Exploring the Ways that Adolescents Form and Perpetuate Impressions of their Teachers

Dissertation

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Abstract

This study used qualitative methodology including observations and interviews to attempt to discover how secondary students form impressions of their teachers and how those impressions are perpetuated among students, leading to teacher reputation. The findings from the study indicate that students form impressions of their teachers by assessing certain immediate elements about the teacher and class including teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style. Students monitor and consider three additional elements when forming extended impressions, additionally contributing to teacher reputation: level of self-confidence, teacher academic support, and sense of classroom community.
Dedication

To all students and all teachers. Always remember, we are all in this together.
Acknowledgements

It’s difficult to step back and gain perspective on the process, attempting to consider everyone who deserves acknowledgment in this endeavor. It makes sense to thank all of the students I have taught over the years. It was thinking about the quality of their learning experiences that continually motivated me to examine the elements in this project. I know I imposed my curiosity onto many of my students with questions about their perceptions, and I was always grateful for their informal insight.

My own parents were always supportive of my projects in higher education, especially my Ph.D. I consider them both extremely intelligent and well rounded, and that has always been a strong influence on my view of learning and knowledge.

Thanks to those at the site of my research, both the actual school and district. Without the aid of those who assisted me in the recruitment phases as well as the contributions of the teacher and student participants, none of this would have been possible.

My dissertation committee deserves special and sincere recognition. As somewhat of a non-traditional student, I feel that you had to go out of your way at times to accommodate me.

Dr. Errante, I appreciated your time and efforts in coaching me along the way in regard to data collection and analysis. I enjoyed the class time that I had with you and consider you so well versed and experienced in the field. Your sense of humor, candor,
and overall approach were welcome, and I feel fortunate that you were willing to work with me.

Dr. Soter, I feel it is a testament to your talents and the meaningful nature of your interactions with students that I still remember your class from my undergraduate program nearly twenty years ago. So many of my colleagues speak highly of you, having completed the same program at Ohio State. I am so pleased that we kept in touch over the years, and I am so honored that you were willing to assist me in this project. I think I only scratched the surface of what you have to offer in my area; having someone of your knowledge and expertise of both theory and pedagogy truly enriched this project.

Dr. Anderman, I truly appreciate your willingness to accept me as an advisee after Dr. Davis’ departure. It would have been easier to decline, especially considering that you were embarking on much greater responsibilities as the Interim Director of the school of Educational Policy and Leadership. I know I benefited from your considerable expertise and experience in the field and your substantive background. More importantly to me though was the time you devoted to assisting me and the support you provided during the entire process. I have grown so much as a thinker and academic writer through that coaching and your attention to my project.

Dr. Davis, I simply would not have reached this point had we not met. I can still remember that first class – you were so engaging and inspiring as a teacher, and when I realized how alike we were in our approach to building relationships, it was as if we were meant to work together. You nurtured me along the way, with your balance of understanding, support, and tough love. Although the final stretch of this project was not exactly as I had pictured so long ago, it meant a lot to me that you were willing to
continue to participate and provide coaching and support from a distance. You are unforgettable.

I will end by thanking my wife, Gretchen. I am well aware of the sacrifices that she made so that I could complete this degree. They were many, and they were significant. But what I want to thank her for the most is her support. I heard every kind word she spoke about me to others (she probably knows I was listening). No matter what phase, I always knew she was willing to support me. I absolutely, positively could not have completed this program and my dissertation without her love and her support. I don’t know how I can ever repay her, but I know that I plan to try. I am so fortunate to have her in my life, and I want her to know that.
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Fields of Study

Major Field: Educational Policy and Leadership
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

During my seventeen years of teaching adolescents at the middle school and high school levels, I spent immeasurable hours thinking about how to be effective with each individual student. My training and experience run the gamut from rural to urban to suburban; in each case one element remained consistent – the inconsistency. It never failed to amaze me that the same technique, approach, or demeanor that was successful with one student might repel another. What both frustrated and intrigued me, though, is the idea that, as a seasoned educator, I felt I should be able to ascertain what approach would best suit each student. Most importantly are how my students’ perceptions of me as a person and of my teaching would serve to create my reputation, and how this could possibly impact future student perceptions and likewise my future effectiveness. The concepts of student impression formation and teacher reputation, however, are far more complex when one takes into consideration the variety of different personalities (both students’ and teachers’) as well as students’ developmental levels. Adolescents are not always able to effectively explain what they want or need, and they are not always willing to communicate with adults even if they do know.

Over time, instruments were developed in an attempt to measure how effective a student perceived a teacher to be (Norman, 2010). Marsh (1984, p. 709) spells out
vividly two important elements associated with the study of student evaluations of
teacher effectiveness:

Teaching effectiveness is multifaceted. The design of instruments
to measure students’ evaluations and the design of research to study
the evaluations should reflect this multidimensionality. There is no single
criterion of effective teaching. Hence, a construct approach to the
validation of student ratings is required in which the
ratings are shown to be related to a variety of other indicators of effective
teaching. No single study, no single criterion, and no single paradigm can
demonstrate, or refute, the validity of students’ evaluations.

Students may react to a teacher’s instruction based on varying criteria. Any attempt to
study what factors they consider when analyzing effective teaching must take that into
account. Marsh implies that ratings should consider other elements of the classroom
dynamic in order to be effective. Given Marsh’s comments, that the ‘instruments’
students use to evaluate teacher effectiveness are ultimately limited, there seemed a clear
need for more qualitative studies of students’ perceptions of their teachers, particularly
with regard to the quality of their interactions. The ‘truest’ instrument may indeed be the
candor of the students’ reflections on what they experience and observe in the classroom.

Informally, I have observed this for the past several years. In my role as
confidant, colleague, and department chairperson, I have had occasion to counsel both
students and peers in regard to the quality of their student teacher relationships.
Oftentimes, this intervention would be necessitated as the result of something negative a
student or peer had heard about one of my department colleagues. In some cases, this
continued to impact the student’s perception of the teacher, even after the students got to know him. It was as if the student entered the class looking for evidence to confirm what she already had been told (Dardenne, 1995). As students communicated during the year and from year to year, this turned into a deeply rooted negative reputation on the part of the teacher, one that even is present in discussions among parents, guidance counselors, and administrators. As a teacher, this concerns me both because my experience has indicated that teacher reputation has the ability to impact student learning and effectiveness, as well as the stability of a teacher’s career.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed in this study is how to deconstruct and assess the complex manner in which students form impressions of their teachers and how those impressions are used to form a teacher’s reputation. A major factor affecting adolescents’ perceptions of an academic environment was their perceptions of the teacher (Ferriera & Bosworth, 2001). Students’ perceptions of teacher practices such as caring, respect, valuing, and listening are associated with adolescents’ sense of belonging (Roeser, Midgeley, & Urdan, 1996). Being optimistic, I assumed that teachers would like to be perceived by students in a positive light. Furthermore (and equally optimistically), I assumed that teachers would be willing to attempt to behave in a manner that encourages this positive perception on the parts of the students. How perceptive, though, are students when it comes to the motives of their teachers?

There have been numerous studies that have examined the ability of children to perceive teacher preference (for review, see Babad, 1993). Whereas some teachers feel they can mask any feelings of negativity toward students, hiding these feelings by
treating students equitably, children may still be able to detect teacher preference (Babad, 1993). In short, taped segments of student and teacher interactions, students were able to ascertain small differences in teacher expectancies even though there was very little actual verbal evidence presented (Babad, Bernieri, & Rosenthal, 1991). Effectively examining perception, though, may be more complicated than simply ascertaining the students’ basic perception of the teacher through their [the students’] viewpoint. Pianta’s (1999) dyadic systems conceptualization of the student suggests that the students’ perception of the teacher and the teacher’s perceptions of the students actually influence each other during the course of classroom interaction. What seems to be missing from the large body of research in the area of student-teacher relationships and teacher effectiveness is the role of perceptions of students before meeting a teacher, as well as during the initial interactions between teachers and students. For example, Buchert, Laws, Apperson, and Bregman (2008) examined student ratings of professors after the first class session and again after the first two weeks of classes. They did not take into account any information known by students prior to attending the class. Coldren and Hively (2009) examined interpersonal variables that affect students’ impressions and likewise did not take into account any prior knowledge of the instructor. Furthermore, there is previous research documenting the impact that student reputation has on teachers (Dunnebier, 2009; Gest, Rulison, Davidson, & Welsh, 2008; White & Jones, 2000) and there is likewise research discussing the validity of student ratings in higher education (Griffin, 2001; Perry, 1979; Perry, Abrami, Leventhal, & Check, 1979; McNatt, 2010; Reid, 2010) Very little research exists, however, at the secondary school level.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impression-formation process between students and their teachers. I examined how and to what extent students' prior knowledge of a teacher impacted how that teacher was viewed initially. As incoming tenth grade students met and got to know the teacher in a classroom setting, how did that new interaction affect the initial impression? In a related fashion, what factors affected the students’ impression of the teacher and the classroom environment? Also, how did these initial impressions serve to form the teachers’ reputations?

Research Questions

Specific questions that guided the research included the following:

1. How do students form impressions of their teachers?

2. What is the role of prior knowledge in the impression formation process, and how is that transmitted between and among students?

3. What role do efficacy for learning and causal attribution play in the student's impression of his or her teacher as the weeks of the school year progress?

These questions directly address how students feel about a student-teacher relationship. Additionally, this addresses how the information passed between students about their teachers may impact their impressions and thus, the teachers’ reputations.

Significance of the Study

This study was based primarily on students’ perceptions of their teachers’ behaviors as well as their perceptions of the classroom environment. It is clear that students’ perceptions of classroom environments affect learning (Dorman & Ferguson, 2004). Rowe, Kim, Baker, Kamphaus, and Horne (2010) discuss that classroom climate has been linked to motivation, student engagement in class activities, goal orientation,
academic values, social skills and competence, and academic achievement. Furthermore, examining students’ perceptions provides researchers a means by which to examine the factors that influence elements such as student motivation and academic achievement. According to Weinstein (1985, p. 333), “students can make sophisticated interpretations of teacher behavior.” This includes both verbal and non-verbal behavior, and in turn suggests that these observations can impact student beliefs and classroom outcomes (Weinstein & McKown, 1998). Because of this, the forming of a stronger understanding of how student perceptions are formed and how they lead to teacher reputation can help researchers and ultimately educators better understand the multiple other factors that impact learning, such as motivation.

For the purposes of this study, “teacher reputation” was defined as similar to Griffin’s (2001) definition -- information that students learn about a teacher prior to attending his or her class. In this study, university students were put into one of three categories based on what they had claimed to have heard about the professor: positive reputation, no information, and negative reputation. Mean overall ratings were calculated by class. The results indicate that students who heard position information rated the course and instructor higher than did those who had heard negative information. Therefore, this study focused on teacher reputation according to the students. It is widely accepted that teachers significantly influence the climate of the classroom environment (Miller & Pedro, 2006), and the literature on impression formation in classrooms is abundant (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Butler & Roesel, 1991; Crittenden & Norr, 1973; Finn, Schrodt, Will, Elledge, Jernberg, & Larson, 2009; Haleta, 1996). However, this study fulfills a need in the field by examining the specific factors that students consider
when forming impressions of their teachers, including information learned before meeting the teacher, as well as how those impressions lead to a teacher’s reputation.

**Contributions to the Field**

Results of the present study will assist educators in understanding students’ feelings and perceptions. Specifically, this study examines students’ perceptions of the teacher and the academic setting. Furthermore, educational psychologists and educators can benefit from a greater understanding of both how students form impressions of their teachers and how those impressions contribute to the formation of teachers’ reputations. Students often enter a classroom with prior knowledge, or at least that which they accept as knowledge. Knowing in what ways and to what extent that impacts their impressions of the teacher as well as their impressions of the classroom environment becomes another key cog in the system of educating students effectively.

**Operational Definitions of Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Press</td>
<td>“The degree to which environmental forces press for student achievement” (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mitman, 1982, p. 22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Community</td>
<td>“Students’ sense of connection to, being valued by, and having influence with their classmates and teacher” (Schaps, Lewis, &amp; Watson, 1997, p. 14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>The teacher’s behavioral expectations of the students and his/her efforts to enforce them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>The manner and type of talking between the teacher and his/her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Demeanor</td>
<td>A teacher’s general personality in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Enthusiasm</td>
<td>A teacher’s level of energy and spirit during instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Reputation</td>
<td>Information that students learn about a teacher prior to attending his or her class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>Frequency, amount, and type of personal information shared with the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Quick, intuitive cognition; mental processes used to form impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressions</td>
<td>Beliefs based on appearance, verbal statements and actions. Impressions of others can even be formed without meeting them based on information about their behavior and characteristics.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter will identify the dominant theoretical frameworks and related literature pertinent to the study of teacher reputation. I begin by discussing the notion of teacher reputation. I then identify the key factors in how perceptions and impressions are formed; many of these concepts apply to all interpersonal relations and thus are key to understanding how they function in a magnified and 'captive' situation such as a secondary school. Next, I describe why the study of teacher reputation, in context, is important for understanding the motivation and achievement of adolescents given their current psychosocial development. Adolescents in the United States spend hundreds of hours per year in schools and in direct interaction with their peers and their teachers. The chapter ends with a discussion of the factors in regard to perceptions that may contribute to adolescents forming impressions of their teachers, including the roles of teacher behavior and discourse, causal attribution, and efficacy theories. These theories provide the foundation for the complex interactions that occur on a daily basis in secondary schools; for this reason, they are crucial in providing the background for how students form initial perceptions of teachers and how those perceptions contribute to impressions, serving to create a teacher's reputation.

Teacher Reputation

The concept of teacher reputation is complex. The majority of the research on student impressions and teacher reputation has been conducted at the university level.
Teacher reputation at the university level

Perry, Abrami, and Leventhal (1979) examined the effect of instructor expressiveness and lecture content on ratings. Abrami, Leventhal, and Perry (1982) examined the notion of educational seduction, the tendency for a highly expressive teacher to be rated higher due to his expressiveness. Likewise, Abrami, Perry, and Leventhal (1992) looked at student personality characteristics and their effect on teacher ratings. These students examined the perceptions and impressions of university students. Several studies examined instructor reputation specifically. Perry, Abrami, Leventhal, and Check (1979) examined instructor reputation, defined as student expectations of an instructor's teaching ability. Buchert, Laws, Apperson, and Bregman (2008) examined the impact of first impressions on teacher reputation. In this case, students considered first impressions more important than reputation in regard to evaluations. McNatt (2010) found that negative reputation persisted despite disconfirming positive performance of the instructor.

Other measures of impressions of teachers

Students may interpret a teacher's behavior within a myriad of separate categories such as classroom climate, support, personal rapport, level of challenge, dedication to teacher, experience level, reputation among colleagues, pedagogy (such as teaching style), or level of involvement in the school (Johnson & Fairchild, 2008; Suldo et al., 2009). For example, King, Schrodt, and Wiesel (2009) measured the variation in students’ perceptions of instructor feedback with findings that emphasize the need for teachers to monitor their use of corrective feedback.
There are already existing notions of what constitutes a positive quality in a teacher. Weinstein (1989, p. 59) notes that both pre-service and practicing teachers tend primarily to describe good teachers as “. . . warm, caring individuals who enjoy working with children.” Although that seems basic and straightforward, many other elements serve to add density and complexity to how reputation is formed. For example, can a teacher both press students for high levels of achievement and demonstrate warmth and caring to his or her students? Several aspects of student evaluation appear to be based on student impressions of teacher expectations, grading, and workload.

Many studies have addressed the factors that contribute to students’ evaluations of teacher effectiveness. Addison, Best, and Warrington (2006) used surveys to measure the role of perceived difficulty of a class on student ratings of the instructor. They found that the students who found the class to be easier than expected rated the professor more favorably than students who found the course more difficult than expected. Centra (2003) examined ratings of college students looking for expected grades and the level of workload and its effect on student ratings. He found that expected grades generally did not affect student evaluations. Olds and Crumbly (2003), on the other hand, examined the effects of grade inflation through given mid-semester tests. In this study, higher grades did result in higher instructor evaluations. Using student questionnaires, Remedios and Lieberman (2008) found that student enjoyment and stimulation had a larger influence on ratings than did grades and course difficulty. These studies were all completed at the post-secondary level. All of them assume that the instructor chooses to maintain a certain level or work for the course, with no factors out of his or her control.
such as district curriculum maps and state-mandated curriculum. These elements certainly impact a secondary school classroom teacher.

Impressions of how teachers organize their classes fall along a similar line. Lake (2001) examined the ratings of physical therapy students. Results indicated that students earned higher grades in an active learning environment versus a lecture-based environment, but students rated the course and instructor lower and felt they had learned less. Others have examined the impressions of competence and professionalism. Teven (2007) examined student reactions to hypothetical scenarios portraying teachers engaging in appropriate or inappropriate behaviors and communicating caring or non-caring. Results indicated that students’ perceptions in response to the scenarios impacted impressions of teacher competence and trustworthiness. Spooren and Mortelmans (2006) found in a study of student ratings that better students tended to give higher ratings, but they acknowledge that other factors such as workload and prior interest may impact these ratings.

Another highly studied element contributing to impressions of teachers is support, including academic, personal, and in the area of persistence. Johnson and Johnson (1983) examined students in grades 5 through 9 using scales to measure their attitudes toward relationships with peers and teachers. Participation in cooperative learning situations related positively to perceptions of support, help, and friendship from teachers and peers. Malecki and Elliott (1999) used the Student Social Support Scale with students in grades 7 through 12, finding that relationships exist among students’ perceived social support, self-support and social behavior. Similarly characterized as impacting student impressions of teachers is teacher understanding. This concept is originally defined by
Cahn and Shulman (1984) as ‘the communicator’s assessment of his/her success or failure when attempting to communicate with another person’ (p. 122) or the attempt that teachers make students feel understood. In a survey of university students, Cahn (1984) found this to be the most important factor in student ratings of teachers. Each of these studies examined how perceptions of students lead to certain impressions of teachers.

Other elements stand to be more contentious between teachers and students. The perception of power was examined by Turman and Schrodt (2006) in a study that explored teacher confirmation behaviors (such as demonstrating interest and responding to questions) and student perceptions of teacher power use. Students felt more positively about teacher use of power if they felt positive about the teacher confirmation behaviors. Fairness and differential behavior have been examined by Babad (1993, 1995, 2005). In his 2005 study, he found that high school students were able to predict a teacher’s differential behavior by viewing clips of unfamiliar teachers’ non-verbal behavior. These students were asked to guess how the teacher would react to high versus low achieving students without viewing any student/teacher interaction. The high school students more accurately predicted the behavior than did the adult judges, based on the actual evaluations of the classroom students. Other categories involve teacher behavior such as communication style. Wanzer and McCroskey (1998) investigated the relation between communication style and teacher/student relationships. They found that more assertive teachers are rated as more effective. Duran, Kelly, and Keaten (2005) examined the use of email between students and faculty. They used surveys of both college faculty and students to determine perceptions of the uses and motives of either faculty-initiated or
student-initiated emails. They found a difference in perception of the motives of emailing between students and teachers. Prisbell (1994) examined the perceptions of students when teachers use affinity-seeking strategies, noting that trustworthiness, assumption of equality, personal autonomy, altruism, and listening impacted student impressions of the teacher’s competence. Using survey data, Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that first-year university students reported increased perceptions of learning with a teacher who used humor. Also, Widmeyer and Loy (1988) examined the impact of students' perceptions that a teacher is either 'warm' or 'cold,' noting that students rated higher the instructor whom they perceived as 'warm.'

Wentzel (1997) attempted to determine what adolescents consider teacher pedagogical caring in classroom settings. Students characterized caring, supportive teachers similarly to traditional descriptions of effective parents, such as demonstrating democratic interaction styles, developing expectations for student behavior in light of individual differences, modeling a “caring” attitude toward their own work, and providing constructive feedback. Additionally, she found that perceptions of caring teachers are related to students’ academic efforts and social responsibility goals. Davis (2006) examined student perception of relationship quality of middle school students, identifying four areas that exert a “press” (p. 195) on the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship. Theses contexts include that of the student, the teacher, the peers, and the interpersonal culture of the classroom and school.

All of these elements may logically individually contribute to the formation of impressions and thus the forming of a teacher's reputation, but how do they operate together from the perspective of the students? How do these perceptions contribute to the
impressions formed by the students? Are there other elements (perhaps subtle ones) not in the literature that impact a student's impression of a teacher and hence, his or her reputation?

**Impression Formation**

Individuals are deeply impacted by what they expect to observe in a person’s behavior. This impact increases if a person does not cognitively address these expectancies. Social perceptions of others are a combination of ‘automatic’ impressions based in part on expectancies (Neuberg, 1989), and one’s assessment of his state of ‘belongingness,’ based on feelings of acceptance or rejection (Verplanken, Jetten, & Van Knippenberg, 1996). In the following section, I review what the relevant literature shares about the process of forming social perceptions including both immediate and long-term processes.

**The nature of perceivers.** Jones discusses the key role of “expectancies” as “essential features of social perception, even when we are passive observers of a social scene” (p. 78). He divides these expectancies into category-based and target-based. Category-based expectancies are most closely related to stereotypes (to be addressed later in this piece); target-based expectancies reflect specific prior experience with a person. More recently, Roese and Sherman (2007, p. 101) note that, “The most readily visible cognitive consequence of expectancies is their influence on how individuals see and understand the world around them . . . expectancies are particularly likely to drive judgments when people are unmotivated to process carefully or are unable to do so.” In a study of student impressions of teachers, we might see this in play in regard to what expectancies a student has beginning the school year with a teacher based on prior
knowledge about teachers. How would the expectancies influence his judgment? The literature seems to indicate a trend toward the importance of the expectancies of the perceiver. This serves as a logical segue to the notion of stereotyping in the formation of social impressions.

**Stereotyping.** Hamilton and Sherman (1994, p. 16) suggest that stereotypes can be viewed as “generalized conceptions of the prominent attribute of a group, and, as such, stereotypes are represented in the memory as abstractions based on previous learning and experience.” Thus, a perceiver brings to a situation perceived notions that assign a “group” to a target. However, they also discuss that the research on the automaticity of stereotyping is not conclusive. In other words, whereas some judgments are immediate and automatic, others develop after the perceiver has had an opportunity to ascertain elements of the target that allow a person to be placed by the perceiver in a category. To illustrate, Hamilton and Sherman (1994, p. 15) state that, “As the perceiver acquires knowledge and beliefs about a group, and those beliefs become associated with that group, a stereotype of that group becomes established. This stereotype is stored in memory as a cognitive structure and can then influence subsequent perceptions of and behaviors toward that group and its members.” Other research indicates that stereotypes are formed based one’s perception of a target’s categorical membership or entitivity (Lepore & Brown, 1997; Welbourne, 1999).

The implications for how students perceive teachers are immense. Some students, for example, may enter high school with strong stereotypic structures about teachers, learning, or reading. Dunning and Sherman (1997, p. 59) also affirm that, “... stereotypes often lead people to make tacit inferences about individuating information.
These inferences alter the meaning of the information to affirm the stereotype people possess.” This is clearly seen in observing any interaction among people; it would be unlikely for a perceiver to ignore any natural biases or stereotypes that have been formed in previous experience in forming an impression of a new target.

Furthermore, the inferences perceivers make are loaded with meaning. It seems more common for a perceiver to assume these inferences to be true based on prior experience and knowledge. Consider, for example, Ross, Amabile, and Steinmetz (1977, p. 485), who note that, “In drawing inferences about actors, perceivers consistently fail to make adequate allowance for the biasing effects of social roles upon performance.” This tendency for perceivers to be somewhat myopic when making inferences contributes to the assumptions they make based on limited information. In this manner, they essentially form opinions, perhaps influential ones, without knowing all of the pertinent information. To illustrate, in a study that examined perceptions of “questioners” and “contestants” in an oral quiz of general knowledge, they found that “social roles bias interpersonal encounters and, consequently, interpersonal judgments” (p. 494). In fact, this may be one of the key elements in looking at the concept of the formation of students’ social perception of teachers (to be discussed later). What types of biases involving a teacher in a school setting might adolescents be inclined to ignore?

In fact, and perhaps more importantly, the perceptions and judgments formed by the perceiver may carry with them specific and relevant categorical information about the perceiver him or herself. For example, Simon (1998, pp. 264-265) notes that, “Group membership is rarely, if ever, value-free. Groups are embedded in a structured system of intergroup relations, in which some groups hold higher status positions than others.
Consequently, different groups (and the respective memberships) have different value connotations, and therefore different attractiveness.” This association with different groups, then, is complex and comes with values attached to its members. This being the case, the attachment of value adds an additional layer of cognition in the already complex paradigm of social perception. The question remains, though, as to how ‘set’ are such elements as background stereotypic information? How might a perceiver be impacted in a given social situation? Wittenbrink, Gist, and Hilton (1997, p. 132) discuss that, “structural properties of stereotypic knowledge serve as a kind of causal blueprint or framework when a stereotype is applied to a given set of information. This blueprint aids the perceiver in integrating the information into a structure of underlying cause-effect relations.” Each person enters a social situation with some type of conception of what to expect and how he or she might behave in certain situations. Using the blueprint metaphor, how often are blueprints followed to their exact specificity? This, then, converts to a perceiver in a social situation who may not deviate from his causal framework, or he may be willing to suspend that framework until learning more about the target or situation. When applied to the study of students’ impressions of teachers, might a student’s “blueprint” for a ‘good teacher’ serve as the measuring stick for that student’s impression, especially in the early stages of the student-teacher relationship?

Automaticity. It is natural and human to make instant judgments about those that we encounter (Vernon, 1933). These judgments are initially based on a number of factors, but what is most compelling about such judgments or impressions is that they are instant and immediate. According to Ajzen (1996, p. 300):

A central development in social psychological theories of belief formation and
change is the recognition that not all judgments receive the same degree of scrutiny. On one extreme is the controlled, highly reasoned, central processing mode where available information is systematically reviewed, analyzed, and integrated prior to any judgment or decision. On the other extreme is the automatic, intuitive, or peripheral mode where judgments may rely on relatively superficial situational cues, on category membership, or on simple cognitive heuristics. It is usually assumed that the heuristic or peripheral mode, requiring less time and effort, is the preferred or default mode, and that the central mode is invoked only when needed.

Azjen argues that, although there can be a more thorough cognitive process involved in forming judgments, in many cases perceiver will use the more obvious and overt cues to form an initial impression. For example, in a study by Riggio and Friedman (1986), subjects were videotaped explaining their personality types while untrained judges viewed the tapes and rated their impressions of the subjects in such areas as likeability, speaking effectiveness, and expressivity-confidence. Males with more expressive non-verbal traits scored higher, as did females who displayed more facial expressiveness.

Whereas there is, indeed, a level of automaticity in impression formation, other factors are certainly at play. In fact, the elements include the individuals involved as well as the situation. For this reason, the judgments made and impressions formed are subject to a variety of variables. One factor may be the motivation to form accurate judgments. Biesanz and Human (2010) studied impressions formed by male participants watching videotapes of females answering basic questions about themselves. Those participants
who were assigned the goal of forming accurate impressions maintained higher agreement with other participants in the same study.

Some may feel impression forming is a 'one-way street' – that is, it is either based wholly on the target or the perceiver; however, Beike and Sherman (1994, p. 274) discuss the forming of impressions as “social inference” and three fundamental processes: induction, deduction, and analogy. They also differentiate between different levels of inference, with inferences about behaviors at one end, individuals in the middle, and groups at the other end. Most closely connected for the purposes of this discussion is their suggestion that, “social inference making is a function of . . . the perceiver, the target, and the situation” (p. 274). This process then must take into account the vast amount of background that the perceiver brings to any given situation. In regard to teacher reputation, the student perceiver must take into account any relevant background information about the teacher such as his or her type of personality and how rigorous his or her class is, and negotiate this meaning with what he knows about himself as a student. In support of this, Bargh and Williams (2006, p. 3) note:

The automatic influences on social life are many and diverse. Other people, their characteristic features, the groups they belong to, the social roles they fill, and whether or not one has a close relationship with them have all been found to be automatic triggers of important psychological and behavioral processes. So too have features of standard situations, which become automatically associated with general norms and rules of conduct, as well as with one’s own personal goals when in those situations.

This serves to emphasize the complexity of the impression-forming paradigm that is in
play concurrently with the automatic nature of the process. Students in a classroom must grapple with all of the associated elements such as stereotypes, their own social roles, the perceived social role of the teacher, and his or her automatic reaction to the teacher’s style and personality. Bargh and Williams (2006, p. 1) note that, “. . . most automatic effects on social life are mediated by the non-conscious activation of social representations—either preconsciously through direct activation by strongly associated stimuli in the environment (as in racial stereotyping effects) or postconsciously through recent, conscious use in an unrelated context (as in most category-priming effects).”

Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow (2009) examined observers’ impressions of 10 personality traits based on full body photographs. They found that observers’ inferences of personality in many cases were based on the individual’s static appearance. In the classroom, a student might have either an adverse or a positive initial reaction to a certain teacher without being completely aware and certainly without being able to articulate his or her reasons. Despite, then, the automatic nature of judgment forming, there may be factors at work that are unable to be accessed or even articulated by the perceiver. The trends in the literature are towards the complexity of the interrelatedness of expectancy, automatic impressions and the effects of stereotypes. Theorists suggest that social structural relationships among groups contribute to the formation of stereotypes. Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007) noted that behavior within one social group can impact stereotype formation of another. The act of impression formation is made even more complex when examining the connection to how those initial impressions affect the subject.

Stereotypes as expectancies contribute to the impression formation process in that
they provide the perceiver information that is considered along with automatic impression forming processes. Stereotypic knowledge operates most strongly when a quality is tacitly assigned to a person based on his or her membership in a group and when a perceiver actively seeks confirmation for a pre-formed stereotype.

**Belongingness.** The automatic and potentially immediate nature of social perceptions operates hand-in-hand with more long-term and slower developing processes. More specifically, there is considerable literature to suggest that our sense of belonging, as well as our constant scanning for signs of acceptance or rejection affect the impressions we form and judgments we make in social situations.

On a basic level, Durkin (1995, p. 322) notes that, “Social comparisons allow us to find out how we are progressing relative to others and to ascertain the reliability of our opinions and beliefs. Through social comparisons, the social environment affects not only our self-concepts and goals but the very framework within which we organize our understandings of the social world.” In this example, we see that people are constantly aware of their social surroundings including how they sense that others are perceiving them. Moreover, they use their impressions of the comparison as data to make decisions about themselves and how they perceive others. This being the case, one can see how this process works together with the other more immediate or automatic processes discussed in the first section. A perceiver enters a situation with preconceived notions such as stereotypes and then is compelled toward other natural automatic responses, based in part on his perception of his place in the social situation. What, though, is the ultimate purpose for this scanning and awareness of one’s social situation and framework?
The literature suggests that attention must be given to the dual nature of the process of forming a social perception. It is not simply a matter of the perceiver using his or her preconceived ‘baggage’ to form the impression, nor is it simply an immediate reading of the level of belongingness.

Further evidenced in the literature along with the importance of assessing our status with a target (leading to the formation of a social perception) is our level of 'belongingness.' This implies that a person needs to continue to monitor his or her status both to satisfy a basic need to belong and to feel secure that he understands the nature of his or her relationships. Our perception of the quality and status of our relationships is connected to our sense of belonging but with emphasis on our status as either accepted or rejected. In support of this, Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 505) note: “The main emotional implication of the belongingness hypothesis is that real, potential, or imagined changes in one’s belongingness status will produce emotional responses, with positive affect linked to increases in belongingness and negative affect linked to decreases in it.” Here we see that our assessment of our status of belonging can impact our emotional state, which can, in turn, impact our impression-forming process. It seems to operate in the style of a yo-yo, with one’s affect at the mercy of the readings of belongingness.

Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs (1995) examined participant ratings of their levels of inclusion or exclusion. This correlated highly with self-esteem, unless the exclusion was interpreted as random. Gardner, Pickett, and Brewer (1999, p. 494) concur, noting that, “The very importance of belonging as a primary goal of all human beings points to the adaptive utility of a social monitoring system. Such a system would attend to current levels of belonging in order to allow for regulation and compensation. When
belongingness needs are unmet, greater processing of socially relevant information in the environment ensues.” Solomon, Battistich, Kim, and Watson (1997) studied students and teachers in four elementary schools using observation. They found that student behaviors in the classroom are related to students’ overall sense of community. This was impacted in the study by teacher practices and behaviors that impacted students’ sense and impression of belonging. This status is not only hugely influential but is also something that is constantly being monitored. As such, it can wax and wane in certain relationships, but all the while, the impression and perception of the individual target is being formed. Leary and Downs (1995, p. 129) discuss the notion of a sociometer, an internal ‘device’ that monitors our status: “… we assert that people are motivated to behave in ways that maintain their self-esteem because behaviors that maintain self-esteem tend to be ones that decrease the likelihood that they will be ignored, avoided, or rejected by other people. Viewed in this manner, behaviors that protect or enhance self-esteem do not originate from a free-standing motive to maintain self-esteem, but rather from the motive to avoid social exclusion.” If we accept the notion that belongingness is a basic and important human need, and we accept the notion that people constantly monitor their status for signs of acceptance or rejection, does that also mean this assessment impacts the formation of a social perception? The data perceived by a person’s sociometer allows him or her to classify a target as accepting or rejecting, and we constantly survey the people in our lives for cues such as verbal or physical, conscious and unconscious, stated or implied. If we perceive cues of rejection, then our self-esteem is lowered, and we may perceive the target as unkind (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). This comes with potential pitfalls, as Leary and Downs (1995) note, such as “broken,” “stuck,” or poorly
calibrated sociometers. But those erroneous readings potentially have as much 'real' impact on the formation of perception as do stereotypes. Furthermore, the same authors note that, “People may behave in ways that maintain their self-esteem even when they are alone because, to assist the person in avoiding exclusion, the sociometer must function in private to deter behaviors that have the potential to negatively affect one’s interpersonal relationships” (p. 130). This private function then is incapable of being interpreted by anyone other than the perceiver him or herself.

In a classroom setting, a student’s sense of belonging is defined by Goodenow (1993) as “students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teachers and peers) in the academic setting and feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p. 25). She found that this can impact motivation and achievement. Furthermore, Goodenow and Grady (1993) noted in a study of school belonging of junior high students that urban adolescents may have a poor sense of school belonging and thus low school motivation, and that students with a high sense of belonging are more likely to be motivated and academically engaged. The pertinent literature seems to suggest, then, that our continual assessment of our status with a target impacts our behavior, and in all likelihood impacts our impression and perception of the target.

In sum, the literature on impression forming and the development of social perceptions seems to indicate that there are two frameworks at work during the process: initially, there is an 'automatic' reaction to a target. This is based in part on expectancies involving the background knowledge the perceiver brings to the situation, such as stereotypic biases. Secondly, there is a systematic and constant assessment of status that
seeks out and analyzes any and all cues in regard to belongingness and our status as rejected or accepted. Because belongingness is considered a basic need, it impacts our judgment and social perceptions.

**Impression Management**

Whereas many of the components of impression formation are pre-conceived, pre-established, sub-conscious, or automatic, another element of impression formation brings into play the intent of the person whose impression is being considered. This concept, known as impression management, stems mainly from the work of Erving Goffman (1959). While there have been copious refinements and developments, most scholarly literature about impression management is connected in some way to Erving Goffman’s Dramaturgical Perspective (1959). Although Goffman’s metaphor portraying the many elements of everyday life as “theater” can be criticized for being a cynical view that characterizes people as manipulative and insincere, most scholars do acknowledge that there is some level of ‘role-playing’ in social interactions (Walsh-Bowers, 2006). Impression management in schools can be quite complex and varied, involving multiple actors on multiple levels, and all operating simultaneously. This is so because both students’ and teachers’ impression management systems are at work and, at times, against one another.

In a study of middle school student and teacher perceptions of appropriate responses to student request for feedback about a poem, Graham and Pajares’ (1998, p. 25) most salient finding involves the “...disagreement between teachers and students as to how caring best manifests itself in the teaching conversation.” This introduces one of several elements in teaching that involve differences in the perceptions of students and
teachers. In this case, while teachers perceived it to be caring to withhold negative feedback, the students interpreted this as a lack of honesty. At the same time, they found that honesty coupled with unkindness is likely to have the opposite effect that the teacher desires. The importance of this is staggering – how can teachers best meet the needs of students without a common conceptualization of something as crucial as ‘caring’? From a teacher’s perspective, this is confounding and frustrating. Teachers are humans, subject to all the behavioral nuances and limitations as everyone else, but it seems that they are expected to rise above that. Hence, the literature seems to suggest that there are vast amounts of subjectivity in how actions of teachers are perceived. In fact, Webb (2006, p. 208) discusses teacher “fabrications”: “inauthentic performances – performances that might sacrifice student learning for the sake of promoting professional reputations.” In instances such as these, the teachers have chosen to use impression management simply to create or modify their reputations. This could potentially impact the students’ impressions.

**Impression Management in School Settings – The Student**

In school settings, especially, adolescents have their own reputations to consider, and in this equation, they must factor in the impression they make on the teacher. Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, and Bosdet (2005, p. 636) note that, “If adolescents perceive the possibility of parental disapproval, adolescents are then faced with considering the implications of disclosure or concealment of information.” One could infer parallels to the classroom and relationship with a teacher-figure. Teachers, after all, are adult figures in the lives of their students. Walker (2008) examined teaching practices using interviews and observations, finding that teaching with a framework of parenting style
can alter both teacher effectiveness and students’ openness to the influence of teacher practices. Ware (2006) similarly looked at a parenting style of education, studying warm demander pedagogy, “a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect” (Bondy & Ross, 2008, p. 54), as culturally responsive pedagogy that is effective with African American students. Furthermore, students are compelled to decide daily how they will interact with their teachers much like they choose how they will interact with their parents. How much of their real selves do they choose to show in various situations? Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, and Bosdet (2005, p. 646) also note, “Adolescents are engaged in supplying varying degrees of correct information, are concerned with impression management, make judgments about their activities and safety, and take into account the relationships [with parents].” Because the student-teacher relationship in high school is one between adult and adolescent, there are inescapable parallels between the adolescent and parent dynamic; in this situation, students may well behave similarly in both interactions. Educationally, this presents the teacher with issues with which to contend in trying to accurately perceive the student. In the worst cases, both student and teacher will be overly concerned with impression managing and not make any educational progress whatsoever.

A more cynical way to look at this notion of students managing their impressions is to assume that they are knowingly misrepresenting themselves in a self-serving manner. Milner (2007, p. 2) discusses ‘self-handicapping’ or the process of seeking out situations that will interfere with a performance so that one can provide an impression-managing explanation. She found that there are some “socially positive consequences of
self-handicapping tendencies. In particular, self-handicapping participants’ social networks seem to thrive . . .” This being the case, students would have even higher motivation to assume a role in a classroom that serves their own interests, such as failing a test, so that an explanation of the incompetent teacher could be provided. Many students in high-achieving families and schools would qualify as being highly driven to want to advance themselves. Although we may not feel students have a tendency to lie, the literature suggests that adolescents are typically compelled to manage their impression. O’Callaghan and Doyle (2001) found that cigarette use served as impression management for adolescents, and Sharp and Getz (1996) found similarly that alcohol abuse in adolescents has an impression management function. As a classroom example, Takei, Johnson, and Clark (1998) found that students may view teachers as “gatekeepers” (p. 32) and select a strategy to pursue in the classroom. Part of that could involve self-promotion in a way that borders on deceit.

It would not be surprising for a student to desire to appear intelligent to a teacher. Murphy (2007, p. 337) noted that, “. . . behaviors that signal high or low intelligence may be magnified in an impression management setting. Perhaps motivation to convey a particular impression amplifies naturally occurring behavior.” Further, Anderman and Midgley (1997) discuss the concept of performance goals, noting that students who are oriented to performance goals “. . . engage in academic work to demonstrate or prove their competency, or to avoid the appearance of lack of ability relative to others” (p. 270). This implies an important distinction between the desire to portray oneself in a certain light based on a specific situation where one feels an impression is being formed and the constant and continual desire to form impressions.
False Self-Behavior

The body of literature on impression formation lends itself to a natural connection to adolescent development: "Beginning in adolescence, a concern with false self-behavior emerges. A major manifestation of false self-behavior involves the suppression of one's voice, namely the failure to express what one really thinks or believes" (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997, p. 169). According to Harter, Marold, Whitesell, and Cobbs (1996, p. 360), false self-behavior "is defined as the extent to which one is acting in ways that do not reflect one's true self . . . .” In a classroom setting, as the teacher attempts to interpret the students’ behavior and attitude (to form an impression) he must take into account efforts on the parts of his students to be interpreted in a way that is not true to the individual. The same authors further discuss that individuals operate with several different role-related "selves," each of which seems to contradict the others. For example, the "self with parents," "self with friends," "self as a student in a classroom," and "self with whom someone is interested romantically" may each be different as compared to the individual's "real me" (p. 360). From the perspective of a teacher, he or she would not only need to be aware of these different selves, but he or she would need to attempt to take into account with which student ‘self’ he or she was interacting in the classroom. Possible motives for engaging in false self-behavior are similar to those of impression management. Students have stated reasons such as not being liked by others or not liking themselves as well as a desire to please or to gain acceptance, in addition to wanting to experiment with other selves to see what it felt like. Harter, Marold, Whitesell, and Cobbs (1996, p. 373) found that, "The most false self behavior is reported by those adolescents who do not feel validated by others, and who therefore attempt to
distort their true selves. Not only do they come to feel that others do not value their true self, but they come to devalue it themselves." This adds another dimension to the teacher’s ability to interpret his or her students’ actions. If a student does not feel valued, he or she may exhibit false self-behavior, but this behavior in and of itself may serve as a roadblock to the teacher helping the student to engage and feel any value. It’s conceivable that this false self-behavior could cause a student to make negative comments about a teacher in an effort to manage his or her impression, impacting the teacher’s reputation.

**How Might Students Form Impressions?**

Students are subject to many of the same influences as their teachers. As perceivers, they engage in immediate expectancy frameworks (automaticity and stereotype) as well as similar extended and continual frameworks (belongingness *vis-à-vis* acceptance and rejection). The different concepts work together to allow the perceiver to formulate a judgment or perception. There is literature on teachers’ perception of students (Becker, Place, Tenzer, & Frueh, 1991; Blood & Blood, 1882; Brooks, 2002; van den Bergh, Dennessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Hollend, 2010; Hines, 1975; Siess & Maloney, 1972; Worrall & Cowan, 1983). There is less, though, on students’ perception of teachers.

**Teacher Behavior**

We must consider what teacher actions impact student perceptions. Silberman (1969) discusses the measurement of how teachers express attitudes toward student using the factors Attachment, Concern, Indifference, and Rejection, and he found that teacher attitudes are generally revealed in their actions. This has tremendous implications in
regard to student perception in nearly every area. Not only is each category relevant and part of a daily ongoing process in the classroom dynamic between teacher and student, but as previously discussed, those elements are likely to be scrutinized by different students in a different manner.

In a study of Teacher Differential Behavior (Babad 1995, p. 373) examined the “teacher’s pet” phenomenon and its relation to student morale. This phenomenon occurs when a teacher shares a special relationship with a loved student or ‘pet’. Oftentimes, teachers can exhibit differential treatment towards this student, which can then be perceived by and impact the other students in the classroom. Babad and colleagues found that in classrooms where the pet was not a popular student, morale was lower; this was not the case, however, in classes where the pet was a popular student.

Whereas the notation of a ‘teacher’s pet’ is not active in every classroom, what is salient is that teachers’ behavior towards individual students is under constant scrutiny. In fact, “Teachers’ differential affect . . . is strongly related to the way that students experience their schooling” (Babad, 1995, p. 373). There are more examples of the types of analysis that have been done on classroom culture. Wosnitza and Nenniger (2001, p. 178) looked at what they termed the “Environmental Conditions of Learning,” which examined factors such as level of demand and teacher behavior as factors in how students felt about the classroom. Others have examined teacher reputation based on feedback from students. Perry, Abrami, Leventhal, and Check (1979) found a significant interaction between a teachers’ reputation by their expressiveness and by their lecture content. Teacher behaviors, content, and reputation (as relayed to the subjects in descriptive booklets) were examined. Students read an introductory statement about the
instructor to establish reputation, then viewed a videotaped lecture by the instructor. Finally, they rated the instructor then took a test. In this case, students rated the positive, high-expressive instructor more favorably than the negative, high expressive instructor. Perry et al. (1979) attempted to replicate previous research by manipulating expressiveness and content to see if it impacted both ratings and achievement. Further, Abrami, Leventhal, and Perry (1982) noted that teacher expressiveness had a large impact on student ratings but little impact on achievement. This implies (and the authors struggled with) the premise that the students can still perceive as positive a poor teacher who is very expressive. They refer to this phenomenon as “educational seduction” (p. 123). This is far more common or at least noticeable in high school (as opposed to college), and actually serves as element of frustration for many of the colleagues of the “Dr. Fox” (incompetent but popular teacher) types, as the 1973 experiments called him (Naftulin, Ware, & Donnelly, 1973). This research is now considered controversial due to methodological inconsistencies and concerns, such as brevity of the lecture compared to an overall course, no student interaction with the lecturer, an unfamiliar topic with no textbook, and an unconventional evaluation form (Abrami, Leventhal, & Perry, 1982). Thus, the literature sheds light on the importance of teacher behavior in regard to how students perceive them (although this does not take teacher impression management into account).

Juvonen (2000) examined the “face-saving” tactics used by students. This relates to student’s perception of teachers insofar as it signifies that students are likely to observe teacher behavior and reaction. She notes about students’ reactions to hypothetical scenarios, “The participants rated how much the teacher would like each of the four
hypothetical students and how popular each of them would be among their classmates” (p. 24). Here we see that a teacher’s reaction to events in the classroom (teacher behavior) is under constant scrutiny. Because of this, a student may form perceptions about the teacher’s reaction to classroom events and then pass those impressions on to peers, contributing to the teacher’s reputation. This also relates to the sociometer hypothesis discussed earlier – in class, students analyze their actions and their sense of belonging based, in part, on teacher behavior. Juvonen further discusses that, “Students were more reluctant to tell their instructors than classmates that they failed because they had not put forth effort” (p. 29). A teacher’s behavior, then, is clearly influential in the context of a classroom setting and student perception of a teacher.

**Teacher Discourse**

There is an interesting correlation between teacher discourse and sense of belongingness as impacted by teacher behavior. White and Jones (1999) conducted a study in which first and second grade children viewed a videotape of a target actor presented as having a liked, average, or disliked reputation. They then showed a second videotape that depicted a teacher's verbal responses to the target's behavior as (a) positive, (b) neutral-salient, or (c) corrective. They found that, “A significant interaction showed that when combined with a liked reputation, positive and neutral-salient feedback conditions increased the salience and positive evaluation of the target child, thus illustrating the importance of considering nonevaluative teacher attention in combination with children's reputational status” (p. 302). This indicates that, “Teacher feedback may be a useful tool in modifying children’s perceptions of socially rejected peers over time” (p. 320). This is important that it indicates that students do indeed monitor their teachers'
speech to and with the class. Turner and Patrick (2004) also describe the way in which teacher discourse contributes to shaping students’ classroom motivation, particularly with regard to students’ perceptions of challenge and caring. They found that teacher practices (calling patterns and support) can impact student participation, and that such levels of student participation are subject to change. Likewise, Turner, Meyer, Midgley, and Patrick (2003, p. 357) conducted a study in which they observed, audio-recorded, and transcribed teacher discourse in sixth grade mathematics classrooms. This was followed up with student surveys. Their findings indicate that, “students in the classroom in which there was less supportive motivational discourse reported more negative affect and self-handicapping.” In this case, less supportive motivational discourse included less explicit support for autonomy, intrinsic motivation, positive affect, and collaboration. Thus, teachers’ motivational discourse may positively impact student impressions of the classroom.

This is a daunting observation, in that it conveys that teachers have a tremendous amount of power in a classroom. Also, it seems logical to infer that teacher feedback may also be a potential tool in creating any negative perceptions on the part of the students about a peer.

Teachers are under constant scrutiny and analysis of the students’ sociometers, only in the teachers’ cases, there are potentially thirty different sociometers at work. Students are looking for signs of acceptance and belonging in terms of their membership in the learning community but also for ways of evaluating their abilities and their efficacy. Furthermore, in a study by El-Ghououory (2002), participants were able to note the discourse of the teacher as it applied to relaying the reputation of a student, including
keying in on positive and negative statements made by the teacher. El-Ghououry found that, “. . . children’s perception are significantly affected by negative information” (p. 49). This ‘power’ that teachers may have to influence the perceptions of the students in the classroom is similar to that mentioned earlier, the potential power to impact the classroom atmosphere by impacting the specific impressions of themselves and of students in the room.

Put simply, the literature indicates that the way that teachers speak to and with students in the class seems likely to be a very influential element in how the students form a perception.

**How Might Adolescent Development Affect Student Impressions?**

Very recent theorists still view adolescent development as a powerful influence on behavior (Schwartz, Maynard, & Uzelac, 2008). This influence likely impacts the adolescent's relationships with his or her teachers. Consider the 'personal uniqueness' aspect of Elkind's Personal Fable (1967). This psychological phase of adolescence situates the student in a position where he or she may feel isolated even despite potential support from an adult or teacher. In fact, "teenagers who are impressed with the uniqueness of their personal experiences might be unwilling to reach out to form the relational alliances that would buffer stress and encourage resilience" (Aalsma, Lapsley, & Flannery, 2006, p. 489). It is this potential of a student's adolescent development to impact student-teacher relationships (and thus, teacher reputation) that make it an important theoretical concept to situate in the discussion of impression formation.

Social scientists place middle adolescence between ages 14-17. It is this confluence of biological, cognitive, and social changes and transitions for adolescents
that make it what Hall (1904) first termed a time of ‘storm and stress’ – a time of disruptive and contradictory actions including reckless and antisocial behavior. Since Hall's work, however, there have been important new contributions to the study of adolescent development.

**Psychosocial Development**

During adolescence, individuals begin to conceive of themselves in a more sophisticated manner; likewise, their conceptions become better organized and differentiated. Harter (1999) notes that adolescents are able take into account the difference between their own descriptions of themselves as opposed to the views of others. Adolescence can be a time of major change in the lives of an individual, where students begin to be self-reflective, explore their identity and new interests as well as begin the process of self-regulated learning and viewing education as the means by which they will become their future identities (Goodenow, 1993).

**Autonomy**

Establishing a sense of autonomy is as important a step in reaching adulthood as is establishing one's sense of identity. Steinberg and Silverberg (1986, p. 848) note:

For most boys and girls, the transition from childhood into adolescence is marked more by a trading of dependency on parents for dependency on peers rather than straight-forward and unidimensional growth in autonomy. During this time, youngsters become more emotionally autonomous in relation to their parents: They adopt less idealized images of their parents, relinquish some of their childish dependencies on them, and form a more individuated sense of self.
Autonomy in the development of adolescents is crucial in regard to education. Positive student feelings are correlated with teacher autonomy enhancement behaviors like fostering relevance and choice (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth, 2002). This sense of autonomy impacts learning and motivation -- students who believe their teachers are autonomy supportive are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987). Operating at the same time as the theories that establish the developmental changes in adolescent are theories that establish possible bases to explain the actions of adolescents in regard to their academic impressions of themselves as well as of their teachers.

**Development of Self-efficacy**

Albert Bandura (1986, p. 391) presents self-efficacy as a component of his social cognitive theory, defining "self-efficacy" as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances.” He notes that self-efficacy beliefs affect human agency in diverse ways, dividing the effects into choice behavior, effort expenditure and persistence, thought patterns and emotional reactions, and humans as producers rather than simply foretellers of behavior. A closer look at these categories shows that people avoid tasks where their efficacy is low and they will more vigorously and with more persistence give effort if their perceived self-efficacy is high (Pajares, 2003). Put more succinctly, "Judgments of personal efficacy affect what students do by influencing the choices they make, the effort they expend, the persistence and perseverance they exert when obstacles arise, and the thought patterns and emotional reactions they experience" (Pajares, 2003, p. 140). This clearly connects to the impressions that students form about themselves in the classroom. For example, Bandura identified four sources of efficacy information: performance
accomplishments, vicarious learning experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (1977). Each of these elements is potentially experienced by a student beginning as early as the first day of school when he or she learns about the specific tasks of the class. Bandura (1999, p. 28) notes: "Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever others factors serve as motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce change by one's actions.” Worth noting is that self-efficacy is most closely associated with self-perception of competence rather than actual level of competence (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 211). This means that a teacher’s interaction with the student and the impression that he or she forms about his or her abilities as a result of that interaction is a factor that contributes to the student’s perception of his or her [the student’s] competence. Clearly, this notion is important for teachers to be aware of and to understand.

**Attributions of self and teacher**

When individuals experience both success and failure, to what do they attribute those results? Although Heider (1958) was the first to propose a psychological theory of attribution, Bernard Weiner's theory of attributions provides some insight into what might determine an individual's perception of causes of either success or failure, particularly relevant to a classroom setting. Weiner and Kukla (1970, p. 18) note: "... the assignment of responsibility is an extremely complex behavior act. Task difficulty, results of the action, individual differences, perceptions of motivation and ability, and undoubtedly many other factors contribute to the final analysis.” For a teacher, then, his or her attempt to understand and to help a student understand specific issues relating to
academic progress and achievement may not be clear to the student despite any evidence presented to him or her that contradicts his or her [the student’s] assessment of responsibility.

In relating this to a classroom, the process would begin with an outcome that a student would interpret as positive or negative, such as a test score or grade. The student then undertakes a "causal search." Several antecedents influence the causal ascriptions, such as specific information (past performance), causal schemata, hedonic biasing (taking more credit for success than responsibility for failure), and actor versus observer perspective. The causal decision reached is biased towards a small number of causes such as ability and effort. These causes fall into three dimensions: locus of causality (either internal or external to the actor), stability (stable or unstable over time), and controllability (controllable or not controllable or subject to volitional change). Stability relates to expectancy changes after success and failure; locus relates to self-esteem and pride following success and failure; controllability relates to self-directed affects of guilt and shame (Weiner, 1992). Consider the following classroom-based example:

It is therefore reasoned that pride and positive self-esteem are experienced as a consequence of attributing a positive outcome to the self and that negative self-esteem is experienced when a negative outcome is ascribed to the self (Stipek, 1983; Weiner, Russell, & Lerman, 1978, 1979). Thus, for example, an "A" from a teacher who gives only that grade is not likely to generate feelings of pride because the cause of that success is external to the actor (the ease of the talk, or teacher generosity). On the other hand, an "A" from a teacher who gives few high grades generates a great deal of pride. In that instance, the causes of success are
likely to be perceived as high ability and/or great effort expenditure (Weiner, 1992, p. 271).

In the same way, then, perceived causes of failure are likely to be ascribed to external causes. Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, and Verette (1987, p. 316) note: "... the private manipulation of perceptions of causality along a locus continuum (toward externality) protects the self-esteem and self-worth of the failing individual.” This phenomenon is clearly at work in classrooms. It is common for all humans to make excuses, some of which attribute causes to external loci of control (Weiner, Figueroa-Munoz, & Kakihara, 1991) -- secondary school students are no exception. The key questions will be, is a student likely to attach causal attributions to his teacher, and does the teacher’s reputation play a role in those attributions?

Juvonen (2000, p. 26) notes that in a study regarding failure accounts:

... the eighth graders were most willing to tell their liked teachers ... that they failed because they lack ability and least likely to say that their failure was due to an unfair exam. In contrast, the students were least likely to convey to the disliked teacher that that they failed because of low ability and most likely to endorse the unfair text explanation ... Hence, students could convey disliking towards the teacher by blaming her (or the exam) and by not portraying themselves in line with the cultural values of the society ...

In this example, we see that the nature of a relationship between a student and a teacher affects the type of attribution about achievement exhibited by the student; the impact that
Person perception is a combination of automatic reactions and preconceived elements. These factors influence both adults and adolescents. In some cases, individuals choose to attempt to manipulate the impression formation process, and this involves taking the perceivers into account and behaving in a manner so as to attempt to influence the impression that is formed. In a classroom setting, the impression formation process is a combination of both students’ and teachers’ attempts at impression formation and management. Additionally, impression formation and impression management are of particular interest and importance to students during adolescence. These students have the increased burden of being particularly self-conscious and scrutinizing their place in the classroom as well as how they categorize their relationships with the teachers and other adults in their lives. This being the case, the factors that impact impression formation, such as expectancies and automaticity, a person’s sense of belonging, and the inherent challenges of adolescence, make these concepts and how they interact to form students' impressions of teachers well worth examining. In the classroom, we have the potential to witness the interaction among all of these elements. Students may enter a classroom with expectancies based on prior knowledge and stereotypic knowledge about teachers. Also, students are potentially monitoring the teacher’s behavior and discourse, and they are potentially monitoring their own sense of belonging.

It is this beginning of the impression formation process for adolescent high school students that I set out to examine as well as how this process then leads to the creation and perpetuation of a teacher’s reputation. In the next chapter, I will detail my
methodology, including subject selection and data collection and analysis.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative methods to investigate how students form impressions of teachers and how those impressions contribute to teacher reputation. The study took place from August 2009, until January 2010, and involved twelve high school sophomores and two teachers from a Midwestern suburban high school. The research followed the principles of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This design allowed for an investigation of how students formed impressions of their teachers as well as if and how these impressions were impacted by and contributed to teacher reputation.

The following specific questions guided the research process:

1. How do students form impressions of their teachers?

2. What is the role of prior knowledge in the impression formation process, and how is that transmitted?

3. What role do efficacy and causal attribution play in the student's impression of his or her teacher as the weeks of the school year progress?

4. What is the role of a student’s feeling of belonging and connectedness in the classroom?

5. How do student perceptions contribute to the formation of a teacher’s reputation?
Researcher Subjectivities

As an experienced educator, I have formed many beliefs about what makes a teacher effective. Much of this is based on my own self-reflection of personal successes and failures in the classroom. As a Nationally Board Certified teacher, I have come to have high expectations for both myself and my colleagues in regard to student achievement; however, simply having high expectations does not necessarily mean that a teacher understands how students learn best and how he or she can use that knowledge to increase student achievement. Rowan, Jacob, and Correnti (2009) note that, “During any given lesson, a teacher’s instruction typically unfolds along many dimensions” (p. 15). I would argue that this statement applies equally to the non-instructional aspects of student-teacher interactions. This may include casual interactions before and after class, between classes, and in interactions outside of the instructional day.

How accurate, though, can I assume to be my assessment of what impacts my classroom given my role and level of experience? Desimone, Smith, and Frisvold (2010) found that in examining classroom interactions, student reports about instruction in the classroom consistently produce different results than do teacher reports. While this may not seem shocking, it certainly implies that there can be inconsistencies between the perceptions of students and the perceptions of their teachers in regard to similar events. Further, these perceptions are then disseminated between and among students. This study sought to determine what elements students consider when forming impressions of their teachers and compare that data to both their peers’ perceptions of similar events as well as the individual teacher’s perceptions of similar styles and events in the classroom. As a teacher-researcher, the questions that plagued me in all phases of the planning and
execution of this study were: What should teachers do with this information about shared peer perceptions once it is ascertained? Once identified, are any discrepancies in student and teacher perception now to be the burden of the teacher? Are teachers obligated to make adjustments either in personality or pedagogy? What are the implications of indentifying any such discrepancies?

**Research Epistemology**

This research is guided by a social constructivist epistemology in which “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). As Crotty states (1998, p. 55), in the social constructivist view, “. . . all meaningful reality, precisely as meaningful reality, is socially constructed.” Thus, several assumptions about the nature of teacher reputation underlie this study. I assume students and teachers make sense of each other as they interact with each other and that this interaction is important for understanding how students and teachers co-construct their classroom reality. Second, I assume that teacher reputation is not an “objective” criteria but the result of the impressions formed by students as they interact with teachers and share information and impressions with peers.

I chose a naturalistic inquiry paradigm for the following reasons. First, I observed students and teachers in naturalistic settings, that is, classrooms, in order to gain insight of the settings and situations that give rise to students’ and teachers’ viewpoints (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the use of student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations, I was able to examine the co-construction of the shared reality in this study. Further, naturalistic inquiry involves “successive iterations of . . . purposive sampling, inductive analysis of the data obtained from the sample, development of grounded theory
based on the inductive analysis, and projection of next steps in a constantly emerging design” (pp. 187-188). This paradigm fit my research context in that I had theoretical assumptions about impression formation among teachers and students at the outset but wished to design a study that would enable informants to “speak for themselves” thereby facilitating new concepts regarding teacher reputation to emerge during the study. In this way, I was able to modify my data collection based on initial information such as interview responses and field observations.

Research Design

The research was designed using qualitative methodology and with the intent of producing data and findings that would assist me in answering my guiding research questions.

Sampling

Informed by Patton (2002, p. 230), I selected subjects based on purposeful sampling. He notes, “Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study.” This sampling method targeted participants who were actual students in the classrooms in which they had just met a new teacher for the upcoming school year, thus enabling me to directly apply the data to my research questions. I selected tenth grade students because I wanted participants to have had some access to a teacher’s reputation information (which excluded incoming freshmen) but not to have been in the building for more than a year. My concern in that case was that they might have formed potentially unshakeable impressions of all of the English faculty members.
Within the context of this study, student participants were chosen based on having successfully completed their freshmen year of high school. This means that they had had similar opportunities to learn the routines of high school, such as academic demand, clubs, sports, cliques, and the general way of life for an adolescent.

Initially, I had intended to visit the current freshmen class at the end of the 2009 school year to recruit in person. However, because this was the students’ exam week with an adjusted and abbreviated schedule, I decided to recruit via mailings. This necessitated an IRB amendment, which was approved in July 2009. Because of my relationship with the administration of the high school, I was able to obtain address labels for the entire 2009-2010 sophomore class. I mailed out the recruitment packets in sets of 50-75 (totaling 300), all of which included the recruitment letter as well as all pertinent forms and a postage-paid return envelope. I made an effort to mail them to various zip codes so as to attempt to solicit participation from students who lived in a variety of the school’s attendance areas. Early on, I received 10-20 responses with all appropriate signed forms included.

I used the secondary sampling method of “typical case sampling” (p. 236). This involves using the school personnel as “key informants” in the selection process, such as current teachers and administrators, who assisted me in selecting participants who were, indeed, typical. This was an integral aspect in the selection of the teacher participants. It was important not to have teacher participants who presently possessed either well-established positive or negative reputations, as this might have negatively impacted my student data on reputation. After discussing, informally, the reputations of the 10th grade
teachers with one of their colleagues as well as with an assistant principal, I indentified several acceptable candidates.

At the beginning of June, during this student recruitment process, I simultaneously emailed several teachers who had been identified in the process of informally assessing present teacher reputation. The faculty member who assisted me in identifying teacher candidates had been a student teacher in my building and I had, in fact, offered her a position before she had accepted her present one; the Assistant Principal had been the principal at my children’s elementary school (where my wife teaches music) before he moved to the high school position. These two “key informants” helped me to select teachers who had neither extremely positive nor extremely negative current reputations, based on their impressions as well as their assessment of the overall impressions of the students. I felt that any pre-existing extremes in regard to teacher reputation would present an obvious bias not conducive to my study of how impressions are formed. My email to the teachers explained who I was, what my study was about, the time commitments, and that they would be paid $100 upon completion. One teacher immediately agreed, at which time I provided the IRB forms to her to complete. Another teacher who was recommended, Ms. McGee, replied that she was teaching classes that were new to her and would be declining my offer. She noted that there were quite a few other teachers at that grade level from which I could choose. At that time, I was set to go back to my lists of 10th grade teachers to find another willing teacher participant, but as it turned out, many of my willing students had been assigned to Ms. McGee. I ended up speaking to her again, during which time she agreed to participate. The delicate timing of this interaction is detailed in the following paragraph.
During the summer, I was able to obtain the grade 10 class lists from my administrative contacts at the school. This proved to be crucial, in that I realized that only a handful of my present registered participants were assigned to my single current teacher participant. I had been overly optimistic in assuming that most of the students would return the recruitment forms (and in the affirmative) – I had assumed that by sheer volume, I would have some in every teacher’s class and that it was only important to have two teacher participants selected. After examining the class lists, I made a special set of recruitment letters that targeted the students assigned to Ms. Banner, teacher participant 1. The majority of students already signed up were assigned to another teacher, and I similarly targeted those students. Unfortunately, that class was the teacher who had already declined participation. My teacher contact offered to follow up with Ms. McGee, teacher participant 2, to see if she might reconsider. She relayed to me that Ms. McGee wanted to talk to me on the phone about the study, and after a quick chat, she cheerfully agreed to participate. Her main concern had been a fear of being evaluated in some way, and I was able to assure her that that was not the intent of the study.

At the end of the recruitment process, I had 4 female students and 8 male students. Because of some late schedule changes to which I was not privy, 1 female and 1 male student were in another teacher’s classroom – this teacher was not a participant in the study. In fact, interestingly, I never spoke to that teacher at any time during the study, even though I decided to retain those two students.

All twelve students participated in each of the three interviews, with the exception of Brian, who was unreachable for his second interview. I had scheduled a phone interview with him on a day that ended up being his birthday; he was unreachable and did
not return my calls or emails. I was able to ask some of those interview questions of him, though, during the final interview. Students received $10 for each of the three interviews.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Interviews with student and teacher participants, and observations in the actual classrooms during instruction were the primary sources of data in this study. Data was collected at several critical phases of their sophomore years. The first interview was conducted on or near the day they picked up their schedules at the school and became aware of their assigned English teacher’s identity. The second interview was conducted after their first day of class with the new teacher. The final interview was conducted approximately 15 weeks into the year. This time period was chosen so as to allow the students to get to know their teachers as well as to have one quarterly grade established.

Observations occurred on the first day of classes and one additional time in the first semester after approximately fifteen weeks of school. I audio taped the classes as well as took relevant field notes focusing on the student participants’ interaction with peers and with the teacher participants. The focus of the observations was to monitor the behavior of the student participants and to examine the teacher discourse with the class, specifically as it occurred with the student participants. Additionally, students were asked to complete a written reflection and to submit this to me a week or so after the final interview, giving them time to think about what we had discussed. I was interested in seeing if any of their comments would differ when put into writing and when harvested after the immediacy of a one-on-one interview. Not all of the students returned the
written reflections even though I provided a stamped, return envelope and issued a reminder.

**Student and Teacher Interviews**

The interviews with students provided relevant information about the specific actions and attributes of the teacher that students focused on as they described their impressions upon meeting, getting to know, and learning from the teacher. Gaining a sense of the students' impressions allowed me to begin to sense how those impressions affected the students' attitude toward the teacher and ultimately what that student said about that teacher to his or her parents and peers. I constructed interview questions that were aligned with the theoretical frameworks and that allowed students to speak candidly about their perceptions. Questions were reviewed by my colleagues for clarity, and I practiced posing the interview questions to some of my current students to test the questions for wordiness, flawed student interpretation of the question, and to ascertain any areas that were not being covered. The questions constructed for the initial interview were informed by the current literature regarding impression formation as well as the literature on student-teacher relationships. The following questions formed the basis of my initial student interviews:

1. What do you know about the English teacher who appears on your schedule?
2. Where did you find out what you know about this teacher?
3. Based on what you know about this teacher, what are your initial perceptions of him or her?
4. What kind of a teacher do you think he/she will be?
5. What additional details would you like to know about this teacher?
6. Do you plan to seek any more information about this teacher?
   a. If so, where will you seek the information?
   b. If not, why don’t you want any additional information?

7. Overall, how do you feel about entering this teacher’s classroom for the upcoming year and why?

Data from the first interview was used to make adjustments to the questions for the second interview; likewise, data from the observations was incorporated into both the second and final interviews. For example, in one instance I asked a student how he felt when the teacher threatened to send him in the hall. The second interview was designed to capture what initial impressions students had of the teacher after the very first day of class, to what extent it matched their prior impressions (if they had any), and to ascertain the effect this might have on their impression of the teacher and the class, even at this early juncture. Targeting specific issues allowed me not only to personalize the interviews but also to focus on the salient occurrences noted in the observations. The following questions formed the basis of my second student interview, conducted after the first day of classes:

1. Based on the first day of class, what do you think about the teacher?

2. What kind of a teacher do you think he or she will be this year?

3. What makes you say that?

4. What did you learn about the teacher before entering his or her class?

5. What have you discussed about the teacher today during school?

6. Based on today, if you were going to tell a friend about this teacher, what would you say?

7. Overall, how do you feel about being a student in his or her class?
The final interview allowed me to track any changes in perception, confidence, efficacy, and attribution of success after one and a half grading periods. With the passage of this amount of time, students were able to address conceptions they might have had entering the class and how those might have altered. Likewise, they had had ample time to discuss the class with peers who had the same teacher and with those who had a different teacher. This was key in attempting to address the concept of how actual reputations are formed and perpetuated.

The final interview, conducted approximately fifteen weeks in the school year, centered on the following questions:

1. How do you feel about being a student in this class?
2. What impressions have you formed about this teacher?
3. What is the teacher doing or saying (or not doing/saying) in order to form these impressions with you?
4. Do you feel successful in this class? Why or why not?
5. If you were going to tell a friend about this teacher or his/her class today, what would you say?

In addition, I tailored questions for each student based on his or her previous responses about his or her teacher as well as their classroom interaction with the teacher. These questions were informed by the students’ comments about their initial perceptions and were designed to probe the students about specific concepts that they had mentioned as being important to them. This systematic approach to the interview process allowed me to craft questions around my theoretical framework as part of the naturalistic inquiry process but also to examine students’ unique responses and commentary. The purpose of
the interviews was to attempt to ascertain what, if any, information about their new teachers the students possessed as well as how that knowledge made them feel. Additionally, I sought to determine in what, if any, means of gathering information about their new teacher they would engage. This was most pertinent in the first interview, as all but one student had not met their new teachers; Jacob had been assigned to the same teacher, Ms. Banner, whom he had been assigned to as a freshman.

The single teacher interview was completed after the final student interviews or approximately 15 weeks into the school year. Teacher participants, to my knowledge, did not know which students were involved in the study, although in one case, a student (Jacob) walked over to me after an observation to ask a question, which could have indicated to the teacher that he was a participant. The following questions formed the basis of my teacher participant interviews:

1. Describe your relationship with this class:
2. How do you go about forming relationships with the students?
3. How do you want to be perceived by your students?
4. How do you think the students perceive you as a teacher?
5. On what do you base your response to that?
6. With which students in the class do you feel you have formed especially positive relationships?
7. What makes you say that?
8. Overall, how responsible are you as the teacher for the students’ success in class?
9. To what extent do you believe your students feel confident that they can be successful?
10. Overall, what impression have you formed about students in this class?

Additionally, I asked questions of the teachers that focused on my observations of how they managed the classroom and how they interacted with their students. While I was not able to ask them targeted questions about the student participants (so as to protect student anonymity), I was able to ask them questions based on the comments made during the student interviews. For example, I asked the teachers about how they handle disruptions or the purpose of giving out a letter to the students, without divulging that these had been key issues that had emerged during the student interviews. In this way, teachers addressed issues that were important to the student participants. Because they were not aware that these elements had been specifically mentioned by members of their classes, I felt that the questions were adequately pointed without causing the teachers to feel self-conscious or defensive.

Classroom Observations

Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that, “a major advantage of direct observation . . . is that it provides here-and-now experience in depth” (p. 273). Observing students and teachers in the naturalistic environment of their classrooms provided a picture for me of how the students interact with their teachers as well as with their peers. A student’s reality is part of a whole that cannot be fully understood outside of its context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because this routine of students learning about their teachers, meeting them for the first time, and then forming impressions is a yearly cycle, it is important to examine how this occurs in the actual environment. There will only be one first day of school each year – there will only be one day when the students walk into the classroom
for the first time, seeing and hearing how the teacher chooses to start off the relationship-building process. I was looking for the types of interactions between students and teachers, classes and teachers, and among students that would help to indicate what factors students take into account when forming impressions of their teachers and how they may go about perpetuating these impressions. Similarly, direct observation would allow me access to nonverbal cues, which could then be incorporated into more probing interview questions during the interview phase of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Examples of this would be students' and teachers' body language during class as well as how students conducted themselves during the time in the classroom. Furthermore, I wanted to discover what if any factors exist in regard to impression formation and reputation that were not related to direct interaction. I hoped that observing the natural environment such as the classroom setting on typical days such as the first day of school would provide insight into the students' level of participation, the overall classroom environment, and the frequency, level, and type of discourse between the teacher and the student, all crucial components as evidenced in previous research (Murphy, et al., 2009; Noblitt, 1993; Patrick et al., 2003; Solomon et al., 1997; Soter et al., 2008).

The purpose of observing the first day of school was to analyze the teacher discourse with the class as well as any specific discourse with the student participants. Classroom observations were audio recorded and transcribed. Likewise, field notes were taken and time-stamped to match the audio recording. This way I was able to match a relevant researcher observation with the exact moment on the recording, which was imperative for elements such as tone of voice and humor. Both teacher participants felt compelled to warn me that there would “not be much to see” on the first day of classes.
They seemed slightly apologetic that I would not see them behaving as if it were a more substantive lesson during the year. The first day of school in many cases can feel both hectic and chaotic (Blackwell & Pepper, 2009). Also many teachers would agree that the first day of classes is rife with ‘housekeeping tasks’ such as attendance, establishment of rules/procedures, handing out textbooks, assigning seats; however, Wong and Wong (2000) suggest that the first day of school is the most important day of the school year. This day, they contend, has the ability to determine success or failure or the entire year. I wanted to be able to analyze how the teacher handled these tasks and this potential for chaos in regard to how she spoke to the students about the tasks and the material. Further, I wanted to observe and later ask the students how they perceived the teacher during this time, not only in regard to the ‘housekeeping’ tasks but more substantive elements such as how much and what types of personal information the teacher disclosed about herself, and how that made the student feel.

However, I also wanted to observe the student participants’ behavior and discourse so that I could ask them about their perceptions, which I would later juxtapose both to my own as well as to the interview responses of the teacher participants. This allowed me to ask some targeted questions in the second interview that was conducted at the conclusion of the first day of classes. The second observation that occurred during the fourth month of school was designed to capture a more typical day of instruction. I scheduled this with the teachers so that I was certain that they would be actively teaching rather than viewing a film or having students working completely independently. By observing and recording this second class, I was able to note the behavior and discourse of the teacher and student participants alike. This allowed me to ask questions in the
final interview based not only on data from the first two interviews but also from what I observed during an actual day of instruction.

**Data Analysis**

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), qualitative data analysis is "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). I felt that the most effective way to begin this process was to divide the research timeline into two distinct phases for data analysis: before the students have an opportunity to get to know the teacher personally and form individual impressions, and after the students have had time to form a relationship and an opinion of the class. This second phase included the opportunity students had to discuss their impressions of the teacher with others, including parents and peers, as well as to experience successes or shortfalls in the class. Conducting data analysis at these two points of the project allowed me to focus the analysis on the context. For example, how do the participants describe their impressions of the teachers before meeting them and on what do they base these impressions? Also, to what extent are the impressions later informed by the students' level of efficacy and are there any causal attributions at work?

For this study, data analysis consisted of creating data memos, open coding and axial coding. Participant profiles were maintained as the study progressed, and I created data memos after interviews to document my reflections of the student commentary as well as the interview processes. In each case, I consulted these data memos in order to produce targeted questions for the subsequent interviews. In this way, I was able to capitalize on what I had gleaned from the observations and interaction between student
and teacher participants. I was also able to induce the student participants to talk more by asking them pointed questions based on my reflection on elements that seemed of obvious importance to individual students (i.e. asking a student participant to reflect on his negative first day of class that began with nearly missing his lunch the period before English, as he had been emphatic about this in initial interviews).

Coding

Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 66) note that coding “involves interacting with data using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data . . . and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions." More literally, coding “represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). This process led me to look for trends in the codes such as the perspectives held by the students or the students’ way of thinking about teachers and their classrooms (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This data also provided me the means of analyzing the instructional discourse (Gillies & Boyle, 2007; Turner et al., 1998; 2003; Turner & Meyer, 2004) to code for patterns in the verbal interactions between students and teachers that might also impact how students describe their impressions of their teachers.

Analyzing Student Interview Data

In this study, students were interviewed three times: the day they picked up their schedules, on or near the day of their first day of class, and approximately fifteen weeks into the school year.
**Open Coding.** With 37 interviews that totaled approximately 600 minutes, I used open coding to begin to see patterns in the vast amount of data. In open coding, data is broken apart and concepts are delineated to serve as raw data as well as analyzed for their properties and dimensions (Straus & Corbin, 1990). Each set of transcripts was analyzed systematically at the conclusion of the data collection. My first pass through the data attempted to look for patterns related to elements of a teacher’s reputation. In this pass through the data, the following questions served as guides:

1. What knowledge of a teacher’s reputation was evident?
2. What elements were considered by students in regard to a teacher’s reputation?
3. What were the key elements that students considered as factors in a teacher’s reputation?

Taken together, these questions assisted me in taking note of elements that were crucial in obtaining understanding of what students found salient in what details they consider about a teacher prior to meeting him or her. What emerged was data coded as TR-Dem for level of demand, TR-man for classroom management, TR-pers for teacher personality (TR indicating teacher reputation). The full list of codes appears in Appendix B. This constituted what students discussed as relevant to their knowledge of a teacher before meeting him or her.

Similarly, a second pass through of the data was made for level of student efficacy with the following questions serving as guides:

1. To what extent do students feel that they can be successful?
2. What factors influence the students’ feelings of confidence and efficacy?
A third pass through was made to code for data related to attribution, guided by the following questions:

1. To what or to whom do students attribute their academic achievement?
2. To what or to whom do students attribute their sense of classroom community?

**Axial Coding.** Informed by Glaser and Strauss (1999) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), I began the process of illustrating patterns found within and across participants. The purpose of this was to attempt to identify themes and to ascertain meaningful relationships. Hoepfl (1997) notes that axial coding serves to analyze “causal events contributing to the phenomenon; descriptive details of the phenomenon itself; and the ramifications of the phenomenon under study must all be identified and explored” (p. 55). This series of analytical passes was pertinent especially considering the element of reputation and the “ramifications” Hoepfl mentions. In order to organize the data for analysis, I used a variation of the pile sort (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). During this phase, I used colored page markers to code the interview transcripts. Each color represented a different data code. Once line numbers of the data were identified by color, they were then lifted out and organized by themes that were identified in an earlier phase.

In subsequent passes, the colored page markers allowed me to see intersections between sense of belonging and efficacy, teacher demand and efficacy, and efficacy and attribution. Noting these intersections, I created index cards with similar color schemes so that I could identify the theoretical crossover as well as to capture representative quotes that aligned with the axial codes. After coding all of the data, all of the crossovers and intersections were organized by way of isolating them based the theoretical frameworks they intersected. For example, I was able to discover that there was an
intersection between high student efficacy and negative impression of a teacher (coded as eff-high-TR-negative).

**Analyzing Observation Data**

In a similar fashion, I transcribed and coded the two observations in both teachers’ classrooms, one from the first day of school and one from a lesson taught approximately 15 weeks into the school year. These transcriptions included my embedded field notes taken during the observation and time stamped to match the audio recording. The total observation time was 500 minutes between the two teacher’s classes.

My coding scheme for this data set was aligned with the following guiding questions:

1. To what extent does teacher discourse affect student efficacy?
2. What, if any, effort does the teacher make to encourage belonging and connectedness?
3. How do the students and student participants react to the teacher?

Subsequent passes through the data were designed to code for crossover between student and teacher perception and alignment with theoretical frameworks. In the case of teacher disclosure, for example, a teacher might have suggested this is a way to encourage belonging and support, but a student might have described a negative feeling about the same teacher disclosure event.

**Analyzing Teacher Interview Data**

The two teacher interviews were transcribed and coded for comparison with both the observation data and the data from the student interviews. The following questions served as guides:

1. To what extent does the teacher feel connected to the class?
2. To what extent does the teacher feel she affects student achievement?

3. To what extent does the teacher sense the efficacy of her students?

Coding in this case was designed to highlight intersections between student and teacher perception as well as for intersections of efficacy, attribution, and belonging. For example, both teacher and student participants commented on their perception of efficacy felt by the students in the class. However, coding revealed that in some cases, students felt less in control of their achievement than the teachers suggested about their students.

**Credibility**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation is one method that can improve the credibility of the research. Methodological triangulation, specifically ‘within method’ triangulation (Denzin, 1970, 2010) was utilized in this study, in that data was collected from the multiple methods of observation and interview. This method is reported to yield completeness, convincing data and reveal any irregularities that may indicate a different perspective (Duffy, 1985; Mitchell, 1986). Informed by Creswell (2009), I used peer debriefing to attempt to enhance the accuracy of the data. This adds validity, in that it involved interpretation of others apart from the actual researcher. Peshkin (1988) notes, "Subjectivity operates during the entire research process" (p. 17). Keeping this firmly in mind was of tremendous import to me in my goal of having findings that were not only salient but also perceived as credible. One desired outcome of peer debriefing is to trace the researcher's effect on the study (Maxwell, 2005). As mentioned earlier, my role as experienced teacher made this crucial. In proceeding with this process, I took a cue from Maxwell (2005) who recommended seeking "feedback from a variety of people, both those familiar with the phenomena or settings you're
studying and those who are strangers to this situation. They will give you different sorts of comments, but both are valuable" (p. 94).

To that end, I solicited the aid of a colleague at my high school, a graduate student in Educational Policy and Leadership at The Ohio State University, and an Assistant Professor of teacher education who has earned a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology. Each of these peers was provided the codes developed by me as well as the operational definitions of those codes. I provided them also with transcripts of the series of three interviews of Lila, Karl, and Liza, asking them to code that chunk of data. Simultaneously, I re-coded this same chunk of data on my own. After I received the peer coding back, I compared it with my own. Also, I reviewed their coding to see if any of the codes were confusing to them as well as to look for discrepancies between their perception of the data and my own. Finally, I examined the data from each peer personally, looking for any biases on my part as researcher as well as to seek some final affirmation as to the data codes that I had identified in relation to belonging, self-efficacy, and causal attribution.

As Greene and Caracelli (1997) discuss, qualitative research has value in its particularity rather than its generalizability. Accordingly, I believe my data analysis includes rich, thick description in conveying the findings. As Creswell (2009, p. 191-192) notes, "This description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.” This makes the results "more realistic and richer" as well as adding to the validity (Creswell, 2009, p. 192).

**Ethical Considerations**
As an experienced high school educator and a father of a teenage son, I am keenly aware of this phase of the students' adolescent development; accordingly, I feel confident that I conducted this research in an ethical manner both for the sake of the student participants as well as the teacher participants and my own credibility and conscience. I explained the study in detail to the students in the recruitment process. Furthermore, consent and assent forms were obtained from the participants and their parents. All procedures mandated and required by the Institutional Review Board at the Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University were completed before engaging in this research. All identifying information has been redacted from the data when presented in this Dissertation. The student participants know that I am not affiliated with their school district and that no teachers will be aware of their participation as well as their specific comments. While I mentioned that I was an English teacher in the recruitment letter, some students seemed surprised after the final interview when it came up that I was a teacher. I’m not certain if this would have impacted their responses at all, and I did not consider attempting to hide this detail about myself when I created the recruitment letter. However, based on some of their surprised reactions, I was left to wonder if they walked away from the study feeling as if I had encouraged them to think I was simply a graduate student so that they would be more candid. The reality is that I had not mentioned that I was a teacher simply because I was typically trying to be efficient in the interview process.

In the next chapter, I will include a discussion of the findings that emerged from the data as well as evidence from the observations and interviews that support themes that
emerged in examining how students formed impressions of their teachers and how those
impressions impacted teacher reputation.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways that adolescents form impressions of their teachers and to investigate how these impressions might contribute to the formation of a teacher’s reputation. For the purposes of this study, “teacher reputation” is defined as similar to Griffin’s (2001) definition -- information that students learn about a teacher prior to attending his or her class. This information can be obtained from a variety of sources but is most commonly transmitted by word-of-mouth from other students in an individual’s peer group. It is with this assumption that I observed and interviewed the students in this study. This study examined the formation and perpetuation of teacher reputation as it exists at the initial meeting between student and teacher and spans approximately half of a school year.

Data Presentation

First, I will provide brief information about the teacher participants, followed by details about the student participants, including a table that presents the students’ gender, age, self-reported GPA, assigned teacher, and a quote that typifies their initial impression of the teacher after the first day of class – one that they would pass along to a peer, contributing to teacher reputation. Next, I include a brief background description of each participant. It is crucial to have a snapshot of the student participants first, given their diverse backgrounds, so that their comments in each section have a relevant context. The next section will detail the elements that emerged as contributing to the impressions of
the teachers that are formed by the students: teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style. Finally, I describe three elements that students monitor and consider when forming extended impressions, additionally contributing to teacher reputation: students’ perceived level of self-confidence, students’ perception of teacher academic support, and students’ sense of classroom community.

**Teacher Participants**

A total of three teachers are referenced in this study, but only two of them were actual formal participants.

**Ms. Brown.** Ms. Brown (pseudonym) was not recruited to be a part of the study but is included as a “shadow teacher.” Two student participants, Lila and Stan, were assigned to Ms. Brown through schedule changes after I had finalized their participation in the study as students of Ms. Banner and Ms. McGee. In Stan’s case, neither he nor I was aware of this change until we sat down to complete the initial interview on the day he picked up his schedules. I included these two students and the interview data they provided. I did not observe these two students in Ms. Brown’s classroom. Also, I did not interview or speak with Ms. Brown during the study.

**Ms. Banner.** Ms. Banner (pseudonym) has been teaching for seven years. She has two children of her own, both in the primary grades. This was her third year teaching American Studies. Ms. Banner was immediately willing to participate in the study and we chatted informally between classes about my teaching experience as well as her perceptions of her school’s environment. Ms. Banner’s room was on the lower level of the school, two floors below most of the other English classrooms. She greeted some
students as they entered, but she also spent some time near her desk organizing materials for the day’s lesson. Overall, students tended to view her as somewhat serious and matter-of-fact. Her general teaching philosophy centered on her feelings of her accountability for the students’ achievement – to this end, she kept track of which students had participated each day and used a roster to attempt to track this data. In interviews, she did, though, express that at some point, she felt she had done all she could and the students need to step up and do their jobs as learners.

**Ms. McGee.** Ms. McGee (pseudonym) has been teaching for nearly 30 years, but this is her first year teaching American Studies (grade 10 English). Her own children are fully grown, and the students mentioned that she would talk about them occasionally in class. Ms. McGee is very animated and outgoing. Her room was in the center of the English hallway at the top of the stairs in a high-traffic area. Current and former students would frequently stop in to say hello. She spent much time greeting students and talking to them as they entered the room. Often, she would do so seated at her desk in the front of the room; sometimes she would sit at the tall chair by the podium or sit on her desk, in a casual manner, leaning back in her large chair. Ms. McGee seemed both to enjoy and find it valuable to engage the students in playful banter during the lesson, even though that sometimes deteriorated into inappropriateness on the parts of some students. Students at times would become over-enthusiastic, verbally engaging each other across the room with off-topic remarks or using borderline inappropriate language in their comments causing Ms. McGee to have to mildly rebuke them for using, as she termed it, “potty talk.” She typically was able to redirect the class and not spend time disciplining any students for such minor misbehavior. Ms. McGee was very enthusiastic and warm
during her lessons, exuding caring and a motherly presence – she specifically noted both of those impressions of herself during interviews. Students’ general impressions of her were that she was somewhat ‘off the wall’ but fun. Her general philosophy of teaching seemed to center on being caring while having high expectations. More so than Ms. Banner, she felt that the students needed to do what was asked of them because it was their job to learn.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Exemplary Quote</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonyms</td>
<td>perceptions leading to reputation after the first day of class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lila</td>
<td>“I think she will be kind of strict.”</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Ms. Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan</td>
<td>“She seems nice. She seems like she knows what she’s doing with the class.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Ms. Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>“I think she’s gonna be a strict teacher that’s gonna make us work a lot most of the class time.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alec</td>
<td>“She seems pretty nice. She seems pretty good.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liza</td>
<td>“I thought she was nice. I didn’t’ see anything wrong with her.”</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>“I knew her going in, but I feel better going in there now.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>“I think that she could probably lighten up a little bit.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>“I thought she was gonna be kinda old and all she would want to do was just read.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Ms. Banner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Student Participants**
Table 1. continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>“I think she’s gonna be fine. She seems nice.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Ms. McGee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>“She seemed pretty nice. She doesn’t seem strict or anything.”</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Ms. McGee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>“I, actually, was really surprised. I thought she’d be so much meaner, but she was so nice.”</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Ms. McGee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>“It’s gonna be a good year. I might actually do okay.”</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Ms. McGee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Participants**

The following snapshots of the student participants provide insight into their general background as well as their diversity and overall attitudes towards school and their respective English class and teacher.

**Lila.** Lila responded to the recruitment materials as well as the emails attempting to ascertain levels of confidence. When I received the rosters in August, she was not in either of the two teacher participants’ classes. However, she was interested in participating, so I retained her as a participant. This student is a former student of a person I know very well; however, she did not appear to recognize me or if she did, she did not mention the connection. Lila seemed rather mature and articulate for her age. I perceived her as a ‘people pleaser,’ as she made frequent references about wanting to do well and to do what the teacher expected of her. Despite that, she seemed willing to
speak freely and candidly about her thoughts regarding school. She is in the band, and that occupies much of her time during the late summer and fall. This year, she is in regular level English, but last year she was in an Enriched level class. Although I did not ask her specifically why she dropped down, she made a few references about not feeling as prepared as some of her peers from other elementary and middle schools. During her interviews, she seemed very easy going and expressed that she likes to take life as it comes. She was very clear in early interviews that she was not overly concerned with finding out details about her teacher; I did, though, sense some part of her that was task-oriented and that appreciated organization in her life. For example she talked specifically about liking that her teacher was very organized. She seemed to appreciate her teacher’s professionalism, spirit, and the amount of energy the teacher spends on getting to know the students. She also felt that the teacher has helped her improve her writing, something that she specifically mentioned in initial interviews wanting to address during this school year.

**Stan.** Stan was supposed to be in Ms. Banner’s class, but when I arrived for the initial interviews and looked at his schedule, it did not have her name on it. I went ahead and conducted the interview. Later, I decided to retain him as a participant. Stan plays soccer and was not very talkative. He seemed annoyed at times by the questions and was quick to ask for clarification with a bit of a frustrated tone (“What do you mean by…?”). He tended to speak negatively, so I inferred from our initial interview and in all subsequent interviews that he didn’t like school much and that he typically didn’t like English class or reading. That being the case, his unenthusiastic feelings about his teacher and his class are difficult to put into context. He seemed to be just trying to get
through school day-by-day, and tolerating it. Because I did not meet his teacher, I am unable to speculate on how this might have affected his impressions or his achievement.

**Karl.** Karl was one of the most vocal and colorful participants. He commented rather ambivalently about the value of school with the exception of stating with certainty that he should not have to take English since he could speak it. I deduced that Karl was Hispanic both from his appearance and because he spoke Spanish with his father during one of my phone calls to schedule an interview. Spanish was the language spoken in his home, and perhaps English was something in his past that he had struggled with. I would have expected him to understand the value of learning the language, but that might be my stereotype of someone like Karl. During the initial interviews, Karl seemed nervous in terms of looking around to see if anyone were observing him. This nervousness did not seem to impede his ability to answer, as he was very outspoken about calling teachers “mean” or claiming that homework was “a waste of time.” He seemed somewhat negative about school and teachers in general, but not so much so that it made me feel his responses were designed simply to insult teachers. Karl had a very bad first day of school. After almost missing lunch because of long lines, he arrived in Ms. Banner’s class and was promptly moved away from the only person he knew in the class (she moved students to assigned seats randomly). He wanted to drop the class after the first day and told me later that he had tried. As he looked back, he acknowledged that he was angry and that that had impacted his comments after the first day. He continued, though, to hold a low opinion of the teacher and class, and even noted that he felt that the teacher was intimidated by him since he is very tall and she is short. This was an interesting
observation. He seemed unmotivated both due to how easy the class was and how unimportant he felt the class was in general.

**Alec.** Alec was deceptively confident. He spoke very smoothly and made excellent eye contact, but he seemed to dodge several of the questions by claiming not to remember or not to have heard anything. He seemed to prefer giving very generic responses and even sometimes tried to placate me with overly positive remarks. I suppose it’s possible that he truly felt this way, but he was in the class with a few other students who were rather negative; it surprised me that he seemed positive about everything. On the other hand, Ms. Banner mentioned him as someone who was typically visibly annoyed by some of the student misbehavior and displays of ignorance in the class. Alec always seemed anxious for the interviews to end. He seemed uncomfortable being asked to speak critically about his teachers. I infer that he felt that it might be inappropriate to criticize a teacher out of respect, and if so, I would infer that this was part of his upbringing.

**Liza.** Liza was a cheerleader who seemed very friendly and outgoing. In each of my interactions with her, she spoke very freely, even if her comments were negative. During observations, Liza was clearly able to give off the impression to her teacher that she was being attentive, but she was able to work on other activities at her desk without much interference. She was extremely put off by Ms. Banner’s personal introduction letter to her students as well as the assignment Ms. Banner gave for the students to produce a similar letter of their own with personal information. This seemed to cross the line between teacher and friend to her; it was something she mentioned at every interview as creating a negative impression of her teacher for her. Although Liza claimed she
would be the teacher’s pet and get an ‘A’, she did not achieve that grade. To her, this was due to the class work being unimportant as well as having higher demands in other classes. At the same time, she seemed very aware of needing the teacher to like her and that she would need to manage her impression so as to maintain that relationship.

**Jacob.** Jacob had had Ms. Banner during freshmen year and hated her. He thus dreaded seeing her name on his schedule. He had moved to the district mid-year, and that seemed to account for much of the friction. Jacob seemed to think he was rather intelligent and enlightened. He was not shy about complimenting himself. Despite his previous experience with Ms. Banner, after the first day, he seemed to have completely changed his opinion of her. He felt she had changed and he had changed – he was very optimistic. This seemed to hinge on her comment that he “tells it like it is” when students were introducing themselves. This seemed to validate him, and yet I perceived she was being euphemistic. Jacob was difficult to reach for the final interview. He had gotten his phone taken away and before that, he had lost texting privileges. His contact phone number didn’t work, and his contact address was not valid. Finally, I just met him after his class and he agreed to do the interview. He was apologetic – I learned that he had been out several days for unexplained reasons and that his father had contacted his teachers. Most striking to me is the fact that Jacob described having a positive relationship with Ms. Banner, almost a friendship. She described him as having psychological issues. Jacob described knowing everyone in class and feeling that they respected him after sharing his work in class. During interviews with some of his classmates who were also participants in the study, they described making fun of him, finding his blurting extremely annoying, and enjoying class more when he was absent. In
an observation, students in one group seemed to be monitoring his behavior, commenting to themselves at one point that his comments were “stupid.” Despite the obvious incongruity, I never once sensed that Jacob didn’t believe what he said, completely.

**Brian.** Brian was rather quiet and talked very slowly. In his final interview, he mentioned having ADD and suggested that he was the type who needed time to think before responding – time to articulate his thoughts. He talked about being nervous about school and feeling pressure from teachers, which he described as unavoidable, meaning that teachers were obligated to do this. Brian expressed a desire for a teacher to be “mellow” but not to get off track. I was unable to arrange a 2nd interview with Brian. In class, Brian seemed quiet and shy. He paid attention but did not actively participate. He seemed friendly with the students around him but did not interact much beyond that. During his final interview, he explained that he had not done very well in class. He seemed to attribute some of this to his teacher. He also expressed resentment that she had contacted his parents, even though he acknowledged that it made a positive difference.

**Greg.** Greg is a hockey player and a lacrosse player. He is witty and energetic, and a bit of a jokester. He made a furtive gesture (finger to the nose) upon seeing me in class the first time, which amused me. He seemed very laid back and casual in class, joking around even on the first day. Later in the year, he was one of the students the teacher would at times have to threaten to remove or to call home about, but it was never for anything belligerent. Also, he agreed that he typically deserved that treatment. After being excited for the year to start, Greg seemed unenthusiastic and bored about class during the final interview. He seemed to feel that the discipline issues in the class, (including ones for which he was responsible) were due to boredom and were students’
efforts to ‘spice up’ the class. He did, though, express a comfort level with the teacher to the extent that he had planned to discuss an essay grade with her for some additional feedback.

**Steven.** Steven was one of the shyest and quietest students in the study. He is in the marching band but doesn’t seem to be the typical extroverted musician. During the first interview, he tended to give one-word answers and seemed to want to provide repetitious answers once he found a phrase he seemed comfortable with to describe a teacher. Overall, he seemed uncomfortable talking about teachers at all. This student required significant probing during each interview. During classroom observations, Steven rarely spoke either publically or to peers. He appeared to pay attention to the teacher during class, making eye contact and following along during lessons. I learned that he had not turned in some assignments and had a very low grade in the beginning of the year. He claimed that he appreciated that the teacher had contacted his parents and that, together, they helped him get back on track.

**Jeff.** Jeff was very talkative and comfortable, both with me and in class. He had very strong opinions about his teachers and school, and they seemed thoughtful. At one point in an email confirming an interview appointment, his mother mentioned that his teachers typically either really like him or really disliked him – I was unable in this study to follow up on what made her say that. I got the impression from meeting and observing Jeff that he was a good student but with that came a bit of an understanding that he should be allowed to make comments to his classmates during a lesson as long as this did not disrupt the teacher or any other students. Jeff claimed to appreciate a more laid-back
classroom environment in which he felt relaxed but still learned. He seems to have that with Ms. McGee, and so he appears rather positive about the class.

**Karen.** Karen fits the description of many suburban young adult females: she is pretty and friendly; she plays soccer and also would like to be successful in school, but not enough to cause her significant stress. She was very candid during interviews regarding her teachers. She even mentioned that she didn’t think her teacher liked Jeff after the first day because he talked a lot, in her opinion. Likewise, she mentioned having heard some rumors about her teacher because her brother had had her when he was in high school. These items were interesting and clearly items she did not have to volunteer. During observations, Karen was a very active participant in class. She seemed confident enough to offer up an answer and not be upset or embarrassed to be wrong. She was not, though, a huge fan of her teacher. Karen implied that Ms. McGee is a little lazy and that she could do more to reach all of the students. This seems to center on the way the teacher conducted class as well as the fact that Ms. McGee allowed students to sleep (with an academic penalty assessed).

**Becky.** Becky was like many students who are deeply involved in a school’s drama program – talkative and a little on the distracted side. She seemed to like school overall, but she also spent hours of her time afterschool, as is typically the case with those involved in drama. Her earliest comments focused on a teacher’s demeanor and personality. She described needing a teacher to be approachable and not make the students feel scared or stupid if they needed to talk to him or her. She seemed to truly enjoy her teacher, and I did observe a social conversation on one occasion before class, representing the comfort level. She seemed to appreciate the teacher’s dramatic and zany
style. But I also observed Becky texting during class and putting her head down during a lesson. She seemed not to be highly engaged and yet she did not attribute this to the class or her teacher.

**What Did Students Consider When Forming an Impression of Their Teacher?**

I conducted a series of three student interviews, two classroom observations, and one teacher interview. After transcribing and coding all of these interactions, I was able to ascertain the aspects most commonly mentioned by the students in regard to the initial and immediate impressions formed of their teachers as well as the thematic categories in which their comments could be placed. This data included the passage of time between the initial interview and the final interview nearly six months later, allowing me to perceive consistency and to examine the elements that continue to be monitored and discussed by students and how those elements continue to contribute to a teacher’s reputation.

Six elements emerged as elements that the students took into consideration when forming early and immediate impressions of their teachers: teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style. Additional elements emerged as being affecting students later in the impressing-forming process: students’ perceived level of self-confidence, students’ perception of teacher academic support, and students’ sense of classroom community. Both the immediate impressions and the extended impressions contribute to the teachers’ reputation or the information that students tend to learn and communicate about a teacher prior to attending his or her class.
Teacher Demeanor

Teacher demeanor refers to a teacher’s general personality traits as perceived by the students. Students’ initial perceptions of the teacher centered on how they perceived the teacher’s classroom demeanor. The teacher’s demeanor was typically discussed in regard to the students’ assessment of how personable the teacher was, including their perception of the teacher’s expressiveness and overall quality of the teacher’s personality. This could be as simple as how approachable the teacher seemed. Jacob commented about Ms. Banner, “You can say ‘hi’ to her in the hallway and just make small talk” (Personal Interview, January 12, 2010). Also, students perceived a teacher’s willingness to be playful. Karen noted about Ms. McGee in her final interview, “She’s always joking around with us – she’s called a couple of kids ‘crack babies’ and stuff like that. Just because they’ll be goofing off . . .” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

A few students expressed negative comments in regard to their teacher’s efforts to be personable. In his initial interview, Stan, whose teacher, Ms. Brown, was not a participant in the study, described some of Ms. Brown’s attempts to chat with the class as getting “. . . off task a lot. She’ll just, like, run off saying something else” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). To him, this personal information was not relevant. He did not experience any positive outcomes through his teacher’s efforts to be personable.

Additionally, students often categorized teachers as “nice” or “mean,” and “strict” or “lenient,” and they did so not in regard to disciplinary polices but as an assessment of the teacher’s personality. This, in turn, was reflected in the comments they would share with peers, contributing to the teacher’s reputation. Steven, for example, stated that he would pass along to friends that Ms. McGee is “. . . a nice teacher. That she is not strict,
like yelling at people” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Students commented frequently as to their perception of how the teacher spoke to the class or conducted lessons. For example, Becky noted about Ms. McGee in her initial interview, “She’s really upbeat. She likes to joke a lot. She’ll be easier to talk to than some of the other teachers that I’ve had in the past. She’s always smiling, making little faces . . . she has a friendly nature” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). This type of student impression was evidenced by their positive feelings about being in the class or in expressing enjoyment in the class. To demonstrate insight into what Becky would consider “mean,” she noted that a mean teacher “is always yelling and picking on little, itsy-bitsy things that people do, like clicking pens or snapping pencils” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Jeff offered a similar description of what he felt signified a strict teacher: “If your cell phone falls out of your pocket, they’ll take it, even though you’re not using it” (Personal Interview, December 21, 2009).

Lila recalled telling her friends at lunch that Ms. Brown was “really nice” and that she thought class would be “fun” (Personal Interview, August 27, 2009). Stan, another of Ms. Brown’s students, noted that she seemed “in a good mood and smiled a lot” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). In a similar manner, Steven described Ms. McGee as “nice” but his evidence was that “she hasn’t really yelled at anybody” and she “laughs along with” students who try entertain the class with comments (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Jeff mentioned that he had heard that the older brother of one of his friends had described Ms. McGee as “not really strict” and “more relaxed” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Karen’s impression supports this, as she described Ms. McGee as “laid back and joking with everyone.” This is an interesting
change from Karen’s initial impression of Ms. McGee before meeting her, which had been that she would be “mean” because she was “older” and might be “strict and old-fashioned” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009).

Another manner by which students formed impressions of the teacher’s personality and demeanor was by observing the way the teacher “interacted with other students” (Jacob, Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Lila noted a similar observation with Ms. Brown’s interaction with other students. She described her as “genuine,” stating that, “She seems very nice. When we just talk before class – or, like, the whole class – we just talk just about what’s going on. Like we talked about Tiger Woods. Explaining recent events and just catching up everybody up with what’s going on in the world” (Personal Interview, December 10, 2010). In addition to suggesting that the teacher’s personality and demeanor were how they formed impressions of the teacher and class, Alec even suggested that this impacted his performance, stating in his final interview: “[the fact that she’s lenient] makes it a little easier to relax and not stress about homework or tests” (Personal Interview, December 16, 2010).

Some students considered it a positive personality trait that their teacher was organized. Karen noted about Ms. McGee: “I feel pretty good about the class . . . It seems like she’s organized. I hate teachers who aren’t organized. She seems like she knows what we are going to do and has everything all planned out” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Greg also noted that he found organization to be a positive attribute, stating in his second interview that Ms. Banner would be a “good” teacher. She “seemed like she knew what she was doing and had the whole class planned” (Personal Interview, August 27, 2009). Lila’s positive impression of Ms. Brown’s personality also involved
organization, noting in her final interview: “She plans out the whole day and the whole week on the board so we know what we’re doing and what’s coming up” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010).

On several occasions, students noted that the teacher had made comments about other classes to them or that they were informed by friends in other classes that such comments had been made. In some cases, students were displeased with this quality of the teacher’s personality – the tendency to comment on one class to another. Liza noted about Ms. Banner, “She talks about our class, and I’ve talked to some of my friends. They say . . . apparently 7th period is like her favorite class or something. And one of my friends from 7th says she always talks about 3rd period . . . and how horrible we are, which we are” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Worth noting here is that Liza did not disagree with the description of her class but did take issue with having her teacher discuss this opinion with her peers in another class.

According to interview data and comments recorded in classroom observations, student impressions of teacher demeanor were reflected in the types of comments they would make to their [the students’] peers very early on, such as during the first day of class and subsequent days in the first week of school. These descriptions and assessments of the teachers’ demeanor were typically one of the first types of comments that were passed along during student communication about teachers. It was common for all students to be able to articulate their early impressions of the teachers’ demeanor and general personality. Because this impression was formed beginning on the first day of school, students were compelled to form an impression with a limited interaction, which means that the impressions they communicated were perhaps similarly limited.
Teacher Enthusiasm

Teacher enthusiasm was examined in regard to the teacher’s level of energy displayed during instruction. This emerged as a key element in how students formed perceptions and how those perceptions were passed along, contributing to reputation. Students monitored teachers’ enjoyment and level of energy during the lesson and tended to speak positively about those teachers and classes. During observations, Ms. McGee tended to be more animated, dramatic, and playful during lessons. She frequently used hand gestures, facial expressions and modulated the tone of her voice. For example, she used vocal sound effects and exaggerated swimming motions while discussing a story. Ms. Banner was more serious and her efforts at being enthusiastic seemed more forced and intentional. It was more common during observations for her to silently check homework noting completion on her roster or to move through a series of questions with the clear intent of managing to make it through her plan for the lesson.

The assessment of how the teacher uses class time was relevant because students’ impressions of if and how a teacher uses class time to actively teach was interpreted by some students as evidence of a teacher’s level of enthusiasm. In some cases, students categorized work time as ‘busywork’ and were critical of teachers using ancillary materials because that seemed unenthusiastic and evidence of teacher disinterest or even incompetence. In some cases, students seemed to evaluate the activities in a teacher’s lesson, attaching those choices to a teacher’s level of enthusiasm, or lack thereof. Lila noted about Ms. Brown, “She doesn’t give us busywork. I’ve noticed that some of my friends – they’ll have to do these worksheets on vocab” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Karl noted about Ms. Banner:
I think she uses the book too much. Everything in the class is based on the book. Like, she has PowerPoints from CD’s of the book. Some teachers use other resources. We just have that book everyday . . . for me, that doesn’t make learning fun . . . She doesn’t know what she’s teaching . . . if she didn’t have a book, there would be no class” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Alec picked up on what he described as less enthusiasm from Ms. Banner but attributed it to the nature of the day’s activity, one where students were working in small groups. He noted, “She was less into it just cuz of the group activities . . . she wasn’t involved” (Personal Interview, December 16, 2009). In a similar manner, Jeff claimed to appreciate Ms. McGee’s manner of presenting stories, noting, “I don’t like it when [the teacher] just reads the book and everyone has to be quiet” (Personal Interview, December 21, 2009).

Becky enjoyed the level of animation and enthusiasm exhibited by Ms. McGee: “It makes class more entertaining. She turns reading and discussing things into – from a lecture to a conversation” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Becky noted about Ms. McGee in her final interview, “She’s very descriptive about everything” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). In contrast, Greg felt that Ms. Banner exhibited little enthusiasm during lessons: “I think it’s been the same message from her the whole year, so far. Just, like – you need to do the reading. We do worksheets over stories we read in our book . . . we have to do reading journals, and those aren’t really that fun” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Stan exhibited a similar link between classroom routine and teacher enthusiasm, noting about Ms. Brown, “We do the same thing every time. We read a story, review a story, and it’s just her talking the whole time” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Brian also perceived a teacher’s classroom protocol critically, commenting about Ms. Banner, “I think she should encourage more students to just get out there and like raise their hand and get more in tune with what we’re doing . . . it
would make things a lot more open. Definitely a lot more expressive. A lot more interactive” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Jacob perceived Ms. Banner as seeming to “care about her job,” offering as evidence that, “Instead of going word-for-word out of a textbook, she’ll go on to explain it using context . . . it shows that she’s interested, and if she’s interested, we should probably be interested, too” (Personal Interview, January 12, 2010). This, also, is in direct contradiction to Karl’s previous comment that Ms. Banner only follows the textbook.

In her final interview, Liza commented about Ms. Banner, “She’s not very interesting. And she doesn’t captivate my attention. I do my other homework in her class.” She elaborated with, “She has a dull voice. She talks to us like we’re little kids, going over [material] again and again” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). With her comments that she chooses not to pay attention because of the teacher’s personality, Liza even links her achievement to being impacted by the teacher’s level of enthusiasm.

Similarly, in his final interview, Greg commented noted about Ms. Banner: “She doesn’t express the stories in an interesting way to me. She just does the job and that’s about it. She just seems like she doesn’t really wanna have fun in the classroom. She doesn’t express enthusiasm in what she’s teaching. It just seems like she doesn’t like what she’s teaching, maybe . . . it just seems like it’s almost all business” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). This not only is critical of her level of enthusiasm but may also contradict his early positive comments about Ms. Banner’s perceived organization, if that level of enthusiasm is perceived less favorably because she progresses efficiently though a lesson. In this case, Greg’s negative perception manifested itself in negative and critical comments about the class. He claimed that if
asked, she would describe the class as “boring” and “not interesting.” “Tough luck” is what he would tell a peer who was assigned to Ms. Banner and then asked him about her reputation – “Just get your work done . . . It’s not gonna be fun” (Personal Interview, December 12, 2009).

Students who perceived a teacher’s level of energy during instruction formed more positive impressions and were more likely to comment positively to peers about their teacher. This perception was closely aligned with students’ perceptions of how the teacher chose to use class time. Often, students attached a critical view of the teacher as unenthusiastic if she chose activities that were not perceived as fun and engaging by students. Those same students were quick to comment negatively about the teacher’s level of enthusiasm and that also corresponded to negative comments about the class, in general.

**Teacher Self-Disclosure**

Teacher self-disclosure refers to personal information shared by the teacher with the students as well as the nature and frequency of this sharing. Students in this study seemed to fall into two contrasting groups in regard to how they felt about the amount and type of teacher self-disclosure they experienced. Lila, for example, had a strong and positive reaction to Ms. Brown’s style of self-disclosure:

I’m pretty sure that she shared her parents have died. That she has a dog that she completely adores. She works out now and then. Cuz we have asked if we could stay after and she’s like, “No I have to go work out.” I think she’s married. So, that satisfies me because I know what her interests are and stuff like that. But there are limits. I don’t want to know everything that your child did today. Yeah, if it’s a funny story, like they dropped the phone in the toilet or something. Or cracked their head open and you had to stay at the hospital, I’ll listen to that. But,
just—“yeah, my son ran a red light today”—she doesn’t do that. I don’t think she has kids.

In this excerpt from her second interview, Lila seems to touch on the sense of balance that was evident in the students’ perceptions of how teachers discuss personal information in the classroom. She appreciates her teacher’s desire to talk informally with her and with the class, and she enjoys knowing some personal items about the teacher, but she does not find it necessary to know everything.

Karen, Ms. McGee’s student, enjoyed the element of humor that was present in the teacher’s self-disclosure:

She’s like, funny and she tells us all these stories. She’s told us stories about how her stepson’s like a…druggie or…I don’t know what else. Or how her daughter who she thought was like this stupid little thing is like a patrol officer with like the high drug users and all that. So she’s always telling us stories about that and it’s so much fun (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Ms. McGee appeared to use humor and self-disclosure as a way to keep students interested, build rapport, and even teach embedded lessons. She commented on this in her interview:

I think more than anything it’s opening myself up. And when you open yourself up, then the kids open up and I’m kind of an open book. I’m not, I’m definitely an extravert. If something pops in my head, it comes out my mouth. So, it just kind of evolved. I don’t know, maybe studying a short story of some type and, and maybe a character has undergone some kind of a conflict or whatever and I’ll tell them, ‘yeah I’ve had this same conflict.’ Tell them about my conflict and then all of the sudden the other kids are, you know. And the kids think they’re getting me off track . . .yeah, when really they don’t see that this is a connection. This is literature affecting your life (Personal Interview, January 18, 2009).

Ms. Banner’s students had divergent attitudes about teacher self-disclosure. Liza clearly felt that there are necessary and appropriate boundaries between teachers and
students. In our first interview, before she had even met Ms. Banner, she noted, “I hope she doesn’t tell us her opinion, because I don’t think you’re [teachers] allowed to do that” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). She went on to say that, “Teachers are supposed to be educators not friends.” Liza was particularly offended by Ms. Banner’s opening day assignment. This involved Ms. Banner providing the class with a letter of introduction from her, including some personal information about her background, interests, and family. Ms. Banner told the class the following information when explaining the purpose of the teacher letter:

The first thing I want to do is introduce myself to you a little bit -- tell you a little bit about myself. And the way that I’ve usually done that is that way I want you to do that with me in a little bit more formal way than what you just did [mention a detail about themselves during attendance]. And that is by a letter. Okay? So I’m giving you a letter that is from me to you. You can skim through it – you might find this information just fascinating or you might find it not so fascinating, and that’s okay. But the most important thing for you to know is the last paragraph. So if you just kind of wanna cut to the chase to see what you’re going to have to do. It’s pretty painless, I promise. But that’s in the last paragraph, okay? So let me go ahead and pass these out to you. I’ll give you a couple minutes to look those over.

(students read the letter)

These are good for allowing you to share anything that you might not be comfortable saying in front of the class. We all go through stuff in our lives – some good, some not so good. I stuck with the basics – what I did over the summer, what’s important to me in my life. I didn’t get really, really deep and share everything with you, but you can choose to do that (Classroom Observation, August 27, 2010).

In introducing the letter, Ms. Banner used both sarcasm and self-deprecating humor in regard to how interesting the students would find the details of her life that she chose to share. Also, Ms. Banner seemed to imply that the students could merely skim that part of the letter and simply focus on the details of the letter that they would have to complete as
an assignment. I did not observe or note Ms. Banner referring to herself at all during the rest of this first observation or in the subsequent observations. To Liza, though, the details about Ms. Banner’s family and interests included in her letter involved more self-disclosure than Liza found appropriate. She commented, “She said a lot about her kids, which was getting into her personal life, which I thought was still a little bit on the line” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). In our final interview, Liza continued this theme that was clearly established on the first day of class, noting, “She talks about herself a lot. She mentions stuff, and it’s kind of just weird” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). One of the most illuminating references Liza made was in the final interview, where she was still talking about the negative impact of Ms. Banner’s letter: “I think the letter is the first thing that set me off. It was a little weird. And then, like…she’d be like talking and, like…”Oh, I was out for swine flu’ and she’s just told us a little bit too much” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Other students of Ms. Banner found her self-disclosure appealing. Displaying some sense of connectedness, Greg noted, “She said she liked to bike and run and swim and stuff, so I was surprised by that. She likes to go outside, too, so that’s good. I like to do that” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). This, too, was a sentiment provided after his experience reading Ms. Banner’s letter on the first day of class.

In her interview, Ms. Banner provided insight into her intended purpose in providing the letter to her students:

I hope it conveys to them that I really am interested in who they are as a person, not just as my student . . . it’s good, I guess -- more than anything I guess I want to open the lines of communication and that’s what I’m trying to do by that
assignment and that I’m really not looking to see how good of a writer they are, I really just want to see. Part of it’s a communication thing cause it, I mean it does teach me a lot about who they are as a writer, you know. I can’t, I can’t look at somebody who has hardly anything spelled right and grammar problems all over and not think “oh this is going to be a problem.” [laughs] But, more than that I guess I want them to get the message that, “hey I can really, I can tell her something that’s going on and she really does care, even though she doesn’t know who I am yet, you know, she cares. That’s part of the reason though that I tell them it doesn’t have to be about personal things. I don’t know that I’ve ever had anybody say, of course maybe they wouldn’t, but they’re just thinking it, that they objected to the assignment because it was too personal because I think there’s room to be real personal and there’s room to not be personal. But the advantage is instead of spilling your guts about your summer and who you are in front of the class of 23 kids, now they can spill their guts if they want but they know that I’m going to be the only audience that looks at it (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

Ms. Banner commented very little on the aspects of the letter that involve her self-disclosure. Her main focus seemed to be the chance for the students to see that she is interested in what they have to say about themselves and in providing an opportunity for the students to start off the year with a positive grade on an assignment that is well within their capabilities.

Although Jacob ultimately misperceived the quality and character of his relationship with Ms. Banner, in his final interview, he put his attitude toward teacher self-disclosure into perspective: “The more you learn about a teacher, like when they talk about their kids or their home life – days off from being sick, or vacation and breaks and stuff, it makes them seem more human. I like that because you’re not learning from a teacher who’s like a robot. But you’re learning from an actual person that you can connect with” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). In these contrasting examples among the perceptions of students and teacher, I saw the potential for the initial formation of a teacher’s reputation to be different based on the same event.
Teacher self-disclosure emerged as an element that is perceived differently by different students as well as perceived in a different manner by the teacher. One teacher used this as a way to connect in a personal way with students, and another teacher felt it was just her natural personality. Whereas many students appreciate knowing some personal details about their teacher, there appears to be a point after which the amount of self-disclosure makes some students feel uncomfortable or is perceived as the teacher taking up class time with personal information. Students tended to appreciate the climate created by teacher self-disclosure and commented positively in those cases; however, students who perceived this negatively were more likely to mention it to peers critically.

**Teacher Academic Press**

Teacher academic press is described in regard to teacher expectations of the amount and type of academic assignments. After the first day of class, several but not all students had already formed perceptions of their teacher’s level of academic press and had participated in conversations, which framed this information in regard to a teacher’s reputation. During the second interview, an additional factor that emerged as contributing to the students’ impressions of the teacher was their perception of the demands of the class. Some students expressed this in relation to the number of books they believed they would read or how much time they perceived they would spend using the literature anthology. More salient comments were made by the students with regard to the amount and difficulty level of homework as well as the difficulty level of written assessments, such as essays. Students were keenly aware of their perceptions of the homework assigned by a teacher, such as how challenging they felt it was, how much time the teacher provided in class to complete it, and how stringently the teacher assessed
the assignment, if assessed at all. It was common for students to categorize homework in a binary manner, such as either ‘meaningful’ or ‘busywork.’ Other students focused on the amount of homework assigned, and viewed that in a similarly arbitrary manner, such as either ‘too much’ or a ‘fair amount.’ A related but distinct element in regard to the demand of the class was the types of writing assignments that the teachers assigned. Students evaluated these in terms of how many essays they would have to write, how stringently they would be graded, and how that would impact their overall grade.

In many cases, students who expressed a high level of confidence in the initial interview confirmed that level in the subsequent interviews after assessing their perception of the demands of the class based on homework and writing assignments. Unlike the first interviews, students did not suggest they perceived the class as easy because they as individuals were of high aptitude or ability; rather, they attached it to the low demand or challenge level of the class and in many cases, suggested this was a flaw on the part of the class or the teacher.

The amount of academic press placed upon students was consistently noted as coveted information about their newly assigned teachers, beginning as early as schedule pick-up day when students begin to seek out information about a teacher’s reputation. In initial interviews, Lila noted, “I will want to know how much work the teacher expects. I don’t like homework every night” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). and Jeff expressed a desire to know about his new teacher, “How much they expect from the students” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Karen took her inquisitiveness a step further, attaching some emotional response to information about a teacher’s academic press: “When I hear that teachers are hard, they are kind of intimidating. You
don’t want to make them mad or anything” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). She seems to equate high levels of press with some type of fear of causing a teacher to be angry. Karen also expressed her perceived value of a teacher who is demanding academically: “I’d like [a low demanding teacher] but I don’t know if I’d learn as much” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). In his second interview, Ms. Banner’s student Jeff felt ambivalent about his perception of her academic press: “She doesn’t give us a lot of homework. Our homework is pretty simple, and she gives us a lot of time to do it” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Karl experienced a negative impression that seemed completely opposite of Karen’s perception of Ms. Banner’s demand, perceiving the academic press of her class to be very low. He notes, “Her class is really easy. We do reading journals. I did that in 6th grade. When we do turn them in, we get to pick our best five so we don’t have to do much to the other ones. Her class is useless, basically” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010).

Karl equated low demand with low importance, even though it amounted to less work and less challenging work for him. Interestingly, in his initial interview, he keyed in on some comments he had received from some of Ms. Banner’s previous students: “I heard they had a lot of writing assignments, and I don’t like writing a lot” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010). In this case, his initial perception was negative based in part on what he had heard from his peers about Ms. Banner’s academic press in the area of writing. That appeared to change, though, after the year began and he interpreted the writing demand as too easy and reminiscent of his middle school English class.

In examining the intersection of student perception and teacher perception, it was important to look at the level of demand that the teachers felt that they exhibited. Some
students felt positively about their perception of their teacher’s level of academic press.

In final interviews, Steven noted about Ms. McGee: “She tries to get everyone to participate in class by reminding people to bring their book and letting people go get their book if they forget” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010). While not always considered meaningful participation, having the required materials and having a teacher demand this of her students conveyed to Steven that Ms. McGee had high standards of academic behavior. Lila seemed to extend her perception of Ms. Brown’s academic press to include caring and dedication:

At one point we were talking about it as a class, about how she doesn’t want us to fail and how a bunch of people were failing. A bunch of the freshmen were. And, one of the kids in my class – she’s like, ‘Why don’t you just give up on them? You’ve called their parents. They’re not doing anything. You can’t force them to do anything.’ She’s [Ms. Brown] just like, ‘Well, I can’t. That’s my job. I have to keep helping them no matter what.’ Just her reason for why she couldn’t give up kinda said, oh she’s not one of those teachers that says, ‘I’ve tried…whatever’ (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010).

Ms. McGee hoped that students perceived her as “open and warm, but demanding.” She stated: “I want students to understand that they need to learn this stuff, and yet I don’t want to be that old stern, ‘Quit looking at the clock!’” Similar to her feelings on her approach to discipline, she notes the need for balance. Ms. McGee more specifically addressed why some students would categorize her as a having high academic press:

I’ll get kids who, you know, that first paper that comes back, “You’re such a hard grader.” And on the one hand that’s kind of cool that they feel the freedom to say that. But on the other hand, I substantiate why. You have to work for an “A.” It’s not because you showed up for class and you did your homework. This is something that you have to struggle with. A lot of times I step into ‘mom shoes.’ In fact, I do have one kid eighth period that calls me ‘school mom.’ Because, you have to explain to them that if something is difficult, you’re going to do one of two things. Either you’re going to say ‘I don’t want to do it. I give up’ or you’re
going to say, ‘I’m going to grapple with this, I’m going to work with this, I’m going to get it and then I’m going to do well.’ So I lecture them like that much of the time. (Personal Interview, January 18, 2009)

Ms. McGee noted in the interview that she felt her rapport with her students allowed her to speak to them in this manner and to have them react positively to that.

Ms. McGee, though, expressed concerns about what she perceived as an incongruity in her perception of her level of demand as opposed to some of her students’ perceptions. She commented,

A lot of them say they think I’m too hard, and it scares me. Every year I seem to get, ‘you want us to read this story?’ We’re following the course outline, we’re doing the state mandates, we’re doing all that stuff. It’s scary because they have everything online now. I assign a story, and they can go home and click a little icon, and it reads it to them (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

Ms. McGee’s concern seemed to stem from her perception of the students changing over the past few years and being less willing to do the work, even though she felt the content and demands have not increased. In fact, she perceived that the demand may have decreased in that students have more resources to assist them than ever before, and yet the amount of work she perceived that they are willing to do is less.

Ms. Banner described a similar desire to be perceived as having a balance in regard to level of academic press. She noted:

I’m hard but I’m not too hard. It’s not impossible. The average student would say if you do your homework in my class, you’ll be okay, if you try. Her tests are hard, but you can do alright if you just do your homework and what you’re supposed to do (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

The teachers’ comments implied a connection between the level of academic press and the teachers’ perceptions of how responsible they are as for the achievement of the students in their classes. Ms. McGee discussed her attitude about this in her interview:
To a degree, I feel responsible for at least doing my darndest to educate them to do the best I know how to get something across to them, to maybe teach things in several ways so that you can reach those kids. But they have to meet me halfway. I’m not responsible for when they leave my class and go home and they have to do an assignment or whatever. It’s really kind of a party of three. It’s got to be me, it’s got to be the parent overseeing and it’s got to be the kid. I think the buck stops there and I think too often we blame ourselves for that and you can probably pinpoint kids that you know aren’t going to do well because they are not listening, they’re not. I mean, how can you force a kid to listen? (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

Ms. Banner expressed both a similar feeling of obligation and frustration at her lack of control of how a student approaches learning:

I feel responsible, I feel obviously hugely responsible that I provide them opportunities to be successful. That I give them in terms of the concepts and things that I teach them, what they need to know to be successful. Like for instance, on the Ohio Graduation Test and then on tests and things like that. I feel that I give them plenty of opportunities to be successful both grade-wise and otherwise in the class. That I create a climate where they can learn. But where I feel like my, I don’t want to say my responsibility ends here, but where I feel like I have less control is the fact that I can’t do anything about their home life. I can not make them do their homework. I can’t even really make them come prepared to class and my 3rd period -- we have battled about this, bringing your textbook to class until it is so old. And then I’ll really lay into them one day and then the very next day all of them will have it. And then the day after that, a third of them will have it and you think, aahh.. So, I kind of feel like, if you’re failing because you’re not doing your work and I’m never seeing your parent and I’m making contact and they’re not and all this kind of thing, then I feel like I’m doing everything I can do. And I’m not going to beat my head against the wall because then it takes time away from the things I’m doing that other students are benefitting from (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

The students’ perceptions of the teachers’ level of academic press seemed rooted in the amount of work and the manner in which the teachers imposed and conveyed the academic press, while the teachers’ perceptions focused on their motivation for being academically demanding as well as the amount of control they had in the situation as opposed to the amount of control possessed by the students. These impressions were
some of the most common types to be communicated between and among peers. Students who perceived a class and teacher as highly demanding were more likely to comment on that aspect to peers, most commonly with an air of concern. Students assess their perception of the level of academic press as a resource in forming crucial initial impressions of the teacher and class.

**Teacher’s Approach to Discipline**

Teacher’s approach to discipline is described as the students’ perceptions of the teacher as strict or lenient as well as the related degrees of strictness or leniency. Students made frequent comments as to their perceptions of the style of discipline of their teachers. This began as early as the initial interview during which students commented on the type of approach to discipline they hoped to experience in their upcoming classes. In her initial interview, Becky described her ideal teacher as one who would “Give a little bit of leeway but not too much where students are slacking off” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010). She seemed to feel that there is a balance to applying discipline and that even as a learner, she would benefit from a teacher who understood that balance. Jeff, on the other hand, expressed that he appreciated a teacher who was not authoritative: “She’s kinda like open. She let us just talk during the class. I like more relaxed teachers, because strict teachers – they always want to just do things a certain way” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010).

Some students seemed to equate approach to discipline to their perception of a teacher as organized and in control. In her first interview, Karen noted about Ms. McGee, “She seems like she’s organized. I hate teachers who aren’t organized. She seems like she knows what we are going to do and has everything all planned out” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010).
Interview, August 26, 2010). This perception connects to similar student perceptions in a teacher’s approach to discipline, in that some students seemed to perceive a lack of structure during a lesson as being a cause of student misbehavior. For example, Greg commented initially about Ms. Banner, “She had a plan, and there wasn’t any time in between to talk or anything like that. You just moved on to the next activity” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010).

The most salient and sometimes acrimonious responses came from students in regard to how the teachers managed some of the behaviors that I observed in the classroom. In both classes, I observed students with their heads down, either sleeping or not attempting to pay attention at all to the lesson. Both teachers chose to ignore this behavior. Ms. McGee followed her class participation grade policy noting the appropriate deduction in her grade book without addressing the student specifically at that moment. Students seemed to fall into two opposite reactions to this style of management. Ms. McGee’s student, Steven, reacted to this in a pragmatic manner in his final interview: “If you’re like sleeping and not paying attention, you don’t get participation points and that lowers your grade. If they keep doing it, they’ll probably not get good grades and might have to re-take [the class] so it’s up to them” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010). Some students felt that a teacher ignoring a student who was sleeping was acceptable if the teacher had already made some effort to reach the student. During her second interview, Karen describes her reaction to her teacher’s approach:

She’s not like too strict, but she doesn’t – she’s good about it, like…I don’t know if you were there. The one kid, Phil [pseudonym], who sits up in the front. He is like a troublemaker everyday. And basically, she started off – she tried to give
him a chance to be better and not mess around and eventually now she just sends him – she doesn’t punish you one time for something. She kinda gives you a chance to come back and pay attention. Not just send you straight to the office. Her idea is if you don’t wanna pay attention – I mean, she has tried to get him to pay attention, but he just doesn’t. I think – that’s how I would feel. It’s like, if you’re not willing to stay awake in class, I don’t feel like wasting class time. Cuz, he does that all the time, so it’s like…it’s a recurring thing. She just doesn’t take class time from other students to try to work it out – she does – she talks to them after class. That way she’s not taking up class time and keeping other people like me from learning – to try to discipline him. (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010).

In this example, the student specifically mentions the protection of her own learning experience as a way of validating the teacher’s approach to a student who is sleeping in class and whom the teacher has already attempted to discipline. In a final interview, Becky took this one step further, noting, “I guess when teachers act like that [ignore students who are sleeping] it’s more so the fact that it’s like responsibility and you have to learn to have self-control and stay awake in class and stuff like that. She shouldn’t have to stop teaching” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2010). Her response indicates a clear division between what student behaviors teachers are responsible for addressing and what qualifies as the sole responsibility of the students. However, other students were critical of this lack of attention to students not making an effort to learn or to pay attention. When asked in her final interview, Karen commented on her perception of her teacher’s lack of interest in reaching all students:

I feel... yeah. Personally, yeah. I feel like if someone is struggling or has a bad grade, she kinda won’t go out of her way to help them. She’ll only help them if they come to her. I don’t think—I know a lot of teachers that—it seems like she doesn’t care if people—cuz the other day she was talking about how, ‘Oh I have 25 people in all my classes that are failing right now.’ And she acted like it was no big deal. You know what I mean? I feel like she should be more concerned and do something about that, cuz if I was a teacher, I wouldn’t want people to fail my class. I would want everyone to pass. I don’t think she wants them to fail, but I think she isn’t...caring as much (Personal Interview, December 15, 2010).
What is fascinating about this example is that earlier, Karen seemed to appreciate the teacher’s unwillingness to disrupt her [Karen’s] learning to attend to a sleeping student. However in this case, she is critical of the teacher’s perceived lack of caring about students failing her class. Karen does not, apparently, see a connection between sleeping during class and failing. She wants the teacher to “do something about it,” but this seems to conflict with her previous comments about using class time to discipline students. I group this example about ‘caring’ in the category of ‘approach to discipline’ because that is how the students perceive the teacher’s behavior. The teacher’s lack of assertively disciplining a student who is obviously not engaged in learning is construed by the student as a lack of caring on the part of the teacher. In fact, Karen mentioned on numerous occasions that she wished that the teacher would “care more.” In each case, Karen was referring to the teacher’s lack of actively responding to a student who was not successful in class due to misbehavior or disengagement.

Ms. McGee addressed this in her interview:

You know what, and I’m a firm believer, and some people disagree with me, is if you’re going to sleep, you go right ahead and sleep. You’re going to lose your five points and I’m not going to catch you up with what you -- they have to learn to be more intrinsically motivated. I think we try to control them too much. They have to learn that they’re making choices that are going to have ramifications. And so if you’re going to come in and sleep every day, you’re probably not going to pass the class. I mean, I’m big on, ‘go ahead and cut [class].’ Except I’m legally liable, but it, it’s, you’re responsible for your own behavior (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

She clearly felt that paying attention in class is the sole responsibility of the student. Ms. Banner felt somewhat differently about her role:

What I try to do is look for an opportunity, for a good opportunity to get their attention. And if I, if we’re engaged in something and I look over and they’re
gone, but to say something to them is going to them stop the flow of it, I usually won’t. But then if it’s a good opportunity, I’ll try to say something. But if I’ve not said anything to them all period, for whatever reason, then I’ll get them after class. If it’s somebody who’s constantly sleeping, which, again, I don’t have much of that this year either. Now the zoning, yes. But, you know, that’s something that I’m not ever really much said anything about, you know. Quit zoning. I mean, how do you control that? But, I will have touched base with the parents or something. And, there have been years that I just, that I have given it up, I mean, there is just, I’ve talked to the parents, and I think, I know an administrator is going to come in here and wonder why am I not saying anything to this kid, but there have been kids that I’ve said something to, five minutes later their head is down, say something to, five minutes their head is down and you think, ‘you know this is just not worth it’ (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

Ms. Banner seemed to feel the same lack of control but commented that she did feel obligated to make some effort to enact some accountability, even displaying insecurity over how her behavior would be perceived by an administrator if he or she were to see students sleeping. Ms. Banner even commented on her sense of students’ perceptions of how a teacher should handle this type of student behavior:

I think it’s mixed. I think some of them think that we should be on them every minute. I think others of them think, well I’ve even had kids say, ‘let them sleep, maybe the bell will ring and they’ll keep sleeping,’ and they think it’s hysterical and then others will be like, ‘why bother? They are always sleeping.’ So, I think it’s so mixed. I can’t get a sense of -- and I think it also kind of depends on, again, whether or not this kid has ever done this. I have had situations where kids have come in and said, ‘I feel terrible can I please lay my head down?’ And usually what I’ll say is ‘how about you just go to the nurse.’ But there are times where I say, ‘Alright today you can.’ It comes down to picking one’s battles (Personal Interview, January 18, 2010).

Ms. Banner demonstrated an awareness of the fact that students monitor her treatment of student behaviors such as sleeping in class, but implied that she treated it on a case-by-case basis. She also seemed aware that students may feel more like Ms. McGee -- that the students are responsible for the behavior choices they make and that the teacher is not obligated to intervene.
Ms. McGee’s student, Steven, served to contrast Karen’s disappointment in Ms. McGee’s approach to discipline. He stated in his final interview, “If they [students] are they going to continue to be disruptive [sic] then they shouldn’t be in the class” (Personal Interview, December 21, 2010). In this case, it’s conceivable that these two students would convey to their peers very different sentiments about how the teacher approaches students who misbehave, and this would have clear and direct impact on the teacher’s reputation.

In a similar manner, some students seemed resentful towards Ms. Banner for her lack of assertiveness in her approach to discipline of traditional student misbehaviors. In a final interview, Alec noted, “She’s really lenient – sometimes a little too lenient. I mean, she’s polite about it, but she could be a little more stern sometimes” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Less understanding was Karl. He was clearly agitated that he perceived Ms. Banner as not doing enough about the misbehaviors, noting in his final interview: “I’d like her to seriously stand up and tell him [Jacob] to stop talking or get out of the classroom. She just ignores him, basically. There’s another kid in that class who’s always making noises when we are trying to take tests. She looks up and sees who’s doing it and then looks back down” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Other students had a negative perception of the teacher’s motivation for not being more assertive. Liza, who claimed in her final interview, “I do my other homework in her class and she doesn’t seem to notice much,” believed that Ms. Banner was more lenient toward her than other students, because she was one of the “good kids.” Regarding Ms. Banner’s treatment of an incident where she [Liza] had her cell phone out, Liza stated,
I think she ignores the wrong things. Like, when I was texting, she probably should have taken my phone. Or, gotten people more on task. Me and another guy was doing something else, we weren’t reading. She should have ‘laid down the law’ more. But she seems to focus more on [imitates teacher voice], “Please listen up. Everyone listen.” She should – I think she should just talk and if you miss it, too bad. You fail. I would’ve expected a professional teacher to at least make the student feel like they shouldn’t do it again [have a cell phone out], rather than just blow it off. She just needs to have more authority. She doesn’t handle our class well. I don’t think she knows what to do when people act badly, so they just keep acting badly (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Here we see that Liza was critical of what she described as Ms. Banner’s partiality in not applying the class rules equally. Liza, though, extends that to an assessment of Ms. Banner’s inability to control the class and to handle misbehaviors. Later in the same interview, I asked her: “Some of the students who were intentionally being noisy – do you think she should ignore that, or is that something that maybe she should deal with?” Her response was, “I think she should ignore it and keep teaching” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Karen noted a similar criticism of Ms. McGee in her final interview: “It bothers me when teachers see something going on and they won’t do anything about it. They won’t even try to stop it …I mean…the small—the big stuff she’ll just throw people out. But the small stuff…I don’t feel like she ever calls people out for, like, texting and stuff. She’ll just tell people to be quiet” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). While both students seem to contradict their earlier sentiments, this supports the notion of balance in applying discipline mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The teacher’s approach to discipline is clearly an element that all students perceived and evaluated. They were able to assess this immediately based on their perceptions during the very first day of class. Students tended to comment with equal
energy if they had positive or negative impressions of the teachers’ approach to
discipline, but they also seemed to have very clear cut and defined ideas of what actions
on the parts of the teachers were appropriate, warranted, and conducive to a positive
learning environment. These perceptions were articulated immediately to peers as
students commented about their early impression of the class and teacher. Students differ
on the extent to which they feel the teacher should react to potential discipline problems,
with some feeling that the teacher needs to be proactive and authoritative and others
feeling that students need to be held responsible for their behavioral decisions. Likewise,
the two teachers felt somewhat differently about their roles as classroom managers; both
teachers, though, acknowledged that they were aware that students paid attention to how
they handled disciplinary situations.

Discussion Style

Teachers’ discussion style was described in regard to whether it was open or
teacher driven as well as the level of student participation in the discussions. Students
discussed their perception of the teachers’ discussion style in regard to the types of class
discussions the teacher encouraged and how the teacher managed the discussions. The
two teachers had very distinct styles. Ms. McGee sat at her desk and asked questions of
the whole class, openly. Ms. Banner walked around the room, calling on students who
raised their hands as well as some who did not, keeping written record of student
participation.

Students expressed positive feelings about the more open discussions, suggesting
that such a style encouraged more participation and felt more relaxed with less pressure.
Steven noted about Ms. McGee that her style “. . . allows people to think and say what
they’re thinking” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Becky also favored this style, noting “It makes it a lot easier than just getting lectured. And sitting with your hand up for 20 minutes, and hearing, ‘Put your hand down. I’ll answer questions when we’re done,’ cuz by then you forget your question” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Jeff noted, “I like [Ms. McGee’s open discussions]. I don’t like it where – just her reading the book and everyone has to be quiet. And no one can give their point of view on stuff” (Personal Interview, December 21, 2009). Karen felt similarly, noting, “I kinda like it more, cuz it’s like a discussion type thing where you can just say whatever you have to say” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Whereas Karen favored Ms. McGee’s open style, she did pick up on the fact that Ms. McGee did not typically call on students by name, which to some can seem impersonal. During the final observation, Karen asked several questions for clarification. She acknowledged in the final interview that she felt comfortable doing so due to the openness of the discussion format. During my observations, however, I noted that, while there was increased participation, it came in the form of simultaneous indiscernible utterances from multiple students. The teacher would then typically acknowledge the collective contribution and move on with the discussion.

Conversely, in the less open style of discussion, the teacher called on students by name and listened intently to their responses, at times giving feedback or bouncing the responses back to the class for follow-up opinions. Some students characterized this style as boring or putting students on the spot, and others expressed that it helped keep them on their toes to know that the teacher might call on them or would definitely call on them (during days where she would call on each student by rows or from her roster).
Although Ms. Banner managed her discussions more formally, Alec seemed to appreciate his perception that this allowed her to focus on each individual student: “She doesn’t cut us off. She just listens to what we have to say even if it’s not right” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). This less open but more personally-focused style was practiced consistently by Ms. Banner. Conversely, some students perceived Ms. Banner’s attention to each student by strategically calling on them by name (and keeping track so that she was sure to call on each student) somewhat of an attempt to catch students off guard. Jacob noted about Ms. Banner’s style of calling on students who have not volunteered to speak: “I honestly think that’s good, because it gives a chance for the kids that are willing to participate to get in there, and then other ones that may be shy and timid – or not even paying attention.” When asked if he was okay with the notion of a teacher catching a student not paying attention, he stated, “If it catches them off guard, it will just make them quicker for the next time. It’s a bit of a crappy tactic when it falls on you, but in the long run, it’ll help you out” (Personal Interview, January 12, 2009). It is worth noting that Jacob typically participated actively, so there was little chance for him to be a student that the teacher called on to monitor for understanding or attentiveness.

Becky noted that calling on students by name who have not volunteered to speak is “fine as long as the person’s sleeping and you call on them for not paying attention, not if you are just giving a lecture and they ask you what you think. Everybody’s gonna have a delayed response for a few seconds. But other times it shows her who’s paying attention and who’s not” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Steven was critical of the lack of variety in the discussion style in Ms. Brown’s class. He noted, “We do the same thing every time. We read a story review a story, and
it’s just her talking the whole time . . . it’s pretty boring” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Conversely, Ms. Brown’s student, Lila, commented that students sometimes raised hands and sometimes just “made eye contact” with the teacher and then spoke. She mentioned that Ms. Brown rarely called on students without warning because students usually “stayed in the discussion” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). This difference in perception may be due in part to the fact that these two students were not in the same classroom together.

Students had strong opinions about their preferred type of classroom discussions. They were quick to assign a value to the teacher’s chosen method and equally willing to share that with those around them, such as peers, when passing along information about a teacher. Worth nothing is that students had varying perceptions of the motivation for a teacher’s chosen style. A teacher who calls on students strategically may be trying to engage the student, which might be perceived by students as trying to ‘put them on the spot.’ Likewise, a teacher who encourages students to jump in and contribute to discussions rather haphazardly may be perceived as being more interested in hearing students’ opinions but in reality, this style seemed less likely to allow the teacher to respond with any clarity to individual student responses. Students tended to pass along comments to peers about these perceptions of discussion style less frequently and with less certainty than they did with other impression-forming elements.

**Elements that Contributed to Students’ Extended Impressions of the Teacher**

Six elements impacting initial and immediate student impression formation: teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style. Three elements emerged as
contributing to student impression formation over an extended period of time: students’ perceptions of their self-confidence, students’ perception of teacher academic support, and students’ perceptions of the classroom community.

Students monitored these elements beyond automatic reactions from their first interactions, and these elements impacted the students’ continuing impressions and thus, the teachers’ reputations.

**Students’ Level of Self-Confidence**

As early as the day they received their schedules, students began commenting to each other about their perceived level of confidence, and this continued as the year progresses. Students had an assessment of their level of self-confidence before meeting the teacher and knowing the demands of the class. This level was then monitored after the initial meeting and throughout the course of the school year. It impacted their impression of the teacher and the class, and it is reflected in the types of comments students made about the teacher and the class. Students’ varied perceptions of their levels of confidence were consistently applied to the new classes and teachers. From there the students formed a new and current perception of their individual levels of confidence for the upcoming English class and its specific tasks and demands. This then colored the way they passed on comments about the class and the teacher, contributing to reputation. It was not always clear to what extent the prior level of confidence impacted the more current level, once students met the teacher and learned about the demands of the class. Students who entered the class with high levels of confidence already tended to have more positive initial impressions of the teacher and class and, accordingly, comment more readily to peers about this.
Many students expressed high levels of confidence based on their own perceptions of their ability levels. This was a consistent theme in all three interviews. Commonly, students would refer to a high grade earned in a previous English class or simply having “done well last year.” Liza stated in her second interview that she would get an ‘A’ because “It only sounded like we were gonna read one book . . . the rest is just free read,” describing herself as “good at reading” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). They provided previous performance often as their support for why they felt confident at the onset of the new school year.

Some students were unable to articulate their level of confidence to be successful in regard to their upcoming English class if they claimed not to know any details about their newly assigned English teachers. For example, Alec claimed not to know any details at all about his new teacher. When asked before his first day of classes if he thought he would be successful, Alec responded, “I don’t know – I am probably just going to enter the class” (Personal Interview, August 19, 2009). Some students expressed a low level of confidence or at least avoided suggesting they might feel confident because they had had a negative experience in their previous year’s class or perhaps in more than one previous English class. In some cases, they described themselves as categorically struggling in English class or simply not liking it without any specific evidence to support that assessment. Students with low levels of confidence or who were unsure tended to be unable or unwilling to actively seek out information about the teacher. Steven expressed nervousness about his upcoming English class but also stated that he did not plan to seek out any information about his new teacher. In this way, his peers did not serve to perpetuate the teacher’s reputation before classes had begun, which is a time when other
students were already discussing elements of their teachers’ reputation with peers.

Many of the students expressed a higher level of confidence if they had been in “Enriched” level English the year before and were now moving down a level to regular American Studies. This emerged as a reason that the students might express more positive comments about that teacher and class based on their higher levels of confidence. The Enriched classes at this school were typically scheduled by students who were being groomed to take Advanced Placement English classes as upperclassman. Additionally, these classes were scheduled with the prerequisite of the students’ 8th grade teachers’ approval the previous year (unless overridden by a student’s parent). Enriched classes typically involve a more brisk pace, more frequent assignments, more challenging assessments, and more demand on the students to complete work outside of class. The students’ description of having a higher level of confidence due to being in Enriched the previous year appeared to be directly connected to the students’ collective perception of Enriched classes being more challenging and demanding, and therefore requiring more ability and effort. The logical assumption on their parts was that the converse would be true about regular level and that they felt confident that they could and would be successful in this upcoming school year in English due to the decreased challenge and demand. Liza stated, “I know from last year, the un-Enriched students didn’t have to read, like, at all. They only read like two books the whole year when Enriched had to read, like four or five. So I know this is going to be easier, which I’m excited about” (Personal Interview, August 19, 2009). Ms. Brown’s student, Lila, mentioned that her essay grades had recently improved, citing as a reason, “This year I’m in a regular class” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Because they entered the class with an
assumption the demands would be lower, students expressed higher levels of confidence, which tended to be attached positively to the class and teacher. Accordingly, students tended to speak positively about this perception to their peers when discussing their English teacher and class.

The levels of confidence expressed by the students during the initial interview were based primarily on their own sense of their ability level in an English class environment. Some assessed this in general terms based solely on their perceptions of their abilities. In his second interview, Jacob expressed confidence, noting, “I think I can be very successful in this class. I am very well read and spoken for my age. I’ve never had a problem with reading before” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Brian noted about his level of confidence, “I feel like I understand what she’s saying and I understand what she wants me to learn. I pick up on it. I get it” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). In other cases, perceptions were based on the grades they had achieved. Steven described feeling confident about his chances for success: “My grade has improved and I’m getting higher grades on my tests” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Also, this combined with their commitment to doing what was asked of them as well as the sense that they had some control over their academic success. Greg exhibited high levels of confidence that he could earn an ‘A’ in Ms. Banner’s class, noting, “If I do what she wants, then it sounds like I’ll do well” (Personal Interview, August 27, 2009). Likewise, Greg comments about his confidence level: “I think I can definitely do that [earn an ‘A’] because she gives us the guidelines for what kind of work she expects, and I used to do the bare minimum and then a little below. And now I am just trying to go beyond” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).
Students’ perceptions of their level of confidence affected their perceptions of the teacher and the class in contrasting manners. On the one hand, some students felt positively about a class in which they felt confident, especially if they felt that it was within their control. Some, like Steven, felt confident based on his description of Ms. Brown’s assignments as “pretty easy” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Also, for example, Karen noted about her confidence level: “I need to get an ‘A’ in that class, but I think I’m starting to study more. Like, on my last test I got an 89, so I know I’m kinda improving. I just need to keep working and getting ahead on stuff” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Karen followed those comments by stating that she felt positive overall about the class and that she had the ability and potential to be successful. Becky noted about her level of confidence, “If you actually pay attention in her class, all the test questions – she talks about them specifically in class. It’s easier” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Students with high levels of confidence who perceived a lack of challenge presented by the class and teacher considered that a flaw of the class and teacher, typically choosing to mention that to peers as a criticism rather than a positive element. These students expressed in comments that they viewed their high sense of confidence as a detriment, in that the class was not challenging and not worth their effort. In some of the latter cases, students openly admitted that they did not actually desire to be challenged more to or to work harder, but the fact remains that they expressed a negative impression of a class they characterized as “too easy.” Karl noted about Ms. Banner’s class, “It’s kinda hard not to [feel successful] because the course is so easy.” He described knowing most of the information already and despite his academic success, he
called the class “useless” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Similarly, Liza noted about Ms. Banner, “I feel successful because I have a pretty good grade, but successful learning, not so much. We learn vocab most of the time. And like similes and metaphors . . . but it’s just like review. This is expanding my knowledge a little bit but not much” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

In both of these cases, the students attached the negative feelings about the class to the teacher, and they commented to peers in a manner that suggested that they had also formed a negative impression of the teacher. For example, even my questions to Karl specifically about the content of the class were answered by comments such as, “She doesn’t make learning fun,” or, “She doesn’t know what she’s teaching” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Similarly, Liza stated, “When we get out of class almost every day, me and my friend talk about how boring she is and how much we can’t wait for next year” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Students’ level of confidence impacted teacher reputation as a factor that operated to some extent before meeting the teacher and forming the initial impressions. Some students entered with high levels of confidence in their abilities or a strong sense of personal control in their academic success. This, in turn, led to a more positive impression of the class and teacher. As the class continued, students likewise continued to monitor these levels; this caused them to continue to monitor their impressions. Most importantly, students who perceived high levels of self-confidence tended to speak more positively about the class and teacher; those with low levels did not necessarily attach that as a negative impression of the teacher, but often they would simply not comment at all or seek out any information about that aspect of a teacher’s reputation.
Perception of Teacher Academic Support

Students were keenly aware of to what extent the teachers were willing and able to help them learn and be successful beyond simply teaching basic content. Students commented often about the specific manner in which teachers presented the content, provided detailed examples, and provided materials for review, such as study guides and online materials from the textbook. In cases where the students perceived that there were high levels of academic support, they tended to perceive the teacher and class more positively and comment more positively, then, about the class and teacher. In a few cases, students evaluated comments made by teachers regarding students’ overall academic progress and those comments impacted student impressions.

Lila noted about Ms. Brown, “She lists the notes out on the board and we copy them down and then she explains them very thoroughly. So we can take extra notes if we need to. And then her quiz questions come directly from the notes, and it’s no surprise” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Likewise, many students noted the amount of time spent in class reviewing for assessments and indicated that a higher amount of time devoted in class in this capacity gave them a feeling of higher teacher support: “She really sorta tries to help – she’ll like do a whole review day before the test and things like that” (Stan, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Becky also expressed appreciation for Ms. McGee’s willingness to answer questions: “She answers every question anybody has, even if it’s, like, out of the way” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Some students expressed concern about not feeling certain about what content would be on assessments and in what format as well as what types of questions would appear on assessments. Karen stated about Ms. McGee: “I don’t think I have a lot of
time to prepare for everything. We’ll go over stuff and we won’t, like, review – she
won’t tell us what’s on it. She’ll just be, like, ‘Well, you have a test tomorrow’”
(Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). I perceived these comments to be related to
teacher academic support in that the students did not specifically attach to this feeling any
dissatisfaction with their grades; they simply expressed feeling insecure and unprepared
at times, attaching that causally to the teacher not providing adequate academic support.
Several students mentioned that they appreciated that the teacher provided them
substantive instructional handouts designed to assist them as they completed work on
their own, and others noted feeling supported with teacher-provided access to the
ancillary materials accompanying the anthology (such as online tutorials). Jeff
commented positively about Ms. McGee’s support: “I go to her to ask questions about
stuff. She’s really helped me. She gave us this thing to help us write papers easier. . .
she made PowerPoints that we can get online and I use those to review before tests”
(Personal Interview, December 21, 2009). He also noted that the teacher took class time
to show students how to access the online textbook as well as provided them with a
handout with login/password information for their ease.

It was clear to me that nearly all students were aware that some level of academic
support was indeed being provided. One student stated plainly about Ms. Brown, “She
gives it all to us. What we do with it is pretty much our choice” (Lila, Personal
Interview, December 15, 2009).

A few cases stood out as having dissimilar reactions to similar levels of support.
This was in regard to the teachers’ efforts to involve parents in cases where students were
struggling. One student expressed appreciation for the teacher’s intervention and credited
that intervention with helping him dramatically improve his grade, stating, “It helped me . . . My parents checked my homework to make sure I did it and that I was studying . . . [without that teacher intervention], my grades wouldn’t have gotten as good as they have been” (Steven, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Another ambivalently expressed that he understood the teacher’s intervention and that it was necessary, somewhat passively reacting to the teacher’s academic intervention. A third student, while acknowledging that his poor progress warranted his parents’ involvement, was somewhat irritated that the teacher did not address this with him directly rather than involving his parents. He noted about this incident, “I’d rather be talked to personally than let my parents handle it for me” (Brian, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). He appeared to feel somewhat blindsided and betrayed, even though he admitted that her act of notifying his parents likely accounted for his improved achievement and grade.

Many of the students who spoke positively of the level of teacher academic support seemed to be relating this impression to their feelings of control over their achievement. Many suggested that they had all the support and tools necessary – that it was simply up to them to utilize.

Not a single student in the study expressed to me or behaved in a manner during observations that suggested he or she perceived himself or herself as incapable of being successful. Not all of the students were high achieving in the traditional sense. In fact, several of the students described themselves as struggling, and their self-reported Grade Point Averages corroborate this. In regard to teacher support, nearly all of the students stated that they believed their teacher wanted them to be successful. However, some perceived the teacher reviewing specific future test items as support: “She goes,
sometimes, out of her way to help us. I’ve noticed that when we’re talking about a story, she’ll actually give off questions from our test. I’ve started to write those down, and they’re almost word-for-word the exact questions on the test” (Jeff, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Brian noted about Ms. Banner, “She told me that if I needed help with anything I could come up to her . . . she’s willing to look into seeing what she could do to help with my grades if I need to” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Teacher academic support took the role of actual physical tools provided as well as time spent by the teacher actively attempting to assist students to be successful. Efforts on the part of teachers to intervene with students who were struggling academically were also construed as supportive behaviors. Some of the supportive behaviors of the teachers were perceived as targeting specific academic outcomes, such as test scores, and others were generally supportive, such as answering questions and spending time explaining content. The student perception of teacher academic support influenced teacher reputation in that the students were quick to mention this perception when asked what they would say to peers about the teacher. In the cases where they felt successful, they typically attributed this either partially or completely to the academic support of the teacher. Students who did not describe feeling successful still acknowledged that the teacher provided academic support. No student appeared to actively pass along negative comments about a teacher’s lack of academic support in order provide an excuse for their own shortcomings as a student.

Student comments about their teachers reflected their assessment of the level of academic support they felt. In the cases of all three teachers, students seemed to feel that their teachers had, at the minimum, provided them with the basic support needed for them
to be successful. Comments about a teacher were typically positive, even if these impressions were based on the mere presence of instructional tools provided by the teacher in aid in student understanding of content. These students were very likely to pass along these perceptions to peers and others, willingly and confidently.

**Students’ Sense of Classroom Community**

Students’ sense of classroom community was expressed at times in relation to the amount of time provided to interact with peers, both formally and informally. This was a key element that they stated they would seek out in trying to ascertain their new teachers’ reputation. Students who had formed initial negative impressions of the classroom community were likely to comment negatively. As all students continued to assess the classroom community and form extended impressions, they continually attached comments about the classroom community to their overall impression of the class and teacher.

Students initially expressed this on a basic level of opportunities to work with each other. One student commented, “I don’t like to work by myself” (Karl, Personal Interview, August 19, 2009), expressing that he found it important to have opportunities to work with peers. They expressed this in regard to collaboration with peers during class activities and also in regard to time to socialize, including the few minutes before and at the end of class. Some students included in their comments feelings about classroom policies such as seating arrangements and teacher reaction to students making comments to each other during class. Ms. Banner’s policy, as she explained to the students, was to seat students alphabetically on the first day as a matter of course and in order to facilitate learning students’ names. She explained to them that she wanted them to discuss any
issues or concerns with the alphabetical seating arrangement with her privately. In Karl’s case, this action, occurring at the beginning of the period, caused an instant dislike for the class. He indicated that he had sat down next to the only friend in the class, and the teacher’s first classroom decision was to move him away from that friend. His impression of the classroom community was damaged in the very first moments of the first day of class, and in his interview, it was clear that this negatively impacted his view of the class and the teacher. In fact, he not only spoke negatively of the class and teacher (to me and to his peers, he claimed), but he actively pursued attempting to switch sections of the class. He stated, “I didn’t like that she made us have assigned seats, when I only know one kid in the whole class” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). His impression of the classroom community was damaged early in this case because he was moved away from the only other person with whom he had any familiarity. Although he was clearly having an emotional reaction, he reiterated this later in the same interview: “I only know one kid, and she moved me away from him. That just, like, ruined my day” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Worth noting, in regard to reputation, is that this student provided negative information about this teacher’s reputation based in large part on the disruption to his sense of classroom community on the first day of class. When asked what he would tell a friend about his teacher after the first day, he stated, “I will actually tell them that I don’t recommend her as a teacher. Like, I feel sorry if you get her. I just – she’s just a bad teacher” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Interestingly, in his final interview, when asked about how comfortable he felt as a member of the class, he stated, “It’s not that big of a deal because we work together just like once a month and that’s it . . . I would be fine if I didn’t know anyone in that class, since it’s not a class
where we work together” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Despite his apparent change in attitude, his negative impression of the classroom community, at least for awhile, negatively impacted Ms. Banner’s reputation. Conversely, another student in the same class noted about his sense of the classroom community, “I would say she’s a good teacher . . . I would tell [friends] not to worry if there’s no friends in the class because she can get you to work with someone” (Alec, Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). On the other hand, Greg was mainly critical of Ms. Banner, but he expressed positive feelings about the class overall when asked, citing that, “I can still talk to my friends in class” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). In this case, his positive perception of the classroom community impacted his overall impression more so than his critical feelings about other elements, such as teacher enthusiasm.

Students’ sense of the classroom community was perceived the moment they set foot in the classroom on the first day of class. It involved their level of comfort with their peers in the room, such as how many friends they have and how much (if at all) they can interact with them. Also, it involved how much peer interaction the teacher facilitated or allows during lessons, either by using collaboration as a learning tool or allowing students to interact casually before, during, and after class. To some students, this was framed in regard to the teacher actively planning for this interaction and requiring it, not allowing any student to be left out. To others, it was the teacher’s willingness simply to allow them the freedom to talk to peers. Frequently, this assessment by the students manifested itself in their overall impression of the teacher and class, in that this sense of classroom community impacted their overall feelings about the teacher and class, which
is often what compels them to pass along comments about their impressions of their teachers.

Students form initial impressions of their teachers by considering the factors of teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style. These elements are immediate and based on both prior impressions from information learned before entering a teacher’s class and impressions formed after the first classroom interaction. Students’ extended impressions continue to form with the additional interactions in the classroom and with the teacher in the areas of students’ level of self-confidence, students’ perception of teacher academic support, and students’ sense of classroom community. These included some elements that had formed initially, such as an initial impression of the classroom community from how the first day of school was conducted, but were then monitored as the school year progressed. All of these elements then contribute to what types of comments students made to peers and others around them, thus forming and impacting an individual teacher’s reputation.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

This study attempted to identify the elements that students consider when forming impressions of their teachers. Sophomore level students were interviewed after receiving their English teacher assignments, observed on the first day of class, and then interviewed at the conclusion of the first day. Additional observation fifteen weeks into the school year and subsequent interviews, as well as interviews with the teacher participants, assisted in enabling me to attempt to ascertain how students form initial impressions, if and how those impressions change over time, and how those impressions contribute to a teacher’s reputation among students.

The present study serves to contribute to existing research in theory and practice in a number of areas. In the areas of impression formation, academic self-efficacy, and causal attribution, the study builds upon current theory as well as extends it in certain areas, particularly in attempting to establish how student impressions of their teachers impact a teacher’s reputation. The findings from the study indicate that students form impressions of their teachers by assessing certain immediate elements about the teacher and class (teacher demeanor, teacher enthusiasm, teacher self-disclosure, teacher academic press, teacher approach to discipline, and teacher discussion style). Students monitor and consider three additional elements when forming extended impressions, additionally contributing to teacher reputation: level of self-confidence, teacher academic
support, and sense of classroom community. Relevant findings in respective areas appear below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Findings</th>
<th>Relation to Current Literature</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotyping</strong></td>
<td>Students made some comments about potential stereotypic knowledge of teachers, but these comments did not influence student impressions.</td>
<td>Findings did not provide evidence to support or challenge current literature (Hamilton &amp; Sherman, 1994; Horn, Killen, &amp; Stangor, 1999; Wittenbrink, Gist, &amp; Hilton, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Automaticity</strong></td>
<td>Students formed automatic impressions of their teachers during their first interaction. Automatic impressions impacted teacher reputation.</td>
<td>Findings support literature regarding students forming automatic impressions of teachers (Ajzen, 1996; Ambady &amp; Rosenthal, 1992; Babad, Avni-Babad, and Rosenthal, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Impression</strong></td>
<td><strong>Formation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Relation to Current Literature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Enthusiasm</strong></td>
<td>Students considered teacher enthusiasm when forming immediate impressions of teachers; in addition, they attached assessments of teachers' use of class time to descriptions of enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Findings support current literature on teacher enthusiasm (Brophy &amp; good, 1996; Frenzel, et al., 2009) and extend the literature to include students' perception that use of class time may be perceived by students as a teacher's level of enthusiasm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Academic Press</strong></td>
<td>Students considered academic press when forming immediate impressions of their teachers. They attached these impressions to the type of press that emphasizes a press for achievement.</td>
<td>Findings support current literature on teacher academic press, specifically aligning with Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mitman (1982) regarding press for student achievement such as rigorous demands of course content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Approach to Discipline</strong></td>
<td>Students' impressions varied as to which approach was appropriate based on their impressions of what constituted inappropriate behavior.</td>
<td>Findings support current literature that suggests secondary students' perceptions of behavior varies (Coslin, 1997) and that suggests that teachers receive training that varies in classroom management (Smart &amp; Igo, 2010).</td>
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"I like more relaxed teachers."
"She's really lenient -- sometimes a little too lenient . . . she could be a little more stern sometimes."

Table 2. Summary of Relevant Findings
### Table 2. continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Impression Formation</th>
<th>Relation to Current Literature</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Demeanor</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students considered teacher demeanor when forming immediate impressions of teachers. Most students were able to articulate their perception of the teacher’s general personality.</td>
<td>Findings support current literature on student perceptions of teachers, specifically Widmeyer and Loy’s (1988) notion that students' perceptions that a teacher is either 'warm' or 'cold,' impact ratings, with students rating higher the instructor whom they perceived as ‘warm.’</td>
<td>“You can say ‘hi’ to her in the hallway and just make small talk.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Self-Disclosure</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students considered personal information shared by the teacher in forming immediate impressions. Students tended either to enjoy this self-disclosure, or find it distracting and inappropriate.</td>
<td>Corroborates current research that relevance of self-disclosure impacts perceptions (Cayanus &amp; Martin, 2008).</td>
<td>“The more you learn about a teacher, like when they talk about their kids or their home life – days off from being sick, or vacation and breaks and stuff, it makes them seem more human.”&lt;br&gt;“She talks about herself a lot. She mentions stuff, and it’s kind of just weird.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Discussion Style</strong>&lt;br&gt;Students discussed their perception of the teachers’ discussion style in regard to the types of class discussions the teacher encouraged and how the teacher managed the discussions. Students expressed positive feelings about the more open discussions</td>
<td>Corroborates current research that suggests teachers’ verbal interaction with the class impacts impressions: (Prisbell, 1994; Soter, et al., 2008; Wanzer &amp; McCroskey, 1998; Wanzer &amp; Frymier, 1999).</td>
<td>“It makes it a lot easier than just getting lectured. And sitting with your hand up for 20 minutes.”</td>
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### Impression Formation

The current literature suggests that people form impressions by way of expectancies that exist as well as automatic impressions. This study served to confirm the overall findings in the current body of literature.
Expectancies

Expectancies can influence perception and behavior (Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974), and this influence is crucial to examine when discussing students immediate impressions of their classroom teachers. Expectancies without actual prior knowledge or even reputational awareness involve the potential impact of stereotypes.

Stereotyping. Horn, Killen, and Stangor (1999) discuss that group stereotypes are associated with adolescents’ social decision-making. In some cases, the initial impressions of students in the study were based on group stereotypes of their assigned teacher based on age, teaching style, or on longevity of teaching. One student commented in her initial interview, “I think that teachers who are real laid back aren’t as good. It’s like they don’t – not that they don’t care as much. If they’re more strict, in a way that they care more” (Karen, Personal Interview, August 19, 2009). Generally, the older teacher was pre-supposed to be more knowledgeable and organized, due to her years of experience. One student described feeling like her teacher would be a good teacher because “. . . she’s been teaching for, like, thirty-some years” (Karen, Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Jeff commented similarly, “She [Ms. McGee] has been here a long time so she seems like she knows what she’s doing” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Greg, though, mentioned about Ms. Banner, “If she’s old and old-fashioned, maybe she likes to write a lot, but I don’t like to write a lot, though” (Personal Interview, August 25, 2009). In one student’s case, Ms. Banner, the younger of the two teacher participants, was ultimately criticized for using the textbook too much, the implication being that she was unseasoned and had to rely on ancillary materials. Some students’ initial impressions were impacted by the general stereotype of English teachers
as making the students read and write a large amount, which was perceived negatively by some students. Karl noted about Ms. Banner, “I think she’s gonna be a strict teacher that’s gonna make us work a lot – most of the class time. I don’t think we’re gonna get to socialize that much” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Additionally, some students noted the stereotype of English teachers as being rather subjective in their evaluating of student work, which they described as “grading hard” or “being a tough grader.” No students stereotyped teachers by their gender. The stereotypes that contributed to initial impressions of teachers did not appear to have a substantial impact on teacher reputation. Wittenbrink, Gist, and Hilton (1997) discuss perceivers entering situations with a stereotypic blueprint. Students did, in fact, enter the classroom with this type of schemata. However, in several cases, students acknowledged the fact that their preconceived notion about the teacher had been dispelled early on based on meeting the teacher and experiencing a class with her. Bargh and Williams (2006, p. 2) note that stereotypes can . . . “become automatically activated by the mere perception of group features.” In this study, the group providing stereotypical features is classified as ‘teachers.’

**Automaticity**

In forming impressions of the teacher, students also displayed some aspects of automaticity. Students formed spontaneous judgments about the teacher’s personality and demeanor after a single meeting on the first day of school, forming such impressions as “nice,” “funny,” or “strict” and “mean.” Jacob mentioned about Ms. Banner, “She was in a good mood and smiled a lot” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). In some cases, these automatic impressions were able to override previous expectancies students might
have had, either from hearing about a teacher’s reputation or from a prior stereotype. For example, Greg, who was concerned his teacher might be “old” and “like to write a lot” noted the following after his first day of class: “The teacher was different than I expected. I thought she was gonna be like kinda old and all she would do was read and have a few cats . . . she said she liked to bike and run and swim . . . so that’s good. I like to do that, too” (Personal Interview, August 25, 2009). Likewise, students formed automatic judgments in the areas of teacher’s approach to discipline and teacher enthusiasm based on assessments from their first interaction. Students articulated that they could assess and articulate a teacher’s style of discipline from assessing the teacher’s behavior on the first day of class and very early in the school year. Lila noted about Ms. Brown, “I think she will be kind of strict. Not ‘mean’ strict but like, ‘if you don’t do this you will have to have the consequences’” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Similarly, Jeff commented about Ms. McGee, “She’s not very strict. She seems like a relaxed teacher, and it seems like it’s going to be fun in her class” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). Also, they articulated clearly that they sensed how enthusiastic a teacher would be based on such elements as the activities conducted on the first day of classes and how the teacher interacted with the students. This aligns with Ambady and Rosenthal’s (1992) findings that individuals can predict behavior based on very short exposure to a person’s behavior. Similarly, Babad, Avni-Babad, and Rosenthal (2004) found that student evaluations were impacted in the areas of expressive and instructional style by students viewing of non-verbal clips of instructors lecturing the class as brief as nine seconds. This idea is evidenced in the study with students such as Becky, who noted, “She [Ms. McGee] seemed upbeat and friendly – she seems like she’s gonna be helpful. She likes
to joke a lot, and it seems like this year is not going to be a lot of her yelling at people” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009).

The concept of automaticity is especially salient in terms of its impact on teacher reputation. Students form automatic initial impressions of teachers during their first interaction. Then, due to the nature of the secondary school day, those students convey those automatic first impressions to peers between classes as well as during lunch. One student noted, “I was talking to some of my friends today and they told me that she [Ms. Banner] was one of the bad ones. They were telling me, ‘Switch out of her class right now!’” (Liza, Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). During my observation of the first day of classes, this same student was in the room right just before the teacher entered and overheard a classmate refer to Ms. Banner as a “bitch” (Field Notes, August 26, 2009). This means that other students are potentially exposed to information about a teacher’s reputation during the course of an 8-period school day. Moreover, students discuss teacher reputation and impressions of teachers via text and social networking sites. In her initial interview, Becky mentioned that intended to begin texting friends to seek out information about her teacher, Ms. McGee, as soon as she could. She noted, “I know on Facebook, everyone likes to write these notes and put their whole schedule on. People say, ‘You have this teacher?’ They’re cool’ or ‘You have this teacher? They’re really nice’ and things like that” (Personal Interview, August 19, 1009). In fact, Facebook has an official Teacher Review application. Finally, Karl reported, “My friends kept telling me that she [Ms. Banner] was a bad teacher and she didn’t know how to teach the students” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). This type of communication could potentially influence others’ impressions. This communication occurs year-round, not
just right before and right after the first day of school (Martin, 2009); however, it is
during this key impression-forming timeframe that it has the ability to be the most
influential.

The theoretical framework underpinning this section suggests that impression
formation begins early on with certain expectancies based on prior information such as
stereotypes (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994). These expectancies combine with elements of
automaticity, or instant judgments made about those we encounter (Ajzen, 1996; Vernon,
1933). At the same time, individuals are examining their sense of acceptance and
belonging, often making social comparisons (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Durkin, 1995).

**Key Elements in Student Impression Formation**

Of the six elements that emerged as contributing to students' immediate
impressions of their teachers, several of them warrant discussion in regard to the current
literature in those specific areas: Teacher Enthusiasm, Teacher Approach to Discipline,
Teacher Academic Press.

**Teacher Enthusiasm**

In an early review of enthusiastic teaching research, Rosenshine (1970, p. 501)
noted that ratings of teacher behaviors such as "energetic," "mobile," "enthusiastic," and
"animated" were related to measures of pupil achievement. She asked the question, "Can
teachers who characteristically teach without animation, whose pupils achieve low
comprehension scores, be trained to increase the comprehension of their pupils by
teaching with more animation?" (p. 512). More recently, Brophy and Good (1986), in
summarizing research on teacher behavior and student achievement note that teacher
enthusiasm is positively related to student achievement. Patrick, Hisley, and Kempler
(2000) used questionnaires with college students to determine that enthusiasm was the strongest predictor of students' motivation and vitality. Similarly, Frenzel, Goetz, Ludtke, Pekrun, and Sutton (2009) found a positive relation between student enjoyment and teachers' displayed enthusiasm during teaching.

Confirming the literature, it is clear from my study that students' perception of a teacher's enthusiastic behavior in the classroom was a key element in the impression-forming process. Students were able to form an opinion immediately and were likely to pass this on to peers. However, Kunter, Tsai, Klusman, Brunner, Krauss, and Baumert (2008) found that teachers' enthusiasm is reflected in their instructional behaviors" (p. 479), and I found that students in my study were quite likely to assess the activities during a classroom and articulate this assessment as representative of a teacher's level of enthusiasm. For example, Karl noted about Ms. Banner that she "used the book too much" as a way to support that she "doesn't make learning fun" (Karl, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Thus, a teacher who, for example assigned 'busywork' was described in language that is similar to language used to describe a teacher whose instructional behavior was unenthusiastic. In other words, in their comments to others, students at times did not express a distinction between a teacher’s enthusiastic behavior and the teacher’s planned activities of the class.

**Teacher Academic Press**

Shouse (1996) expresses a framework for academic press composed of the elements of academic climate, disciplinary climate, and teachers' instructional practices and emphasis. Viewed in this manner, they found that in low achieving schools, academic press can function as a form of social capital. Middleton and Midgley (2002)
discuss academic press in a manner that focuses on "techniques that teachers use to probe, to check for, and to ensure understanding by individual students during the instructional process" (p. 377). They found that a press for understanding positively influenced students' goal orientation. Phillips (1997) discusses academic press in terms of a press for performance by way of academic demands.

As an element that students considered when forming impressions of their teachers, students in my study described their impressions as similar to Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mitman (1982, p. 22): “The degree to which environmental forces press for student achievement,” such as rigorous demands in terms of course content, clear course requirements and instructional objectives, high work standards, and regularly assigning homework. Students found it meaningful to find out how much work a teacher would be demanding, how much reading they would doing during the year, and how stringently a teacher would assess work completed in class.

Relevant here is that students tended to focus mostly on the specific academic demands made by their respective classroom teachers. Students consistently asked peers about amount "how much homework [the teacher] expects" as well as "how many books [they] will be reading" (Lila, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Students tended not to comment about the overall academic atmosphere of the school (Chong et al., 2010; Phillips, 1997; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010) or the press for understanding (Meece, 1991; Middleton & Midgley, 2002), two other elements referenced in literature about the role of academic press. This may indicate that in the impression formation process for students, more relevant to them are the academic demands or press exerted by the teacher in regard to expectations rather than what may be more influential in a longer educational
process, such as how deeply students are encouraged to think about what they are learning. It would be interesting to examine students' impressions of the academic press at the end of the year to see if they would consider any elements of a teacher's press for understanding in the classroom.

**Teacher Approach to Discipline**

In any classroom, students are likely to observe a teacher making a disciplinary decision even on the first day of school. My study was no exception. Lane, Pierson, Stang, and Carter (2010) found in a study of elementary, middle, and high school teachers' expectations that teachers place great emphasis on cooperation and self-control skills. Coslin (1997) examined the views of secondary students in regards to disruptive behavior. He found that students' opinions of these types of behavior vary based on students' gender as well as their estimation of the seriousness of the disruptive action. Similarly, students varied in their impression of how teachers reacted to disciplinary issue. Ladd and Linderholm (2008) likewise examined teacher approach to classroom management and noted that school grade labels can impact teacher response to student misbehavior.

In the present study, it is clear that students have varied perceptions of what constitutes misbehavior and therefore varied perceptions of the manner in which the teachers responded. Some students found minor infractions amusing and felt they made the class more interesting. These students did not feel a teacher should react harshly to these behaviors. Other students felt that the teacher was obligated to react to misbehaviors and that a failure to do so was both unprofessional and a hindrance to the learning environment. Also, some students even attached a lack of concern to a teacher
who would not actively discipline a student who was sleeping and completely disengaged from the learning process. Some students commented that their teacher should "do more" about misbehaviors or about students who were not paying attending (Karen, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Other students appreciated the class being "kinda open" and one where the teacher lets them "just talk during class" (Jeff, Personal Interview, August 26, 2009).

These varied impressions about the teachers' approach to discipline were immediate and were conveyed frequently among students, making this a clear element that impacts teacher reputation. What is still evident, however, is that students perceive the teacher's approach to discipline differently, with some still using the terms "strict" and "lenient" as interchangeable with "mean" and "nice," respectively. This might indicate that the area of Teacher Demeanor and Teacher Approach to Discipline are intertwined in regard to student impression formation and the types of comments they pass along about their teachers.

In the next section, I will discuss three elements that students continued to monitor as the school year continued. They assessed their impressions of the teacher in these categories on an ongoing basis, and this impacted the manner in which they tended to describe their teacher.

Perception of Teacher Academic Support

Wentzel, Battle, Russell, and Looney (2010) discuss academic support in the areas of providing help, advice, and instruction. The majority of the literature regarding teacher support takes the form of social or emotional support (Dolan & McCaslin, 2008; Katz, Kaplan, Gueta, 2010; Methany, McWhirter, & O'Neil, 2008; Suldo, et al., 2009).
The body of literature suggests that adolescents' perceived social support may contribute to achievement indirectly through motivational and affective outcomes. Specifically, a number of studies indicate that teachers will be perceived as less supportive after the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). Few if any studies isolate teacher academic support as separate from any other support that may involve caring and concern. Students in the present study tended to view this type of support as discrete and as an element that was monitored and examined as the year progressed, especially as they begin to complete assignments for grades and take tests in the specific class. Noted often were methods of academic support such as reviewing for tests and teacher-provided access to ancillary materials, either physical or online. This information was prominently mentioned by students when describing their perceptions of their teacher; however, students' perception of this element, specifically, had the potential to change based on the increase in workload as the year progressed as well as their actual grades and performances on specific tasks such as tests and quizzes. Students seemed more likely to speak positively about a teacher, despite acknowledging the teacher's high demands, if the teacher provided ample academic support, in the students' opinions.

**Sense of Classroom Community**

Schaps and Watson (1997) define classroom community as students' “sense of connection to, being valued by, and having influence with their classmates and teacher” (p. 14). Solomon et al. (1996) suggest that the sense of the classroom as a community involves the perspectives of students that the classroom is "characterized by mutually supportive relationships . . . all members have meaningful input into what happens in the
classroom and contribute to the establishment of shared group norms” (p. 241). They found direct links between teachers' practices and student behaviors in the classroom. These then related to the students' sense of the classroom as a community. Students’ assessment of the classroom community in regard to forming impressions of teachers did not emerge as having a large impact on student impression and teacher reputation.

Whereas some students described some discomfort and negative impression of the classroom initially, in most cases that was due to not having friends to talk to in class on the first day or not having access to talk to their friends on the first day. Karl noted before his first day of class, “I don’t like working by myself” (Personal Interview, August 10, 2009). Most students described themselves in the final interviews as being comfortable in the class and exhibiting a sense of belonging. The findings indicate that students did not take their sense of the classroom community into account beyond a surface-level and immediate of the class itself. For example, Karl, who was initially very outspoken about his feelings of not belonging, stated in the final interview, “It’s not that big of a deal [having friends in class and having opportunities to work with them] because we work together just like once a month. And that’s it. I would be fine if I didn’t know anyone in that class, since it’s not like a class where we work together” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Likewise, Alec did not sense any urgency in monitoring his sense of belonging, stating, “I would tell friends not to worry if there’s no friends in the class because she can get you to work with someone” (Personal Interview, August 26, 2009). While classroom community emerged as an element that was monitored, this element does not appear to have a major impact, then, on the formation of teacher reputation.
Students’ Perceived Level of Self-Confidence

An element that emerged as being monitored beyond an immediate and automatic impression was students' perceived level of self-confidence. This level forms before students meet the teacher and learn about the class. As they learn about the specific tasks, they are able to perceive their sense of self-efficacy. This is relevant in that students in the study reacted differently to their assessment of their academic self-efficacy. Some with high self-efficacy formed positive impressions of the teacher and class, whereas others with similarly high self-efficacy formed negative impressions of the teacher and class. These impressions based on assessment of self-efficacy contributed to the types of comments and attitudes about the teachers that students would perpetuate, contributing to teacher reputation.

According to Bandura (1986, 1991), stronger perceived self-efficacy leads to a person setting higher goal challenges and a firmer commitment to those challenges, suggesting that a higher sense of efficacy will result in greater effort, persistence, and resilience. Other research has suggested a positive relation between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance (Carway et al., 2003, Lane & Lane, 2001; Lane et al., 2004; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Newby-Fraser & Schlebusch, 1998; Wolters & Pintrich 1998). Specifically, student assessments of academic self-efficacy can also provide gratification and satisfaction with what they believe they can accomplish (Pajares, 1997; Zimmerman, 1995).

In the study, students’ general levels of confidence were ascertained in personal interviews at the beginning of the year before meeting their respective teachers. At this early phase of the study, students were able to consider their prior personal accomplishments and mastery experiences in previous English classes. When asked if he
felt he would be successful in his new English class, Alec noted in his initial interview, “I did really good last year in English. It was my best class. I think I averaged like a 96%. So, yeah – I’m confident” (Personal Interview, August 19, 2009). Without having met their teachers and learned about the class’ expectations (specific tasks), they were unable to predict anything more than what Schunk (1996) refers to as their self-efficacy for learning. This would be measured in general terms such as one’s belief that he or she could make grade level gains in a given time period. However, during subsequent interviews, the students had had opportunities for vicarious learning experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal, the other three elements that together with personal accomplishment form one’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Student’s beliefs about their efficacy to manage academic task demands can also influence them emotionally by decreasing their stress, anxiety, and depression (Bandura, 1997); however, little is known about how secondary school teacher reputation is formed. Given the present body of research on the effects of academic self-efficacy on student achievement, it can reasonably be inferred that high self-efficacy would lead students to form a positive impression of their teacher and thus, lead to the teacher having a positive reputation. In the present study, this was often the case. Students entered their sophomore year with high levels of confidence based on their self-assessment of their abilities along with positive prior experience or mastery experience in a previous English class. For many, once this combined with the vicarious experiences in the classroom, verbal persuasion from the teacher, and their amount of emotional arousal (their judgment of their ability to cope with a potentially threatening situation), it created a feeling of academic self-efficacy for the tasks they would be asked to perform in their
English class. Becky exhibited high levels of efficacy in discussing her future in Ms. McGee’s class, noting that she and the whole class felt encouraged by the teacher. He acknowledged feeling supported, positive, and looking forward to the rest of the year (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). With these strong feelings of self-efficacy came positive impressions of the teacher and positive comments passed along by others, contributing to the teacher’s positive reputation. Lila noted improvement in her writing during her time in Ms. Brown’s class. She commented positively about the teacher: “She gave us this worksheet on how you do an introductory paragraph . . . and for somebody to backtrack, kind of – and put that in front of you, it really helped” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

Collins (1982) found that self-efficacy predicts motivation and achievement across levels of student ability, but it is unclear in this case what impact this might have on teacher reputation. Extending academic self-efficacy theory somewhat, however, were several students who went through the same process as the aforementioned students and demonstrated high levels of academic self-efficacy. However, in the cases of these students, their high level of academic self-efficacy manifested itself in negative impressions of the teacher and the class. Students viewed the class as too easy or “useless,” that it’s “kinda hard not to” feel successful (Karl, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009) and that their feelings of efficacy did not elicit positive impressions. In fact, they resented the class and teacher even though they were able to predict a positive academic performance in the class. One student, even though she was successful, seemed annoyed that she was “bored” and the class was “too easy” (Lila, Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). This, in turn, led them to form a negative
impression of the teacher and class and to pass on similarly negative commentary to peers and others, contributing to a teacher’s negative reputation.

Although students’ levels of efficacy manifested themselves differently for different students, it is clear that students considered that level as a factor in their overall impression of the teacher as well as what elements they chose to pass along to others. When asked, each student was able to articulate his or her assessment of his or her level of efficacy, and in most cases, the student followed that statement with an assessment, either positive or negative, or the role of the teacher.

**Causal Attribution in Relation to Teacher Reputation**

During the course of the study, students were able to articulate their sense of the causes of their academic achievement in terms of locus, controllability, and stability. Generally, they felt that they were in control of their achievement but that the teacher was an important external actor. They also felt that this assessment was likely to remain stable during the course of the year. Students tended to view this in a positive manner and to speak positively about this in regard to the teacher, contributing neutrally if not positively to the teacher’s reputation.

Weiner (1985, 1986) discusses three dimensions of perceived causes: internal or external to the actor (locus), controllable or uncontrollable by the actor or others (controllability), and varying or unvarying over time (stability). Students made frequent comments about the extent to which the cause of their academic progress was attributable to the teacher. The curriculum and the manner in which the content was presented were determined by the teacher or another actor such as the State of Ohio or school district. Despite this, students seemed to feel that they were the main actors in the causes of their
academic progress. Likewise, they felt in control, commenting frequently about the extent to which the teacher had provided them the tools to be successful and that it was up to them [the students] to do their part to earn their desired level of achievement. Lila stated, “It [class] should go pretty well, if I continue to work hard . . . she gives it all to us. What we do with it is pretty much our choice” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009). Students also articulated that they did not sense this was likely to change; they formed an understanding of the dynamics of the class and expectations of the teacher, and they felt able to meet those challenges successfully, as evidenced by Steven’s comments: “I feel I can continue to improve” (Personal Interview, December 15, 2009).

The contribution to teacher reputation made by students’ causal attribution of their academic achievement seems to be either neutral or positive. Students expressed at minimum an understanding of an ‘agreement’ between teacher and learning that tools for success would be provided and that students had an opportunity to use them to their advantage. Students acknowledged this even in cases where they had formed a negative impression of the teacher. Students with positive impressions of their teacher tended to feel more than an ‘agreement’ – they articulated that they felt a sense of academic if not personal support from the teacher, if the teacher seemed more in control (or more willing to try to control) the causes of the students’ academic achievement. No student, even those who had formed negative impressions or who had experience some mild failures in class attributed this causally to the teacher. This was somewhat surprising, given the strong negative opinions of the teachers that some students expressed and the convenience of ascribing the cause to a shortcoming of the teacher’s.
Students in the study formed initial impressions of their teachers using both expectancies, such as stereotypic knowledge and inference as well as levels of automaticity based on their initial reaction to meeting the teacher for the first time. These elements elicited impressions of the teachers, which were then transmitted between and among students beginning as early as the day schedules were picked up. Additionally students’ sense of academic self-efficacy accounted for both their impression of the teacher and class as well as helped to impact what types of reputation-oriented comments they would make to peers. The impact of students’ causal attribution of their academic achievement on impression and teacher reputation appeared not to be a major factor. Likewise, students’ sense of belonging in the classroom did not appear to have a major impact on impression formation and teacher reputation.

Teacher Reputation

It is important to note that many of the previous studies at the university level on teacher or instructor reputation considered pre-formed notions of the teachers’ reputations. They either assessed the students’ impressions or provided a priming element beforehand, such as a statement about the teacher establishing a certain reputation. Due to the nature of this study, it is unclear exactly what the impact of teacher reputation was on the students’ early perceptions of the teachers. This was simply due to the fact that the majority of the students claimed not to know anything about their newly assigned teacher. Likewise, it is also unclear how students’ perceptions and impressions contribute to the teachers’ reputations. In order to be able to discern this, students would have needed to provide details about the teacher near the end of the year as well as at the beginning of the following year, so that the comments they would
make to peers could be examined. In the span of time the students participated in the study, they were able to provide ample data for how perceptions and impressions are formed of their teachers, but exactly how these contribute to the formation of a teacher’s reputation is not clear.

**Implications for Practice**

This study focused on the impression formation process in classrooms where the pedagogy of English teachers was in play. This is worth keeping in mind as the implications are discussed, as it may be that the impression formation process is impacted in some way by the content area of the class. The implications for pedagogical practice based on this study are both relevant and daunting. Classroom teachers will benefit from having a greater understanding of what elements that students consider and when in regard to how they form initial perceptions of teachers. Students and much of the public identify enthusiasm as one defining characteristic of a good teacher (Brophy & Good, 1986; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001), but what do students perceive as an enthusiastic teacher? Likewise, teachers will benefit from understanding that each of them has a reputation, that reputation is formed and perpetuated both through initial impressions of students and impressions that continue to form throughout the year of interaction. Teachers have always been aware that students were observing and monitoring their [teachers’] speech and behavior – it is the nature of being the leader and authority figure in the classroom. However, teachers may not be aware of the various areas that students most closely scrutinize.

These important findings from this study do, though, present a dilemma – one that clearly has the power to impact practice. To what extent can or should a teacher alter his
or her behavior or methods based upon managing the impressions of the students in the classroom? This becomes even more of a struggle if the teacher feels confident that he or she has the power to effectively manage the students’ impressions of him or her. At what point are a teacher’s personality and demeanor, for example, simply a matter of that teacher’s long-standing personality and, therefore, something the students have to learn to accept? It seems that if it could be identified that a teacher’s demeanor was a hindrance to any particular classroom of students, the teacher would be obligated to react to it in some fashion, but how? In the culture of today’s American public educational system, teachers are expected to meet the needs of all students. In some people’s opinions, this may extend as far as how teachers conduct themselves during lessons. Put simply, does knowing how students form impressions of a teacher obligate him or her to react in any way to that information? That is a difficult question to answer, and opinions of current teachers will run the gamut, I am sure. Teachers use assessment data to strategically choose interventions for students and classes; if they use that type of data to monitor and adjust progress so that student achievement will be increased, might they also consider data on impression formation and its impact? This may be another case where teachers struggle with the notion of helping students to be successful during their years in high school, doing whatever it takes, only to send them off to potentially face situations as early as their freshmen year in college where they are on their own to make accommodations for themselves. Worth noting here is that a teacher must have confidence in his or her approach and training; it would be distracting for a teacher to spend too much time attempting to discern each student’s perceptions. Likewise, teachers need to decide on their own what parts of their personalities are simply not
subject to change. The findings of this student are not meant to imply that a teacher need be subject to the particular subjectivities of a given classroom. Ultimately this will need to be a matter for the teacher to decide. Those who monitor and evaluate teachers must use caution when implementing programs that are designed to measure teaching effectiveness based in part on student impressions – as evidenced by this study, the impression formation process is complex and not one that can be evaluated in a simplistic manner, especially when teachers’ livelihoods are at stake.

Pre-service teaching programs will also benefit from the findings presented in this study. Such programs include substantive training on educational and motivational theory as well as general and content-area pedagogy. Miller and Pedro (2006) note, pre-service teachers must “. . . be taught strategies in inclusive teaching to convey respect, fairness and high expectations” (p. 298). All of this is potentially impacted by student impression formation and teacher reputation. Fledgling teachers who are beginning their first year with their first class will perhaps benefit the most from these findings, as those teachers potentially begin their student-teacher relationships with natural reputations of their own in the eyes of students, parents, and even colleagues. If nothing else, pre-service teachers should be aware of the areas that contribute to student impression and teacher reputation. For example, Frymier and Houser (1999) found that when students participated in classroom discussions, they earned higher grades, were more motivated, and experienced feelings of empowerment. This being the case, should a teacher be encouraged to do more to involve all students in discussions? What method is best for accomplishing this? Ms. Banner practiced a targeted method of involving students – calling on them in turn in an organized manner; however, Ms. McGee allowed free and
open participation, and, more students were actually involved. The value of their participation was less clear, though, in my estimation. Students, though, tended to speak more positively about the more open classroom style. If the desired results (learning) are better achieved from an environment that students may not appreciate (more structure), this is a conundrum. As they conduct themselves and make pedagogical choices as teachers, they need to have some understanding of the types of reactions those actions and choices are likely to produce. Smart and Igo (2010) report that teachers receive widely varying behavior management training in their pre-service programs, with no way to ensure that it is adequate. In the area of Approach to Discipline, it may be that what forms a positive impression on students differs from the paradigm being taught in any given teacher training program.

**Limitations**

Like any study, this one has its limitations. Specifically, these limitations occurred in the areas of the time frame of the study as well as the inability to include the perspectives of others not officially included in the study.

**Time Frame of the Study**

The most obvious limitation to this research is the span of time devoted to studying how reputation is formed and how that evolves over the course of the school year for adolescents. Due to the parameters of the study, I was only able to examine this concept for approximately half of the academic school year. This allowed me to clearly ascertain initial impressions and to trace how those were affected by the first day of school and approximately one semester of the students’ sophomore year. In addition, I was able to include some information about students’ academic success, as by this time
of the year they had had ample opportunity to complete work and receive grades on this work. That being said, I feel that it would have provided relevant data to examine students’ impressions and how those related to teacher reputation in the second semester as well as at the very end of the year. I noted that students’ impressions had changed in some cases over the course of my interviews, and it would have been welcome and valuable to examine this at the end of the year. In fact, it may even have provided pertinent data to examine these same students’ impressions at the beginning of the following school year, as that tends to be the time when they are asked their opinions of the prior year’s teacher by peers. Perhaps the most valid record of how students, individually, will perpetuate a teacher’s reputation is what they will say about this teacher only after completing the class and having some separation from it, such as a summer break.

**Inclusion of Other Relevant Research Participants**

It became evident during the study that students considered the opinions of adults in their lives as part of the impression formation process, as well as how that affected their assigned teacher’s reputation in the eyes of the students. As a small-scale study of impression formation and reputation formation, this project did not include any data from the parents or siblings of the participants. Several participants mentioned comments made to them by either parents or older siblings. One student mentioned that, “My mom told me that she [Ms. McGee] didn’t like my brother that much,” and this occurred even before the student met the teacher (Karen, Personal Interview, August 19, 2009). It would have been valuable to include data about a teacher’s reputation from the families of all of the participants. Barge and Loges (2003) found that negative communication by
parents to students about schools and their personnel negatively impacted students’ motivation and attitude about school. Likewise, I feel that comments made by family members to participants about their teachers, even if it is not based on first-hand knowledge of the teacher, likely contributes both to a student’s initial impression of a teacher as well as lays the foundation for a teacher’s reputation with that particular student.

Additionally, I would have liked to have included other teachers at the building in the study so that I could at least interview them about their impressions of their colleagues who were actual participants. Some students specifically mentioned discussing their participating teacher’s reputation with other teachers at the building whom they knew from previous contact. Also, in my personal teaching experience, it is not uncommon for a teacher to discuss his or her impressions of a colleague with students, especially if the teacher has a strong rapport with the specific students and if those students ask the teacher directly about a colleague. Although I know from my data that students did in fact seek out reputation-related information from other teachers in the building, I was unable to verify what exactly the teachers said or to further examine what impact that might have had on the students’ impressions and the teachers’ reputations.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study provided some insight into how adolescent students form initial impressions of their teachers and how those impressions contribute to the teacher’s reputation. Further study is needed to examine how, specifically, a teacher’s reputation contributes to such elements as academic motivation and other perhaps content-specific elements such as literacy development.
Additionally, further study is warranted to examine the extent to which a teacher is aware of and can influence or control his or her reputation as well as if reputation is dynamic. Can a teacher’s reputation that is traditionally negative transform throughout the course of a school year or during the course of his or her career? What impact might this have on the teacher’s effectiveness as well as on his or her career advancement?

Further study is needed in order to examine how adolescent development relative to high school students impacts both impression formation and teacher reputation. It would be beneficial to attempt to distinguish between comments made by students about teachers that are more a matter of a personal struggle on the part of the student and less about that student’s actual impression of the teacher. A relevant area of study would include a span of time long enough to be able to examine and separate student responses that are based on emotion (in hindsight, via the students’ own testimony) from actual assessments on their part about teachers that are thoughtful and based on evidence. Although, as discussed earlier, it may be that the veracity of student impressions is less important than what they choose to say to a peer about a teacher on any given day, in that that is the truth to them at that moment. They may not ever follow-up with a peer to correct a misconception that they shared early in the impression-forming process. The concept studied in this project is striking: a teacher forms an impression on students beginning at their first interaction, and this impression can impact this student’s learning as well as the teacher’s reputation. From there, the potential impact is almost overwhelming. I look forward to continuing to examine this in the years to come. For any teacher, this notion impacts his or her ability to be effective, and surely all teachers will find that relevant and important.
My Role as a Teacher Scholar

Teacher scholars attempt to enrich their teaching by incorporating their own research into their instruction. This study had a tremendous impact on me as a teacher scholar. Not since going through the process of National Board Certification in 2001 have I had the occasion to think about and analyze my own teaching as I thought about and analyzed the teaching and learning of the participants in the study. Reading the voluminous literature about teaching and applying the findings to my study served to remind me of how challenging teaching is at the present time, especially in public schools. There exist relevant and sometimes shocking findings in the current body of literature for nearly every single aspect of what a teacher does and says on any given day. Despite all of the cries for schools to try to be more like businesses, when I think about all that teachers have to juggle, it motivates me even more to try to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Teachers need to be aware of the research that has been done that is profoundly relevant to their craft. I believe that they would find it meaningful and illuminating, and I believe that it would impact them in a positive way. I believe, quite simply, that it would make them better teachers. Armed with this knowledge, they can better understand their students, form stronger relationships, and better meet their students' needs. That’s important, and that’s teaching.
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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Student Interview Questions -- Interview 1

Initial Interview:

1. What do you know about the English teacher who appears on your schedule?
2. Where did you find out what you know about this teacher?
3. Based on what you know about this teacher, what are your initial perceptions of him or her?
4. What kind of a teacher do you think he/she will be?
5. What additional details would you like to know about this teacher?
6. Do you plan to seek any more information about this teacher?
   a. If so, where will you seek the information?
   b. If not, why don’t you want any additional information?
8. Overall, how do you feel about entering this teacher’s classroom for the upcoming year and why?

Student Interview Questions -- Interview 2

1. Based on the first day of class, what do you think about the teacher?
2. What kind of a teacher do you think he or she will be this year?
3. What makes you say that?
4. What did you learn about the teacher before entering his or her class?
5. What have you discussed about the teacher today during school?
6. Based on today, if you were going to tell a friend about this teacher, what would you say?
7. Overall, how do you feel about being a student in his or her class?

Student Interview Questions -- Interview 3

1. How do you feel about being a student in this class?
2. What impressions have you formed about this teacher?
3. What is the teacher doing or saying (or not doing/saying) in order to form these impressions with you?
4. Do you feel successful in this class? Why or why not?
5. If you were going to tell a friend about this teacher or his/her class today, what would you say?

Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interviews

1. Describe your relationship with this class:
2. How do you go about forming relationships with the students?
3. How do you think the students perceive you as a teacher?
4. On what do you base your response to that?
5. With which students in the class do you feel you have formed especially positive relationships?
6. What makes you say that?
7. Overall, how responsible are you as the teacher for the students’ success in class?
8. To what extent do you believe your students feel confident that they can be successful?
9. Overall, what impression have you formed about students in this class?
Appendix B: Definitions of Codes

The following codes were used in the Peer Debriefing process.

**TR-B-C-P** (teacher reputation-belonging-collaboration-positive)  
*Refers to elements of a teacher’s reputation (as indicated by the Participant) that impact a student’s sense of belonging in the classroom as indicated by the amount of collaboration the teacher allows or facilitates. Positive indicates that the student has positive feelings about the way the teacher facilitates this type of interaction in the classroom.

**TR-B-C-N** (teacher reputation-belonging-collaboration-negative)  
*Negative indicates that the student has negative feelings about the way the teacher facilitates this type of interaction in the classroom.

**TR-S-E-H** (teacher reputation-strict-effort-high)  
*Refers to student description of a teacher as “strict” and indicating that this causes the student to give a higher effort.

**TR-S-E-L** (teacher reputation-strict-effort-low)  
*Indicates the “strict” reputation of a teacher causes the student to give a lower effort.

**TR-demand-H-N** (teacher reputation-demand-high-negative)  
*Indicates the student perceives the teacher as highly demanding and perceives this as negative.

**TR-demand-H-P** (teacher reputation-demand-high-positive)

**TR-demeanor-P** (teacher reputation-demeanor-positive)  
*Refers to student description of his impression of the teacher’s demeanor in a positive manner. “Demeanor” refers to personality and interaction with students.

**TR-demeanor-N** (teacher reputation-demeanor-negative)  
*Student description of teacher demeanor is categorized in a negative manner.

**TR-man-L-N** (teacher reputation-classroom management-low-negative)  
*Refers to the student’s description of a teacher as not actively managing the classroom and the student’s perception of that style as negative.
TR-man-L-P (teacher reputation-classroom management-low-positive)

TR-man-H-N (teacher reputation-classroom management-high-negative)

TR-man-H-P (teacher reputation-classroom management-high-positive)

TR-TC-L-N (teacher reputation-teacher creativity-low-negative)
*Refers to the student’s perception that the teacher exhibits a low level of creativity in her approach to the class. In this case, the student perceives this as negative.

TR-TC-H-P (teacher reputation-teacher creativity-high-positive)

TR-TC-L-P (teacher reputation-teacher creativity-low-positive)

TR-TC-H-N (teacher reputation-teacher creativity-high-negative)

B-TE-H-N (belonging-teacher expressiveness-high-negative)
*Refers to the impact on the sense of belonging experienced by the student as a result of the amount and type of personal expressiveness of his teacher. In this case, high amount produces a negative impact on the student’s sense of belonging.

B-TE-H-P (belonging-teacher expressiveness-high-positive)

B-TE-L-N (belonging-teacher expressiveness-low-negative)

B-TE-L-P (belonging-teacher expressiveness-low-positive)

B-TI-H-N (belonging-teacher inquiry-high-negative)
*Refers to the impact on the sense of belonging experience by the student as a result of the amount and type of inquiries about the students made by the teacher. In this case, a high level on the part of the teacher is perceived as negative by the student.

B-TI-H-P (belonging-teacher inquiry-high-positive)

B-TI-L-N (belonging-teacher inquiry-low-negative)

B-TI-L-P (belonging-teacher inquiry-low-positive)

B-C-L-N (belonging-student collaboration-low-negative)
*Refers to the sense of belonging expressed by the student in relation to the amount of collaboration with peers that the teacher facilitates. In this case, a low amount is perceived as having a negative impact on the student’s sense of belonging.

B-C-H-N (belonging-student collaboration-high-negative)

B-C-L-P (belonging-student collaboration-low-positive)

B-C-H-P (belonging-student collaboration-high-positive)

B-SU-L-N (belonging-student input-low-negative)
*Refers to the sense of belonging expressed by the student in relation to the amount of student input allowed or sought by the teacher. In this case, a low amount is perceived as having a negative impact on the student’s sense of belonging.

B-SU-L-P (belonging-student input-low-positive)

B-SU-H-P (belonging-student input-high-positive)

B-SU-H-N (belonging-student input-high-negative)

E-PE-P-H (efficacy-prior experience-positive-high)
*Refers to the high level of student efficacy expressed as a result of a positive experience in a prior English class.

E-PE-N-L (efficacy-prior experience-negative-low)

E-SA-H-H (efficacy-student ability-high-high)
*Refers to a high level of student efficacy expressed as a result of student’s perception of having high ability level.

E-SA-L-L (efficacy-student ability-low-low)

E-D-L-H (efficacy-demand-low-high)
*Refers to the high level of efficacy expressed as a result of the low level of demand of the class perceived by the student.

E-D-L-L (efficacy-demand-low-low)

E-D-H-H (efficacy-demand-high-high)

E-D-H-L (efficacy-demand-high-low)