas*

Content	Language Communication	Cultural Social	Classroom Behavior
Written Coursework Homework. Quizzes. Projects. Use of multi-media. Verbal expression Freedom of participation. Extended answers encouraged.	Bilingual ASL/English. Word choice in ASL Reading Read-aloud for help.	Freedom to speak Cultural control of classroom talk. Topics of discussion. Social Chatting	Good Behavior

When asked about what she tried to get out of her students this is what she said,

First, critical thinking skills. Can they think for themselves? Do they have ideas? It doesn't matter what kind. Related to academics, like this happened, comparing this event with that one. They're not robots, sitting there. Letting the teacher “Tell me, tell me, tell me.” For example, right now, in one class I have a project where they imagine, visualize, they create themselves as immigrants from a certain country, and move to

America. I asked that class today to write a “letter” to their “parents” in their European country. I explained it, went through the list, “You’re on a ship, is it a good experience or bad experience? Did you fall in love with someone? Did you meet someone?” I threw out ideas at them. “The ship arrives in New York, you see the Statue of Liberty, you see it, do you feel “Finally!” or do you feel “That’s what I heard about” or you finally see land and not water all around? You go into NYC. Is it easy to find a job or frustrating? Where do you live? Do you join your family? Or share an apartment with three strangers you don’t know, et cetera?” That’s my biggest struggle. I want to see students themselves come up with wonderful ideas, like they could write it.

During interviews students were asked about their written work. Some of the interview quotations above show that they had to do worksheets and quizzes nearly every day. There were similar interview responses from several other students as well. They also said they had to write answers to review questions in the text after reading from it. The quizzes themselves as well as the homework were often discussed in class which leads us to the theme of verbal expression.

### **Verbal Expression.**

One notable characteristic of Ms. Geils’ classroom that impressed me was the relatively open flow of communication. Many people are probably familiar with the kind of classroom where no talking is allowed except at the discretion of the instructor. That did happen in Ms. Geils class when she had the floor, but students were free to add comments or ask questions during pauses between her utterances. In addition to comments, opinions, and questions, students also responded to questions and other elicitation attempts by the teacher.

As noted above, Ms. Geils tended to intersperse her direct teaching with elicitation attempts. She had some success in getting students to respond. The kind of response she got depended on what kind of question she asked. Not surprisingly if she asked a “who” or “what” question, the answers were short. If she asked “how” or “why” questions the answers were more elaborate. These latter types of questions usually occurred when reviewing previously taught topics. Also, she would ask students to defend or elaborate on their answers, and generally try to have a discussion. This happened most often while reviewing the answers to quizzes right after they were finished. In most cases, if the majority of the students got the answer right the first time, she would move on to the next question. If there seemed to be some ambiguity or confusion, Ms. Geils would start probing with questions. She was not hesitant to pursue answers and was persistent about getting them. However, she also got a good amount of output from discussing class readings with her students either individually or in pairs. The relatively open flow of information in the classroom was remarkable when compared to many traditional classrooms. While Ms. Geils generally had control of the floor, she was not rigid about controlling student participation via questions or comments, and even allowed some off-topic discussions to take place. Like all fluent signers of ASL she was able to control the flow of conversation with her eye gaze. No interruptions were possible

unless she was looking at a student and yielded the floor. Sometimes students would begin to sign or wave for attention. However, they started only when they had Ms. Geils' eye contact. The following student comment illustrates how they felt about being able to speak up in the classroom.

I can interrupt to give an opinion. She won't stop us. She will listen to our feelings. We can express anything and she will listen and share with us. She's not like, "No, I disagree, too bad, I have the authority." She will always try to discuss, balance the student's and teacher's feelings, and go back and forth.

Based on observations, students were generally free to provide output. However, it was not just limited to academic topics. Ms. Geils was open to almost anything as she says here.

I want them to be able to share what they feel is right, what they feel is wrong. Sometimes they bring up some issues. As a teacher, I always have to be ready for the most interesting topics that could come up. I have had students discuss issues related to gays and lesbians. But, I applaud them because they're thinking for themselves and debating topics. I always try to give them a neutral side, explain why things happen that way, why people feel that way. The only thing I will teach them is like power versus pride. But basically, I enjoy it more when they're able to ask "It's the same as what happened out there." I want them to be able to learn to stand up for themselves too. Sometimes they're passive. I say, "Why support that? What do you really think? Come on." I think that's the only thing I really expect from them. To think for themselves.

Note that again Ms. Geils emphasizes the idea that students need to be independent and able to think for themselves. However, the classroom was not a *laissez-faire* environment either. Some students commented that they did not feel totally free to just interrupt at any time. "We are not permitted to distract people, let them finish. Then when they look at you. It's your turn. Don't interrupt and start talking."

In contrast, anytime Ms. Geils was not addressing the class or when she was writing on the board, several students would start chatting. Most of the chatting observed during this time was personal and social. Some of it was related to the educational topic at hand. Ms. Geils was never seen rebuking her students for doing so regardless of the reason for their chatting. All she had to do was either wave for attention or flash the lights when she was ready to take the floor. She stated to me that at the beginning of the school year she told the students she did not mind chatting in class as long as they paid attention when she wanted it. One student did say something about it, "Sometimes we talk in class, but when she is trying to teach we will not talk. When she looks away we can chat." Overall, the communication environment was open in this classroom and student output was encouraged as described above.

## Feedback

Feedback was the third most frequently coded category in this study. Feedback is defined as the teacher's evaluations of student contributions, comments, work, or behavior. As seen in Table 5, three themes were noted in this area: praise, criticism, and answers.

### Praise

Praise is defined as any positive response to student output. It can range from a quick nod to effusive comments. From the observations, Ms. Geils was quick to give praise for correct answers. This feedback was quite brief, usually in the form of a nod, or the comments "right" or "good," with a smile. She was not prone to lavish praise. However, she would use a little more approval if she thought there was a lot of deliberation or effort. In general, Ms. Geils treated most of her students equally in terms of praise. There was however one student who was the target of more frequent praise than the others. He often did better work than the other students or provided a greater number of answers to questions. But usually, even if Ms. Geils praised him more frequently, it was still brief.

Table 5

#### *Feedback Behavior Patterns Across Focal Areas*

Content	Language/ Communication	Cultural/Social	Classroom Behavior
Praise Brief comments Restates student comments Expansion attempts Criticism Brief and moderate comments Silence/Ignore Disappointment Answers Expects students to struggle Wants to see effort	Praise Brief comments Restates student comments Expansion attempts Criticism Appropriate ASL registers Helpful feedback about writing Answers Students need to read aloud before getting help	Praise Brief comments Replies to Deaf Culture Criticism Expects boundaries to be followed Silence/Ignore Shows tact in sensitive areas Answers Gives answers readily	Praise Brief comments Polite Criticism Silence/Ignore Mild sarcasm

The use of praise utterances, however brief, was often immediately followed up by input. Pause between the feedback and input utterances was very transitory. A frequently occurring example would be a nod quickly followed by a comment or another question. The nod provides positive feedback, but then the students get new immediate input from

the following comment or questions. The follow-up input was one of three types: repetition, expansion, or questions.

- Repetition was done for the benefit of all the other students, to ensure that they saw the original reply. In some cases rather than repeating, the teacher would rephrase. (i.e., “That’s right, she said....”)
- Expansion is where the teacher would elaborate further on the topic. This was something she liked to do frequently. Often she would add real life examples.
- Questions following the feedback were usually an attempt to get the students to give more details.

This is what two students said about Ms. Geils’ questioning patterns following feedback.

*Student 1:* She says, “Right, but I need more specifics.” She always says that.

*Student 2:* Tells us to expand more on the answer.

As Ms. Geils stated above, she wanted her students to learn to defend their answers or to have more discussions as a way of encouraging independent thinking skills.

There were few instances of positive feedback for classroom behavior. It is not that Ms. Geils did not recognize good behavior, she appeared that she simply expected good behavior and got it. All the same, Ms. Geils was polite towards her students. She thanked them if they took the time to show courteous behavior towards her or other people in the classroom. She used smiles and small compliments for obvious efforts to behave, or to correct their behavior. Most of the students felt that Ms. Geils was kind and fair with her feedback even if it was the negative kind, as will be seen below.

## **Criticism**

Here criticism refers to negative feedback. In a classroom, it can range from simple silence to plain “No” to blistering denunciations or constructive comments. Her students generally said that they saw Ms. Geils as the helpful sort with her criticism. But even her most disapproving feedback seemed to strike a chord with some of her students. Most of the time, her negative responses were brief, such as saying “no” or “wrong.” She also used silence and looked around the classroom at different students when she was not getting the answers she wanted. Almost all of the students commented about the feedback they got when they gave wrong answers during questioning. “When she’s not happy with our answers, the feedback is still good. Never says bad things, never criticizes us, never. Her feedback helps, she tries to help us.” “I’ve had her since last year. She never puts me down at all.” “She says, ‘No, that’s wrong’ or ‘Wrong, sorry, thumbs down.’” “She will say ‘wrong answer’ and she tells me and the others why it’s wrong. She says, ‘wrong’ or ‘right answer.’” “If I give the wrong answer, she says, ‘No. Close but...’” “If I’m wrong, ‘That’s not really the answer, does anyone else know the answer?’ If not, she will explain the answer.”

Observations showed that Ms. Geils was moderate in her negative responses. She tended to encourage students and pursue a correct answer. Silence was an effective way

to encourage more attempts by the students. It would be inaccurate to say it was non-communicative silence, as her eyebrows would be raised and there would be an expectant look on her face. Only after some unsuccessful attempts by the students would she give an answer.

Since Ms. Geils previously taught English, it is not surprising that she would insist her students try to use Standard English in writing. Of the student comments about the kind of feedback they got on their work, one of them did directly address the issue of writing.

Before, I didn't do well on my essays. She explains, gives feedback, and explains how we should do essays. She's not very (pause), not mad. Just, like the same thing as I recently said, willing to help, give feedback. "Do the right thing." Writes on the board the right way to do an essay. She says, "Don't worry you will do better next time."

Note that this student stated that she was "not mad," but willing to give help. I observed her explaining to the class the basics of writing an essay and she simply told them "I noticed most of you don't know how to write an essay the right way. I noticed from your tests that you have some weak areas." She also told them that they needed to support their thesis statements in their essays; that she was more interested in the supporting points than their grammar, which they could edit later. Basically, her pattern was to follow her "negative" comments with constructive feedback on how to do their work better the next time. This is what she said,

Now, if related with a paper, if I don't like something, I always write "You did good on this one, but where is this other point? What is that?" and they always have a chance to make up their work, so that they're communicating through writing. This is also reflected in a statement that she left written on top of the board: "Reminder: You can redo any assignment."

The type of negative feedback Ms. Geils used related to social and cultural issues or behavior varied from staring (i.e., "teacher's glare") to disagreement. Few incidents of egregious behaviors that might draw a stern rebuke were observed. Ms. Geils tried to ignore negative behavior to avoid drawing attention to it. One student was observed telling a rather tasteless joke. Ms. Geils noticed and ignored it. He continued repeating it to other students causing them to laugh, and she simply looked at them with raised eyebrows. The laughing came to an abrupt stop. She never mentioned a word about it then or afterwards. If there were some social or cultural matters Ms. Geils disagreed with, she would usually directly address the issue with a short comment.

Ms. Geils' shared her perspective on what she tries to teach and what she expected from her students in terms of behavior.

I don't like setting too many rules, but I also like teaching them where the boundaries are. I also want them to be motivated to learn, to enjoy this. It's not supposed to be a place where you get punished and scolded but a

place where they have enthusiasm. But, I'm very strict about a few things like being on time. How I do that, by giving quizzes. Train them to know how to keep up with their work. I try to give them a lot of empowerment with becoming more responsible. I think that's most important in a learning environment. Once they, the students, feel they have control over a lot, they will probably be open to learning more. If I say "No, no, no," they will become resistant. I need to let them be themselves. The first day of school I always say, "I will treat you the same as you treat me." Respect each other. It's fine. I've always had a good relationship with most, if not all of my students in eight years of teaching because I give them their room, they're people too. They have their lives and they have their experiences. Can't always expect them to be perfect. But I always try to take advantage of their positive energy, wherever they can find it. Take advantage of it. I try to redirect those who are negative. I often ignore negative behavior because I know really they take advantage. I don't want to encourage them. I always focus on the positive.

We can see how the teacher appears to empower her students to be independent thinkers and show respect for other people and how she accentuates their positive aspects over the negative.

Ms. Geils' most powerful feedback tool was her way of expressing disappointment as seen in the following vignette. This had to do with the multimedia presentation mentioned previously. The students were ill prepared on the day their presentations were due. What follows is an excerpt of the lecture Ms. Geils gave her students. Of all the observations I made, this one was unforgettable and to me sums up what she expected from her students. Note that no "yelling" happened here, her demeanor was very calm and straightforward.

How do you think I feel right now? (Several students say, "Upset") Disappointed yes, upset no. Why am I disappointed, why? (Several students say, "Not ready") You're not ready. No one asked me for help, not much. Very few asked me. I expected a lot more questions...I didn't see you use a lot of your textbooks. Yes, I know it's frustrating for you. The library wasn't the best place to find books. Frustrating for you, right? BUT, did anyone say to me "I don't think I have enough, this is what I have?" Today, you're still working (on projects). You're supposed to come in at 8:00, ready to speak, right? I see people still typing, saying, "I thought..." I don't want to see this happen again... You can show me what you have. I will say some of what happened was not your fault...but I also don't think you read what I write, I don't think you really paid attention to what I said in class, what I wrote on the board. That's a problem. I want you to understand I work because I want you to get something. You need to work a little bit too. Okay? Don't feel bad, I'm not mad, I'm not upset, I'm disappointed. This was a frustrating project for you and frustrating for me too. Okay?



It is clear that the students did not meet her expectations. As it turned out this lecture did have an impact on the students as well as myself, as can be seen from their interviews when some of them commented on what had happened. "Really, she can be strict if we don't follow her expectations. She will be upset, feel like 'Come on!'" "Some kids did not finish their projects. They were irresponsible. She was disappointed. (Looks taken aback) That was the first time for me. I was thinking, 'I should progress faster, should have listened.'" "So far seems her attitude's pretty good. No problem with her attitude until recently, she was upset because we were not responsible about asking her questions. First time I saw her upset so far. Her attitude is fine." However, two of the students did not seem willing to accept what Ms. Geils said and remarked that they felt they were not given sufficient time to prepare. My observations of the two students were that they had not been working very hard and were actually off task. Ms. Geils had also noticed that I was watching them and she remarked to me that she doubted that they would be ready for their presentations. This reinforces my observations of her pattern of expecting students to work without constant reminders and for them to ask questions as needed. She followed a similar pattern with answering students' questions.

### **Answers**

While Ms. Geils would give answers to student questions, she did not give them out freely without first trying to get some effort from the students. Recall that she did not like to "spoon feed" answers to her students. This is what she told me during our interview.

I want them to feel the struggle and success, that experience of accomplishment. Spoon-fed, they will never feel that experience...I want students to experience frustration, but when they get to the point of too much frustration, that's when I know I need to get involved. Again it's based on judgment, you know, human intuition.

Her usual behavior pattern was to reply to questions with a question of her own to see what students already understood. Also it seemed to encourage students' thinking in order to answer their own questions. This pattern was also apparent when she helped students with their reading, and during review questioning. One student commented on Ms. Geils' answers. "Yeah, at least we try. If we're wrong she'll still help us. She tells us the reason why we're wrong, explains it. If you're right, she will say you're right and explain more deeply."

Ms. Geils employed the same pattern for helping students find materials as in the library and on the internet. One day she gave them a list of search engines to use on the internet to help them with their research. One student asked her why there was so much work involved. She gave him a mild rebuke about being lazy and explained that research involves making sure he had more than one source of information. This behavior pattern goes right along with her expressed beliefs.

Ms. Geils' pattern in giving answers has been to make students show some effort at those answers on their own particularly with academic content. However, with topics related to culture or society, she would often just tell the students what they wanted to

know. One day when students were asking about different names and surnames for various ethnicities, she came right out with the answers. She told them about the different translations of the names Michael and John in different languages. Anything that had to do with the possibility of continuing school into higher education was answered promptly and with encouragement. Ms. Geils also did not shy away from giving answers about potentially controversial cultural topics. In discussions about cultures asserting themselves, she liked to talk about power versus pride. While it is not clear why Ms. Geils was so forthcoming with answers, it is clear that her “no spoon feeding” rule appeared not to apply to cultural or societal topics. By and large, her feedback, regardless of its type, seemed well received by her students.

### Climate

Climate refers to the general mood of the classroom and the teacher’s provision of emotional support, warmth and attention through cues indicating support and approval. This can include the attitudes, statements, and behaviors directed towards the students. Climate was the fourth and least frequently coded factor from the data.

This is not to say that it was the least noteworthy of the four. In fact, given hindsight, I believe it could be the most significant. The low number of coded utterances reflects the difficulty of distinguishing the pervasive nature of climate in the classroom. The Earth’s atmosphere is a useful metaphor. We have it all around us and rarely think about it unless there are changes, but this does not make it unimportant to us. The same can be said for a classroom climate. It is there, but we do not notice it unless it changes. While several examples were shown above that the classroom offered a positive learning environment, I also will look at more specific climate issues related to the four focal areas. In every area, there were two types of communication behaviors noted: attitudes and body language. See Table 6.

Table 6

#### *Climate Behavior Patterns Across Focal Areas*

Content	Language/ Communication	Cultural/ Social	Classroom Behavior
Attitude Natural teacher Favorite subject US History Teacher not friend	Attitude Appropriate language Bilingual ASL/English	Attitude Pro-ASL and Deaf Culture Sensitive to other cultures	Attitude Expects good behavior. Not a place for punishment.
Body Language Enthusiasm Animated when interested Effect of opinions on students	Importance of reading skills Body Language Expectant looks when writing vocabulary on board. Animated about ASL, English and reading	Expects deaf children to be treated like any other. Body Language Animated about Deaf Culture and Socio-Cultural issues related to History	Body Language Folded fingers Teacher’s glare

## **Attitude**

Attitude is defined here as a mental position with regard to a fact or state. Attitude data in this study were generated by comments made to the class and during interviews. Looking at attitude gives us a better insight about why Ms. Geils behaves the way she does in certain situations. I already described some of the insights from previous sections. Most important in setting the climate is the teachers' attitude. The perception of Ms. Geils is that she is an optimistic person who enjoys her job even with some of the stress and frustrations that come with it. This is reflected in one of Ms. Geils' comments.

I started teaching from scratch but it felt natural to me. I think I always knew I would be a teacher. I guess I really knew in the back of my mind that schools were my field. Anyway, (after college) I worked at my old High School. I started really liking teaching and the hours were neat. But whew, I realized it was a lot of work. After a while, I felt I couldn't imagine doing another job.

Ms. Geils appears to be a teacher who enjoyed working in the field of education and felt she belonged there.

Another aspect to examine is Ms. Geils' attitude about her role as a teacher and what she expected from her students. This is what she said during her interview.

I'm not here to be like a friend. I always emphasize that to my students. We can be friends, we can. But, I'm your teacher first, your friend second. You don't have to like me, don't have to, but you need to do what I ask you to do. The reason for that is that I want them to understand that they're here for a reason and I'm here for a reason. I'm here to make sure they learn something and leave this classroom saying, "Oh, I really learned a lot." Not, "I love that teacher, lets me do whatever I want in the classroom." I don't want to be remembered that way. I want them to remember me for hard work.

It appears that Ms. Geils' attitude is that students are in school to learn, and she expects them to work for what they want. She would only push them so far, and if they decided not to do what she expected, there would be negative consequences. You can see that she was friendly enough, but also students better be ready to do some work. This reflects the climate described by the students as "strict but friendly."

In student's perceptions of Ms. Geils' classroom manner, the words "strict" and "friendly" showed up several times. "If I'm not serious, her attitude is 'Well, what's that?' She is serious, strict. Tells me to be serious." "Really, she can be strict if we don't follow her expectations." "She seems to be a good teacher, but she is like strict, very strict about homework and tests." "I like that she knows what she is teaching, and is a very strict teacher." "She smiles, is friendly, a little bit strict, no big deal."

While the students were speaking mostly of Ms. Geils' attitude, this can also manifest their perception of how she enforces her classroom rules. The aura of the classroom and the approach to students' behavior is one of mutual respect. When asking

for compliance, I noted that her tone appeared simple, straightforward, and she did it with a smile. In every case I observed, the students quickly and quietly complied without protest or showing a negative attitude. Note that Ms. Geils said that she tends to ignore negative behaviors and this was generally true. However she does have her limits and was observed reprimanding her students quite sternly after repeated behavior violations. Such outbursts were rare.

You have already seen some examples above that Ms. Geils has definite opinions about what kind of language is acceptable for use in the classroom and other social settings. During the interview, she expressed her belief in a bilingual ASL/English philosophy. Persons who subscribe to this philosophy believe that ASL should be the first language of children who are deaf and the primary mode of face-to-face communication in the classroom and that it can be used to teach deaf children how to read and write English as a second language. Many of Ms. Geils classroom practices appear to follow this pedagogical approach.

While she did not say so directly, it is not hard to infer that Ms. Geils sees good reading skills as a key ability to develop in school. One indicator of this is a poster in her classroom saying “Reading makes life a lot easier.” She does not “spoon-feed” her students with their reading difficulties. Instead she makes them read aloud in ASL from the text and helps them over the rough spots using questions to elicit their own knowledge. She also said she would rather have her students learn history through the use of novels rather than state mandated text books and then have them try to discern fact from fiction in these novels. As described before her goal was her students’ independence, as readers and as citizens.

Ms. Geils advocated the use of ASL in the classroom and of discussing topics related to Deaf culture. She appeared to be sensitive to other human differences, for example other languages, cultures, and sexual orientation. Her behavior towards her students was differentiated not on the basis of their cultural differences as much as with their academic aptitude. She was asked if her expectations of her students were related to her own experience as a Deaf person.

Maybe because I’m deaf myself. I know that being deaf is no different. People act like it’s pitiable. One student admitted to me and to the principal and her parents in a meeting we had one time, “Honest, I admit I begged for an A from other teachers” and they would give her an A because she was hard-of-hearing. I was disgusted. I know there are teachers like that. I would have never done that. I’m Deaf, maybe, I know what it’s like. But again, it’s not because I’m Deaf that makes me that way. It’s because, think, those people who say, “Oh, fine, I’ll give you an A,” have NO respect for deaf education. And I feel those teachers should not have any business being here, period. There are a lot of hearing teachers that I admire and respect because they’re there for the same reason I am. Being fascinated with the deaf, fine, but there are a lot of hearing teachers who come here with sympathy, pity, who want to help. I hope I didn’t end up sounding too angry. It’s not that, it’s just the fact that I’m frustrated for many deaf educators. Educators of the deaf who really have a vision of the deaf as being like anyone else.

If there was anything Ms. Geils was openly negative about in the classroom, it was the problems with some of the support services at the school. She would complain to students and even to me about the lack of good library books, the limited hours of the computer lab, the time it takes for the administration to take care of problems, and other affairs that were out of her control. However, even with these perceived limitations, she showed an ability to be flexible and to work within the limits of the school. Neither did she let the students use these limits as an excuse for not finishing their schoolwork. She expressed her desire that wanted students to work for something instead of having it handed to them.

### **Body Language**

Another way that I could see that Ms. Geils enjoyed teaching is via her body language. To me, she showed a lot of enthusiasm, animation, and interest in the subject. People who have either observed her in videos for this study, or live in the classroom have described her as an interesting teacher with enthusiasm. The students themselves were attentive and rarely seen off task during one of her talks. Some people may think of an animated teacher as one who gestures a lot. That concept would be a bit difficult to apply here since ASL has movements that have linguistic structure and meaning that could be mistaken for gesturing by those not familiar with the language. However, she was usually in constant motion, not staying very long in one spot, which gives the impression of an animated person. Deaf people, like myself are sensitive to body language and especially facial expressions. Ms. Geils' facial expressions were frequently filled with meaning and intent. Some examples are described below.

Nearly every time Ms. Geils introduced a new word or concept and wrote it on the board, she would turn to the class with a look that could only be described as "expectant." She raised her eyebrows, folded her arms, and looked around the room for a student to say something. This was an effective prompt and led students to attempt to contribute a possible definition. She was a bit livelier in her discussions about English word definitions, the ASL signs for them, and often brought up the root meanings of the word in Latin, Greek, or some other language. She exhibited a real enthusiasm for these types of discussions. Also related to language was how she dealt with reading difficulties by discussing them with her students. During these discussions she showed a high level of immediacy. She would stand quite close to the student and alternate between leaning over the text with them and only standing back to talk with them. This latter action is due to the need for space between people using ASL to be seen.

Issues related to Deaf culture seemed to bring out liveliness in Ms. Geils' actions and talk. In one example where a student was talking about Deaf soldiers from the North and South during the Civil War, Ms. Geils showed interest and smiled. She followed with some folklore about the Deaf during the same war, which she told with some zest. The same could be said for most other culturally related issues brought up in the classroom. It seems apparent that she enjoys history, which of course relates information about culture and society. Ms. Geils enjoyed discussions with students if they could apply classroom topics with their own life experiences. The only time she was observed having what could be described as negative body language related to cultural/social issues was during the interview when she was describing the kinds of teachers she did not like, who "have

no business being in Deaf education,” as in the excerpt shown above. The frustration was clearly visible on her face. However she might have felt about certain hearing people, especially those described above, she was not seen making disparaging remarks or any sort of body language to indicate negative feelings about them while she was with her students.

When she was not happy or satisfied with what she was seeing from her students, one habit she had was folding her fingers in front of herself while looking at the class. She would have raised eyebrows and corners of her mouth would be slightly upturned. There are only two incidents that stand out where she had an angry tone and a truly stern look on her face. An angry tone in ASL normally involves larger and more rapid signing movements and lowered eyebrows. One was where she rebuked a student for swearing and the other was where she told some of the students to “Get it out of your system, now!” She also occasionally employed the “teacher’s glare” that was described above in the feedback section. On the whole, with the exception of some behavioral discipline, there was a positive learning climate in the classroom.

### **Summary of Findings**

Using the sub-questions of this study as an outline, the findings are summarized here. Ms. Geils showed behaviors that reflected generally high expectations of her students and a good belief in her own teaching efficacy. She wanted her students to be able to think independently and to be able debate social issues well. She believed that they would accomplish more and have a better sense of that accomplishment if they needed to struggle to solve problems they dealt with. The data contains at least five references by the teacher that students should “think for themselves.” Ms. Geils deplored other professionals in the field who let students get by with little effort or “spoon fed” them. Having her students behave as good Deaf citizens who know their boundaries and appropriate social registers was important to her.

### **Patterns of Communication Cues**

The patterns of communication cues used by Ms. Geils created a positive, friendly, and caring learning environment within the classroom. She showed an enthusiasm for teaching and for the subject matter as reflected by her engaging approach to teaching. She often applied the concepts taught real life situations. Ms. Geils emphasized the learning of written English and vocabulary skills. She effectively used ASL in English language teaching. Students were encouraged to make use of media and popular culture to further investigate or learn about topics. They were free to ask questions and make comments during appropriate pauses in Ms. Geils’ talk. Students were given homework and quizzes daily that followed state curriculum standards. Feedback towards students’ verbal and written work was brief and unambiguous. Students were expected to show some self-effort at finding answers before Ms. Geils would intervene. When they did have an answer, she would attempt to get them to expand further upon it. In terms of social behavior, Ms. Geils would usually ignore or react with silence to anything she deemed inappropriate. She openly encouraged anything that had to do with promoting Deaf culture.

### **Teacher Exhibition of Differential Behaviors with The Students**

Ms. Geils, while generally positive and encouraging towards her students as a group, did exhibit some differential behaviors towards individual students. She had a tendency to favor her higher achieving students in discussions by asking them more questions. None of the individual interaction patterns were truly negative. Overall, even with the differential treatment, she was just as likely to work closely with any of the students. Ms. Geils' differential interaction patterns were almost completely tuned to each student's particular needs or strengths.

### **Student Response to Teacher Cues and Behavior**

. The student's responses to Ms. Geils' cues and behaviors were generally positive. She was described as strict but friendly, fair in her feedback, and showed respect towards the views of the students. Most of the students said the class work she provided was challenging. Students said they were free to contribute to discussions and ask questions when it was appropriate to interrupt. Some students said they felt obligated to contribute to discussions and expand upon answers they provided. Most of them described her feedback about their work as positive or helpful and that they could do additional work to keep up their grades at their own discretion.

## **Discussion**

### **Limitations**

As a single case study, since only one classroom and teacher is involved, the results cannot be generalized to other classrooms. There are other reasons not to generalize to other cases including wide variations in the kinds of communication modes used between teachers and deaf students, variations in the communication skills of teachers, differences between a self-contained deaf education classroom and a mainstreamed classroom, that in the latter, communication is often mediated by a third party in the form of a sign language interpreter (Labue, 1998). However, it is usually not an assertion that a case study seeks to generalize to a population as in a survey study but instead it can generalize to theory (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 1994). There is discussion below on the theory behind the framework used for this study especially in terms of classroom climate.

Secondly, the presence of a researcher observing a classroom can affect the behavior of the teacher. It is possible that the participant teacher deviated from her normal approach with students. Students themselves may be self-conscious and/or behave in a manner that is not typical of their ordinary style. Observations were made over two week periods a month apart to reduce the observation effect and in essence to make the cameras and researcher become a part of the classroom environment. Also since the participants were not aware of the actual purpose of the study during data collection, this should have reduced the possibility of behaving or responding in a manner that would "please" the researcher.

The teaching features used by Ms. Geils, as identified in this study, largely reflect those recognized in the literature as characteristic of teachers communicating high expectation behaviors towards their students (Brophy, 1985; Good, 1981; Good & Brophy, 2003; Rosenthal 1974, 2002; Weinstein, 2002). Not only does she have high expectations, but also the characteristics of her classroom reflect those of a positive learning climate (Cooper & Simonds, 1999). Ms. Geils' insistence that her students not be "spoon-fed," that they show effort, think for themselves, learn from their mistakes and showing a belief that students can achieve is somewhat contradictory to the common belief that struggling to learn reflects a lack of ability. Weinstein (2002) made note of this trend and stated that "students are not taught that the prize is in the struggle" (p. 37) and that ability has come to mean the appearance of doing work effortlessly. The idea that teachers of deaf and hard-of-hearing children need the attributes shown above is reflected in the following statement; "If there is a problem, it is much more likely to be found in the way that we teach and what we expect from deaf students than in the deaf students themselves" (Marschark et al., 2002, p. 7). There is a need to get past the perceived limitations of the students and for teachers to realize that they indeed have the ability to influence student achievement. In other words, as noted by Weinstein, increased teacher efficacy, reflective of the belief that student aptitude is malleable rather than fixed, can result in increased student achievement. Just simply willing higher expectations is not enough--the beliefs of the teacher must be communicated and acted upon in order for student achievement to be impacted in a positive way (Weinstein, 1996).

### **Influence of Climate**

Of all the attributes of Ms. Geils' classroom, the most pervasive was that of the climate particularly in terms of communication. This epiphany did not occur to me until after I had finished doing the data analysis. While climate was the smallest category of coded utterances, looking at the overall data suggested to me that it had the largest influence, even though this was not detected in the initial analysis. As in the analogy I used above that compared classroom climate and the Earth's atmosphere, just because we are not conscious of it does not mean it is not there. Many of us could agree the teacher creates the climate. Think of any of your teachers and think about how the climate changed in the same room with a substitute teacher. Cooper and Simonds (1999) noted that while climate is primarily non-verbal, all classroom communication interactions have a climate element to them. Fisher (1995) states that teachers are responsible for setting the tone in the classroom and students will take their cues from it. These suggested to me that while climate behaviors can be isolated at times, it is also an integral part of the other three factors. The communication climate or teacher effect in Ms. Geils' classroom was a pervasive element that was part of each interaction. There appeared to be an open climate with a social constructivist basis where the teacher assists students in their construction of knowledge (see for example Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007). Note the friendly and warm demeanor of the teacher, the encouragement for student participation (but controlled by the teacher's eye-gaze), the constant comparisons of the topic matter to students' lives, and the ongoing social chatting while teacher does not have the floor. It was obvious that the students felt comfortable there.



### **Moderated Differentiation in Instruction**

Another important attribute of Ms. Geils was the moderated differentiation in her approach towards her students. While there was some differentiation in feedback and attention oriented along the lines of ability to contribute and successful completion of assigned work, all students received the same type of work and the same opportunities to do extra work. Weinstein (2002) notes that in highly differentiated classrooms, the high and low ranked students received work of different difficulty levels, differentiated feedback (more negative and critical towards lows), and different opportunities to do extra or special assignments. This was not observed happening in Ms. Geils' classroom.

She did mention that she tried to give the same kinds of work to lower "non-academic" classes. However the question remains as to just how differentiated her approach is between classes as compared to within class. Also, I know that the school tracked their students into classes based on both their perceived and their measured ability. By what exact criteria I did not find out. This begs the question, was Ms. Geils' behavior less differentiated because of the similar perceived abilities of her students within the class? Across how many programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students is tracking a common practice? There needs to be some investigation into how the institutional practice of tracking or grouping students both within and between classes influences expectations practices towards deaf students.

### **Influence of Culture and Language**

One of the remarkable issues about this study was the cultural consonance in the classroom despite the ethnic diversity of the students. Remember that all of the students and the teacher labeled themselves as Deaf. Even one who stated he was actually hard-of-hearing says he likes to call himself Deaf and that he was proud of it. The impact of cultural differences on teacher expectations is not to be underestimated. Irvine (1990) noted that in classrooms where both the teacher and students were African American, the expectations were higher. When there was a Caucasian teacher, there was cultural dissonance taking place that created an unfavorable learning environment. Weinstein (2002) cited many examples in the literature of lowered expectations of students whose cultural background differed from that of the teacher.

We saw that Ms. Geils emphasizes that her students will not just be good citizens, but good Deaf citizens and that she sees herself as a role model. Whitesell (1991) noted that the Deaf teacher in her study said her deaf students did well because she expected that they would do well. Compton (1997) in an interview of four female teachers who were Deaf noted a pattern that they had higher academic and behavioral expectations for their students because they knew what it was like to be deaf themselves. Ms. Geils made similar remarks in her interviews. Exposure to adult Deaf role models and to Deaf culture could have an empowering effect on students in terms of the kinds of expectations they will receive. It could tell them they too can grow up to be well-educated and successful adults (Schirmer, 2001). Stewart and Kluwin (2001) advocate the exposure to Deaf role models as critical to the healthy development of deaf children. They also advocate the use of team teaching with a Deaf teacher. While many hearing individuals may never be a

part of Deaf culture, their knowledge of, and respect for it and its members could also be helpful in fostering better expectations.

One of the defining characteristics of a culture is the language used by the participants. In this case, it means the use of ASL. Many culturally Deaf adults strongly identify with and hold great loyalty to ASL (Lane et al., 1996; Schirmer, 2001). One of the characteristics of Ms. Geils was her love of language and reading. She was able to use ASL effectively to teach language concepts. She did not only emphasize ASL or English, but also the importance of knowing other languages. I also described how she made her students put forth some effort in their reading by translating written English into ASL. Not only did she appear to expect her students to be competent in ASL but also in the use of written English. This reflects the views of many Deaf adults that while ASL is important to them, learning written English is also important (Lane et al.; Marschark et al., 2002; Whitesell 1991). Many Deaf teachers use ASL in their classrooms as a means of instruction for content and language (Marschark et al.). The issue of communication in deaf education classrooms has long been contentious, and currently there is debate over the effectiveness of using ASL to teach English using bilingual approaches (Marschark et al.; Moores 2001). It would be helpful to look at not just the pedagogy, but also the social cultural aspects of language teaching by Deaf adults.

### **Spoon Feeding**

The most provocative construct that arose from this study was Ms. Geils' comments on "spoon feeding." I was familiar with this term being used among other educators of the deaf and Deaf adults (Smith, 2007). However the role of this idea in teaching practice, and its meaning among teachers of the deaf has yet to be investigated. As she told me, Ms. Geils uses it to express contempt for educators of the deaf who do not challenge their students and who willingly provide easy answers to problems. Apparently, some students try to take advantage of "spoon feeding" to get easy grades or avoid hard work. Marschark et al. (2002) notes that teachers are often willing to accept superficial answers from deaf students and that they are often allowed to get by with less than what is required from hearing students. It is unclear at this point just how widespread the phenomenon of "spoon feeding" is in deaf education, whether the phenomenon has other labels, and how students perceive it and make use of it.

### **Student Perspective**

It is clear to me that student perspective can be valuable to this type of study. Nearly every statement that the students made during their interviews for this study was a comment on the different aspects of communication behavior of the teacher and its affect upon them. This should not be surprising in light of the fact that they are the consumers of education. As Weinstein (2002) noted there is a gap in most of the studies done on teacher expectations in that they focus mostly on the teachers and ignore student perspectives. She noted that students as young as kindergarten age are able to perceive and make astute reports about the kinds of teacher communication behaviors they see in the classroom. In deaf education, it would be informative to the study of teacher expectations (and many other issues as well) if we were able to gain the perspectives and

stories of deaf and hard-of-hearing people about the deaf education programs that they attended as youngsters.

### Revisiting the Framework

I will look at some of the issues that arose post hoc from the preliminary framework used in this study (See Table 1) and a revised framework will be proposed that addresses this subject for future studies. It became apparent to me as an epiphany after the conclusion of data analysis and while writing this up that climate was not just a separate factor from the other three: input, output, and feedback, but is an overarching factor and is inherent within any other factor present in the classroom. This brings into question the idea of climate as a separate entity from the other three factors investigated. In regards to the other three factors, there was a consistent pattern in the classroom where input was followed by output from the students followed by feedback from the teacher. This is to me is no different than the Input, Response, and Evaluation (IRE) discourse pattern that has been shown to be the default pattern in American classrooms (Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979, Wells, 1993).

In terms of the focal areas, there were instances when the codes applied to utterances in the data would involve two or more of these focal areas. There were frequent overlaps in coding between the areas of language/communication and content. Other frequent overlaps involved socio-cultural aspects such as classroom behavior and social chatting. In light of these overlaps and for purposes of simplification, the four focal areas can be reduced to two. These are labeled academics, and social/cultural. The new academic focus would include all of the original content focus area, and the formal language curriculum component of the language/communication focus. The new social/cultural focus includes the informal aspects of language/communication, and all of the classroom behavior and cultural/social focus areas.

A visual concept of the framework with the revisions suggested above is presented in three dimensions in Figure 2 below. First is the overarching dimension of climate, which includes all affective behavior actions that are communicated in the classroom by the teacher. The IRE discourse pattern is represented horizontally in place of the original factors. The areas of focus, academics and social cultural are laid vertically over the discourse pattern. This gives us a six-way matrix with climate as the overarching dimension. Specific examples of each area of the matrix are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Revised Framework of Teacher Communication of Expectations

<u>Climate</u> : Established by affective actions of teacher		
<u>Discourse Pattern</u>	<u>Areas of Focus</u>	
	Academics	Social Cultural
Input	Instruction of formal curriculum	Instruction on social and cultural norms
Response	Student written or verbal response	Student behavior
Evaluation	Comments about academic performance	Comments about behavior

With the current push for increased student achievement and more interventions, the truth is that there is no simple fix to the problem as noted by Nolen (2004). A change in attitudes and expectations for the achievement of children who are deaf is one of the complex and interrelated issues that needs to be addressed. This really requires a system wide commitment across the interdependent layers of community, schools, and institutions of higher education to encourage positive behaviors like that of the teacher in this study. Fullan (2001) states that while it is quite difficult to institute changes in established educational settings, they can be accomplished if all affected parties are involved. Applied to deaf education, it requires that we listen and involve the consumers; the children, the parents, the exemplary teachers and administrators, and especially adults who are Deaf. Once we have given the “spoon” back to deaf children and expect them to use it like any other child, like the teacher we just read about, we will find that they can effectively “feed” themselves and live fuller and more independent lives.

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## Appendix A

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. What kind of learning climate do you try to project in your classroom?
2. What kind of feedback do you like to give your students when (a) what they do is acceptable, and (b) what they do is not acceptable to you?
3. What kinds of teaching input, academic and otherwise, do you try to provide for your students?
4. What kind of output do you try to get from your students to show what they've learned in your classroom? Don't limit yourself to academic topics only.
5. What does it mean to you to have high or positive teacher expectations of students?

### Student Interview Questions

1. How do you feel about your teacher's attitude towards you in the classroom? (Climate)
2. What kinds of things does your teacher tell you about what you do in the classroom and your school work? (Feedback)
3. How do you feel about how you're taught and the kind of work (homework, tests, projects, etc.) you get in class/school? (Input)
4. How do you feel about the kinds of things the teacher lets you do or asks you to prove how much you've learned in school? (Output)
5. Is there anything else you want to tell me that you like or don't like about school or your teacher?

Note: Probes “Tell me more about that” or “Is there anything else?” used as needed to gain clarification.

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### **Author Note**

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