

**BEHAVIOURAL INTERACTIONS
IN
SECONDARY CLASSROOMS
BETWEEN
TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:
WHAT THEY SAY, WHAT THEY DO**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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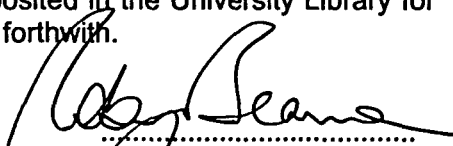
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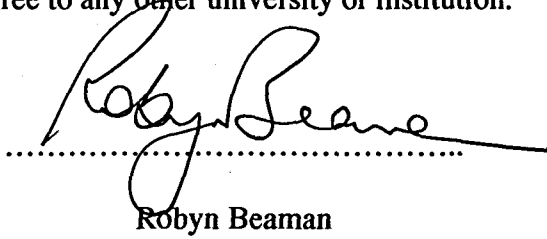
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SUMMARY

The focus of this thesis is troublesome classroom behaviour and the behavioural interactions between teachers and students in secondary school. Following a review of the extant research literature, Section A of the thesis reports a study examining the perceptions of 145 secondary teachers from New South Wales with regard to behaviours they find troublesome in their classrooms. *Talking out of turn* was clearly identified as the classroom behaviour of most concern, most frequently occurring and, importantly, the main misbehaviour of the most troublesome individual students. In two studies completed in parallel, it was similarly shown that teachers who identified themselves as having particular difficulties with classroom behaviour, or who had identified ten percent or more of their class as troublesome, experienced higher levels of stress related to classroom behaviour and their students perceived the classroom environment to be characterised by differential treatment of students. Section B of the thesis comprises observational studies of teachers and classroom behaviour with a substantial focus on student and teacher gender. Reviews of the literature on teachers' "natural" use of approval and disapproval and on differential teacher behaviour towards boys and girls were followed by two parallel studies. The first study, involving 79 New South Wales secondary school teachers and their classes, showed that while teachers typically responded to students with more approval than disapproval, almost all approval was reserved for academic behaviour whereas approval for appropriate classroom behaviour was very infrequent. Teachers typically reprimanded students for inappropriate behaviour at a very high rate. The second study showed that boys attracted far more teacher responses than girls but that most of this involved reprimands for inappropriate behaviour. Section C of the thesis relates teacher perceptions to observed classroom behaviour. It was concluded that in classes with larger numbers of troublesome students there was reduced academic feedback to students and where teachers' rates of negative responding were higher there was a reduced perception of participation by students.

CANDIDATE STATEMENT

This is to certify that the work comprising this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robyn Beaman', is written over a horizontal dotted line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robyn Beaman

PREFACE

The data used in this thesis were collected in the course of a commissioned evaluation project for the state education department in New South Wales in the 1990s conducted by Macquarie University Special Education Centre, under the direction of Professor Kevin Wheldall. Data from the pre-intervention phase of the commissioned research project have been utilised in the program of research that comprises this thesis. The candidate was the research associate of the project director, Professor Kevin Wheldall, and managed the commissioned research project under his supervision.

A brief contents page is presented at the beginning of this thesis. More detailed contents pages providing headings and page numbers, as well as a list of tables and figures, precedes each chapter.

A note about publications from the thesis: A previous and shorter version of Chapter 2 of this thesis has been published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Special Education Perspectives*. A previous version of Chapter 7 has been published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Educational Psychology*. A version of Chapter 9 has been accepted for publication by the peer-reviewed journal, *Educational Review*. The specific details of each publication are provided as a footnote to the relevant chapter.

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I would like to express my gratitude to my family, without whose love, support, encouragement, and patience this thesis would not have been completed.

Special thanks to my supervisor, Dr Coral Kemp, who provided me with just the right amount, at just the right time, of those all-important instructional supports – feedback and encouragement; the hallmarks of a fine educator. Thank you Coral for your excellent supervision, guidance and belief. It is very much appreciated.

Robyn Beaman

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