WORK AVOIDANCE AS A MANIFESTATION OF ANGER, HELPLESSNESS, AND BOREDOM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine a particular goal orientation in achievement motivation known as the work-avoidant orientation and its manifestation as mechanisms (anger and resentment, incompetency, and boredom), which are akin to the mechanisms that may give rise to passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom.

One-hundred and forty-six students were screened using a self-report survey to identify students with a work-avoidant goal orientation. The data from the goal orientation surveys were analyzed; twenty students who displayed a work-avoidance orientation were identified. A teacher checklist of work-avoidant behaviours was used to corroborate students' self-rating of work avoidance. These twenty students were then interviewed to probe the reasons for their work avoidance. Specifically, it was hypothesized that feelings of anger and resentment, feelings of incompetency, and boredom may result in work avoidance.

The findings from this study, that is, the results of the self-report goal surveys, showed the presence of three goal orientations, ego-social orientation, task-mastery orientation, and work-avoidant orientation. The results of the interview analysis indicated that half of the work-avoidant students interviewed displayed feelings of anger and resentment, feelings of incompetency, and boredom. These mechanisms paralleled some aspects of passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom.

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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine a particular goal orientation in achievement motivation known as the work-avoidant orientation. Specifically, it was the intent of the study to demonstrate that work avoidance may be a manifestation of mechanisms such as, resentment and anger, incompetency, and boredom, which appear to parallel some aspects of passive aggression, learned helplessness, and boredom. That is, students who are angry and resentful, incompetent, or bored may pursue a work-avoidance goal and, subsequently, demonstrate work-avoidance behaviours.

INTRODUCTION

Underachievement

Motivating students to learn or to achieve at their potential has been a concern for teachers throughout the history of education. "In a perfect world, all students would enter classrooms with enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. In the real world, however, the increasing number of unmotivated students is a concern for today's educators" (Fulk & Grymes, 1994, p. 28). According to Orr (1996), the gap between the ones who try hard and the ones who could care less is increasing every year. Studies have shown that most middle-school students demonstrate poor motivation to learn, and their attitude towards school becomes increasingly negative as they enter adolescence (Eccles & Midgley, 1990). Although it was generally agreed that it is during the junior high years that the problems of unmotivated students and subsequent underachievement becomes

more obvious, it has been demonstrated that these patterns emerged as early as the primary grades. Shaw and McCuen (1960), in a study of high school students who had been classmates since first grade, found that the underachieving boys had tended to receive lower grades than the achieving boys beginning in first grade. By grade three and continuing up to grade ten, they demonstrated significantly lower performance levels and poorer achievement. A similar pattern was found for underachieving girls who began to receive lower grades than those of achieving girls in grade six and declined to significantly lower performance by grade nine. Raph, Goldberg, and Passow (1969) listed several studies that supported the idea that motivational problems may emerge early in a student's school career and be firmly entrenched by the time they reach adolescence. Citing a 1964 work by Nash, Raph et al. (1969) noted that there were a greater number of lower achieving students in the eighth and ninth grades. Raph et al. also cited a 1957 work by Barrett which found an underachievement pattern present by grade five and work by D'Heurle (cited in Raph et al., 1969) identified academic underachievement behaviour as having occurred in a gifted group of third graders. However early the onset of motivational difficulties, it is maintained by Eccles, Midgley, and Alder (1984), that it is in early adolescence that a downward spiral occurs that leads some students to academic failure and school dropout. Simmons and Blyth (1987) reported a significant decline in school grades as students move into junior high. The magnitude of the decline was also predictive of subsequent school failure and dropout. Eccles and Midgley (1990), in a review of research on changes in academic motivation during adolescence,

collected information from a variety of studies that show that students' attitudes towards school and their self-perceived competency decline with age until the late high school years.

Although it is important to recognize that the problems of academic underachievement and student motivation can begin quite early in a student's life, more importantly, it is essential to recognize the long-range implications of having poorly motivated students who are not achieving to their fullest potential. These students are surrendering educational opportunities that will have a significant impact on their occupational choices and subsequent lifestyles.

Student Motivation

Clifford (1990) referred to the problem of student underachievement as "educational suicide." She stated that "most disturbing are the students who sever themselves from the flow of knowledge while they occupy desks, like mummies" (p. 22). She suggested that it was primarily a motivational problem, and therefore, we must turn to motivational theories and research for our answers.

Theories of Achievement Motivation

Increasing and/or understanding student motivation to achieve has, in fact, been a long-term focus of research in education. As early as the 1950s, McClelland and Atkinson proposed a learned-drive theory to explain achievement motivation (Covington, 1984a). They suggested that individuals were motivated to achieve based on a desire to

appear successful on one hand and to avoid failure on the other. The methods employed by students to resolve this conflict influenced the degree of achievement that occurred.

Weiner and his colleagues, in the seventies and eighties, added a cognitive component to achievement motivation that had been missing from the previous learned-drive theories. They were guided by the principles of attribution theory, which suggested that all individuals look for ways to explain events that have happened to them (Weiner, 1984). With respect to achievement, an individual will seek reasons to explain success or failure outcomes, especially if the outcome is unexpected. Weiner (1984) went so far as to suggest that "the major determinants of future achievement behaviour are cognitive attributions." According to the cognitive-attribution theory of achievement motivation, individuals perceived ability, task effort, and task ease/difficulty as the major causes of achievement performance (Weiner, 1984; Weiner, 1994). If the individuals are success oriented or failure avoidant, there would be resulting differences in attributions. Success-oriented individuals attributed success to high ability and failure to external reasons, such as task difficulty or effort. Failure-avoiding individuals, on the other hand, ascribed success to external factors, such as luck or task ease, and attributed their failure to low ability (Weiner, 1984; Weiner, 1994).

Flowing out of the cognitive-attribution theory was the basic premise of the self-worth theory which was that: "a central part of all classroom achievement is the need for students to protect their sense of worth or personal value. Perceptions of ability are crucial to this" (Covington, 1984a, p. 5). Thus, the theory suggested that students' sense

of self is largely impacted by their self-perception of ability (Covington, 1984a; Covington, 1984b). Therefore, students are constantly engaged in endeavours to protect their sense of self-worth, either by demonstrating high ability or mastery or by avoiding demonstrations of low ability. This theory was useful in explaining a number of self-handicapping behaviours that students engaged in, such as procrastination, not trying, cheating, and absenteeism (Covington, 1984a; Covington, 1984b). These strategies, according to the self-worth theory, were designed to protect feelings of self-worth.

John Nicholls, drawing on research from both cognitive-attribution theories and self-worth theories of achievement motivation, emerged with "The Intentional Approach" to explain achievement behaviours (Nicholls, 1984). "In this approach, behaviour is predicted by assuming that individuals are goal-directed and that their behaviour is a rational or economic attempt to gain their goals" (Nicholls, 1984, p. 40). Nicholls (1984) ascertained that the goal of achievement behaviour was directed towards demonstrating competence rather than incompetence. Nicholls maintained that there were different conceptions of ability, and as suggested by the attributional theorists, one being less differentiated than the other. The more differentiated concept of ability involved viewing ability as capacity, and it required individuals to judge themselves against others to obtain a measure of their own competence. These success-oriented/ego-involved individuals valued judgements of high ability. The less-differentiated concept of ability used self-referenced judgements of ability as opposed to social comparisons. Competency was judged by increases in learning as perceived by the learner. Nicholls

(1983, 1984) proposed that students who were more concerned with learning, as opposed to demonstrating high ability, were to be known as task-involved or task-oriented individuals. According to Nicholls (1983, 1984), students who were task involved would seek to master material they were uncertain that they could do, whereas students who were ego-involved would not attempt learning if it was unlikely that the outcome would not demonstrate high capacity. Respectively, these students adhered to task-mastery goals and ego-social goals (Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985). Although these two goal perspectives, ego-social and task-mastery orientations, were dominant in achievement motivation, Nicholls and his colleagues further identified a third goal orientation that existed in academic settings, the work-avoidant orientation. This particular orientation involved a basic desire to put forth as little effort as possible and get away with it (Nicholls et al., 1985). Meece and Holt (1993) suggested that whereas task-mastery goals and ego-social goals represented different forms of approach motivation, work-avoidant goals represented a form of avoidance motivation.

Achievement problems were viewed, then, in terms of motivation towards the goals which have meaning in the students' world (Roth & Meyersburg, 1963). Unmotivated students were viewed in terms which defined their motives for choosing poor achievement. According to Martino (1993), particular goal orientations would affect the achievement pattern of the students. Dweck (1986) described these two achievement patterns: Adaptive motivational patterns, those "that promote the establishment, maintenance, and attainment of personally challenging and personally

valued achievement;" and, maladaptive motivational patterns that are "associated with a failure to establish reasonably valued goals, maintain effective striving towards those goals, or, ultimately, to attain valued goals that are potentially within one's reach" (p. 1040). Research on goal orientations has demonstrated that students who pursue performance/ego-social goals or work-avoidant goals were more likely to display maladaptive motivational patterns, have a negative attitude towards school, and demonstrate behaviours that are not conducive to achievement (Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; Nicholls et al., 1985; Nolen, 1988).

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The problem of academic underachievement, then, has its foundation in student motivation and, in particular, goal orientations. If, as the literature suggests, a work-avoidance orientation leads to a maladaptive motivational pattern, then students who pursue a work-avoidant goal will have motivational and achievement difficulties. The problem of student motivation, which faces educators and parents daily, is illustrated by this excerpt from a *Reader's Digest* (1996) article that described an actual conversation between a teacher and a student.

> "John," I said, "You're bright, healthy, and you have a great chance for a better-than-average education. Why are you sitting here doing nothing?" His answer was scary. "I don't know. I know I could do well, I don't know why I don't try." (p. 112).

This study hypothesized that work avoidance may be a manifestation of mechanisms that parallel those that arise in passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom.

Does work avoidance arise out of angry-hostile, incompetent, or bored feelings? This is the research question that will be addressed in this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of achievement motivation have demonstrated that achievement behaviour is heavily influenced by the particular goal orientation that a student adopts (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Meece & Holt, 1993; Meece et al., 1988; Nicholls et al., 1985). Citing an article by Nicholls (1989), Duda, Fox, Biddle, and Armstrong (1992) asserted that these goal orientations are a directing force which shape the behavioural, cognitive, and affective responses to achievement events. "In essence, it is suggested that students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are rational expressions of their dominant goal" (Nicholls, 1989 (as cited in Duda et al., 1992), p. 313). Dweck and Leggett (1988) suggested that the goals individuals pursue create the framework from which they interpret and react to events. In the academic domain, they suggested students pursue two classes of goals: performance goals, in which students are interested in obtaining favourable judgements of their ability; and learning goals, in which students are concerned with increasing their competence. Performance goals and learning goals are also referred to as ego-social goals and task-mastery goals, respectively (Nicholls et al., 1985). Nicholls and his colleagues added a third goal orientation, the work-avoidant orientation, to further explain achievement behaviours. The goal dimensions of task and ego orientation are virtually independent of one another (Nicholls, Cobb, Wood, Yackel, Patashnick, 1990), and work avoidance is negatively related to task orientation and unrelated or positively related to ego orientation (Nicholls et al., 1985; Thorkildsen, 1988).

Students with a task-mastery orientation have self-improvement or skill development as their goal (Meece et al., 1988). Research has shown that these students demonstrated active cognitive engagement (Meece et al., 1988) used deep processing strategies (Nolen, 1988) and indicated a preference for challenging activities (Seifert, 1995). Task-mastery students tended to view failure experiences as a cue to increase their effort or to rethink current strategies (Dweck, 1986). They also believed that success in school required effort, interest, and a cooperative attitude (Duda & Nicholls, 1992).

Unlike students with a task-mastery orientation, students who pursued ego-social goals were primarily concerned with receiving favourable judgements of their ability or avoiding negative evaluation of their ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Meece et al. (1988) indicated that an ego-social orientation was associated with the belief that learning was a means to an end. The students were most interested in receiving praise, demonstrating superior ability, and avoiding negative judgements. These ego-social goals were linked to the belief that failure was caused by a lack of ability (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) and that success relied on a competitive nature, superior ability, and was influenced by external factors (Nicholls et al., 1985). Performance/ego-oriented students demonstrated less active cognitive engagement, used surface-level processing strategies, and engaged in self-handicapping behaviours more often than task-oriented students (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Meece & Holt, 1993; Nolen, 1988).

Duda and Nicholls (1992) investigated high school students' beliefs about the causes of success in school and sport. Results indicated that task orientation was associated with the belief that success required interest, effort, and cooperative work with one's peers. An ego orientation, on the other hand, was linked to the belief that success in school required attempts to beat others and superior ability. In the classroom and in sport, Duda and Nicholls (1992) found that satisfaction and enjoyment were moderately correlated with task orientation and negatively correlated with the work-avoidance orientation. Boredom, however, was positively correlated with work avoidance in both achievement settings. In fact, work avoidance emerged as a strong predictor of boredom in the academic setting ($R^2 = 22$).

Again, in 1992, Duda et al. (1992) completed a similar study in Britain. Using an inventory, they assessed achievement goals and beliefs about success in sport among British ten-year olds. The results suggested that this group was primarily task-oriented, valued cooperation, and believed that hard work would lead to achievement in sport. Those who were concerned with demonstrating superior competence (ego orientation) believed that success in sports stemmed from high ability. Children who scored high on work avoidance were also more likely to think that external factors cause success. The ego orientation was also linked to an endorsement of work avoidance. Nicholls, in a 1989 study (cited in Duda et al., 1992), Jagacinski and Nicholls (1990), and others suggested that,

> It would be rational although not motivationally adaptive for high ego-orientated children who doubt their competence eventually to define success in terms of not trying or avoiding sport completely. Holding back one's effort and interest is a strategy which may help mask a fragile sense of ability. (Duda et al., 1992, p. 319).

Nicholls et al. (1990) administered scales to several second-grade mathematics classes to assess task and ego orientation. Results were consistent with previously described studies. Task orientation was moderately correlated with the belief that success would be prompted by interest, effort, and cooperation. Ego orientation was quite highly correlated with the belief that success requires superior mathematical ability and attempts to beat others. As predicted, work avoidance was negatively associated with task orientation and positively associated with ego orientation.

Nolen (1988) extended the work of Nicholls, Dweck, and others by examining the relationship between goal orientations and use of study strategies. The strategies assessed were (a) deep-processing strategies, which include selecting important information, accommodating new information, and monitoring comprehension, and (b) surface level strategies, which include memorization, rehearsal, and reading the passage over and over. Task orientation was positively correlated with both perceived value and use of strategies requiring deep processing of information. Ego orientation was positively related to use and perceived value of surface-level strategies only. Work avoidance was negatively related to use and valuing of both kinds of strategies. Nicholls et al. (1985), in a study to obtain students' views about the purpose of education, found that the view that schools should help one gain wealth and occupational status was

positively associated with work avoidance but not with task orientation. Work avoidance, on the other hand, was not associated with the view that schools should assist students in becoming socially useful, productive members of society. This belief was moderately correlated with task orientation - the desire to gain understanding for its own sake. Thorkildsen (1988) replicated this study using students of exceptional academic ability as her subjects. Her results were consistent with those of Nicholls et al. (1985). The view that school should help one attain wealth and status was not associated with task orientation, satisfaction with school, or the belief that academic success is supported by interest and effort. Work avoidance was associated positively with ego orientation and negatively with task orientation.

Dweck and Leggett (1988) described a series of studies conducted by Diener and Dweck in 1978 and 1980 (as cited in Dweck & Leggett) on children who were described as performance goal (ego) or mastery goal (task) oriented. They reported that students adopting a performance goal viewed their difficulties as failures, as an indication of low ability, and as insurmountable. They appeared to view further efforts as futile. They reported aversions to the tasks, boredom with the problems, or anxiety over their performance. Those pursuing a mastery goal viewed their difficulties as challenges. They engaged in self-instruction and self-monitoring, and were very optimistic that their efforts would pay off. Dweck and Leggett (1988) further suggested that these two groups viewed intelligence differently. Students who pursued performance goals viewed intelligence as a fixed entity whereas students who pursued mastery goals saw

intelligence as malleable.

Work-avoidant goals included avoiding work, getting work done with a minimum of effort, and escaping teacher constraints (Nicholls et al., 1985). This goal orientation was linked to effort minimizing strategies such as eliciting help from others, copying work or guessing at answers (Meece et al., 1988). Meece and Holt (1993) suggested that students may choose to pursue this particular orientation to express their negative attitude toward school work, to avoid failure or as a coping strategy to deal with a particular situation.

Work avoidance was also perceived as a defensive strategy used by students who were concerned with the adequacy of their ability and who desired to protect feelings of self-worth and avoid negative judgements of ability (Meece et al., 1988). Generally, work-avoidant students tended to have poorer work habits and study skills, were somewhat impulsive and often displayed negative attitudes towards school and peers, and were known to lack initiative and independence with respect to school work (Bruns, 1992; Pecaut, 1991; Raph et al., 1969). These students who pursued work-avoidant goals were more likely to think that success was linked to internal factors, such as ability, and had little relationship to effort, interest, and a cooperative attitude (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Nicholls et al., 1985).

From the studies described, the three types of motivational orientation that exist in achievement settings were ego social, task mastery, and work avoidance. It was hypothesized in this study that work avoidance is manifested in ways that are similar to

passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. These three categories and their relationship to work avoidance will be explained in the next section.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

Definition

During World War II, the passive-aggressive personality disorder was first used as a psychiatric diagnosis within the military and soon became the leading cause of psychiatric inpatient admissions and military discharges (Frances & Widiger, 1990). Passive aggressiveness was characteristic of people who, according to Small, Small, Alig, and Moore (1970), exhibited behaviour patterns characterized by both passivity and aggressiveness. It was essentially a character disorder which prevented individuals from maintaining effective, interpersonal relationships due to difficulty with expressing hostility and finding gratification (Parsons, 1983; Small et al., 1970). The most striking feature of passive-aggressive personality disorder appeared to be the resistance to external demands (Beck & Freeman, 1990; Fine, Overholser, & Berkoff, 1992). Passive-aggressive individuals resented being forced to comply to the demands of others or rules set by others. They typically felt angry and resentful and had difficulty with expressing their anger in a constructive manner. Instead, their resistance was manifested through behaviours such as dawdling, procrastination, poor-work quality, and forgetting obligations (Beck & Freeman, 1990; Fine et al., 1992). Although these passive-aggressive behaviour traits were common to many persons as a pattern of interpersonal

behaviour, if extreme enough, they impaired functioning in crucial areas such as work, marriage, and school.

Development of Passive Aggression

Berres and Long (1979) theorized that passive-aggressive individuals were formed at a very early age. They were usually the product of a middle class family who had high expectations for their children. The children of this family were taught that to be popular and successful, one's behaviour must be perceived as being good. Hostility, sarcasm, rudeness, and inappropriate behaviour were prohibited. Consequently, some children denied themselves the normal feelings of anger and frustration and became passive aggressive. Passive-aggressive behaviour in school then was thought to be a hostile response towards parents or teachers by students who were incapable of handling feelings of anger (Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Bruns, 1992; Weiner, 1971). Being unable to directly express anger and aggressive feelings caused passive-aggressive children to rely on passive procedures to provide a somewhat safe outlet for release. Morrison (1969) suggested that the release came through demeaning adult values such as academic achievement. She stated that,

> Underachievement may provide a safe means to aggress for the preadolescent since intention of aggression cannot be proved. Grades provide communication between adult authorities, parent and teacher. The underachievers may be conveying the message, "I can do better but I will not. (p. 169).

Poor academic performance, then, was seen as a way that some students vented their anger and retaliated against their parents (Weiner, 1971). As early as 1952, Kirk (as

cited in Weiner, 1970) inferred from her experience with passive-aggressive underachieving college students that they tended to be: (a) expending considerable energy to avert any awareness or explicit expression of angry feelings, (b) struggling, in particular, with pronounced anger at family members who are demanding or expecting success, and (c) utilizing academic failure as a means of indirectly aggressing against their parents.

As previously stated, students who embraced a work-avoidance orientation often did so in an attempt to cope with a particular situation. For angry-hostile students, it was a situation where an outlet was required for the expression of hostile feelings. Work-avoidant behaviours, similar to passive-aggressive behaviours, allowed students to vent their anger in a way that was more acceptable than direct aggression. This behaviour had been described by Bricklin and Bricklin (1967) as sneaky aggressiveness. It annoys whom it is intended to annoy, but it would probably not be called aggressive.

Passive-Aggressive Behaviours

Hardt (1988) suggested that in a classroom there were many tactics employed by passive-aggressive students in an attempt to indirectly express their anger and vent their frustrations with being forced to comply to the external demands placed upon them. Rabkin (1965) stated that such students entered school burdened by anger that could not properly be channelled and were frustrated to an extreme degree by the most trivial demand or problem. Observable passive-aggressive behaviours and verbal responses fell

into two categories according to Medick (1979): generally annoying behaviours and behaviours related to school work.

Morrison (1969), in her scale for rating passive-aggressive behaviour, listed the following symptoms: does what is asked to do but takes a long time; often argues a point for the sake of argument; does not follow directions closely, would rather say "I can't" than try; often complains about rules; doesn't turn in homework on time; often requires you to repeat requests; and often offers implausible excuses for failure to do something.

There appeared to be certain patterns of behaviours that had been utilized by passive-aggressive students in the classroom. They included the following:

1. ***Selective Hearing.*** Passive-aggressive students' hearing shuts down when they were asked to do something they would rather not do (Berres & Long, 1979). Also known as passive listening, these students only heard what they wanted to hear. The teacher was often required to repeat directions leading to teacher frustration (Beck & Roblee, 1983).

2. ***Withholding/Slow Down Tactics.*** These students were described as being slow to complete assigned work. They would do what was asked but take forever completing it (Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967). Beck and Roblee (1983) described them as students who are always in slow motion. They would take a very long time to get from one place to another or to complete a task. This delaying technique was also an attempt to control the classroom by making everyone wait until they were ready (Berres & Long, 1979).

3. ***Purposeful Forgetting***. These were the students who were continually leaving their books, pencils, and other belongings somewhere other than the classroom (Beck & Roblee, 1983; Bruns, 1992; Medick, 1983). As a result, the teacher would lecture these students, which appeared to be psychologically gratifying for them as the teacher lost control (Beck & Roblee, 1983; Berres & Long, 1979).

4. ***Accidental Destruction***. Beck and Roblee (1983) suggested that passive-aggressive students often performed tasks so that the "end result is confusion, chaos, and mess" (p. 19). The passive aggression helped in such a way as to ensure the teacher could not possibly request their assistance again (Berres & Long, 1979).

5. ***Don't Ask Me For Help***. The students requested help from the teacher but made it impossible through various behaviours for the teacher to assist. The teacher would become so frustrated that he/she would walk away in anger from them (Berres & Long, 1979).

Overall, passive-aggressive students displayed behaviours that were annoying and irritating and that could result in angry outbursts by the teacher. However, while engaging in these passive-aggressive behaviours, they would appear polite, sorry, and even confused by the teacher's reactions (Berres & Long, 1979).

Medick (1979) summarized the behaviour as follows:

> In summary, then, the passive-aggressive child hears only what he wants to hear, drags his feet at all transitions in the schedule, loses or misplaces belongings and then complains that he can't find them, volunteers to do things but manages to mess them up, and demands constant attention and service. He talks, laughs, and makes noises of all kinds at inappropriate times, is out of his seat frequently, and has a steady stream of excuses for misbehaviour and failure to do his homework (p. 119).

The behaviours utilized by passive-aggressive students to convey their feelings of anger and resentment are similar to work-avoidant behaviours. The feelings that give rise to passive aggression may also give rise to work avoidance.

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

Definition

Learned helplessness derived its name from the passive response that occurred as a result of a belief that any attempt to control an event would prove futile (McKean, 1994). It is evidenced in the students who are intellectually capable of producing grade-level work, yet do not perform at the level of their capabilities because they believe there is nothing they can do to prevent failure or assure success (Alderman, 1990; Medick, 1979). Craske (1988) cited works done with colleagues that suggested that, in an academic context, a state of learned helplessness was reached when students who had experienced repeated failure at a particular task, attributed this failure to a lack of ability, then experienced negative affect and a lowering of self-esteem. These students would not expect to perform well on related tasks in the future. In particular, they would perform more poorly after failure than before failure in tasks of similar levels of difficulty and would expend less effort (Craske, 1988). Dweck and Leggett (1988) cited

studies by Diener and Dweck from 1978 and 1980 that indicated helpless students quickly began to report negative self-cognitions after experiencing failure. They attributed failure to personal inadequacy and cited deficient intelligence, memory and problem-solving ability as probable causes of failure. According to Miller (1986), then, learned helplessness occurred when students experienced noncontingency, that is, failure would occur whether one tried or not, and so the student gave up and stopped trying. In essence, the learned helplessness model implied that some students may withdraw effort because they did not see themselves as capable of success. Whether or not they tried, the outcome would be the same - failure. Logically, there was little to be gained by trying, and nothing to be lost by not trying (Craske, 1988). These students were not interested in protecting a perception of ability because they did not believe they possessed ability, nor were they trying to protect their self-esteem. Martino (1993) summarized this helpless pattern as:

> Self-defeating behaviour that has led many of these young adolescents to become failure-accepting students. Their sense of self-worth has deteriorated. They have convinced themselves their problems have resulted from low ability, and they believe there is little hope for change (p. 19).

Characteristics of Learned-Helpless Students

Dweck and Elliott (1983) described learned helplessness:

> As an acute and situational response characterized by plunging expectancies in response to perceived failure. Students who develop learned helplessness reactions can be found at all levels of academic ability. They are prone to show catastrophic reactions when they encounter serious frustrations, followed by progressive deterioration in the quality of their coping once they have begun to fail.

Bulkowsky and Willows (1980), in a study of learned helpless students who were faced with a challenging reading task, reported that they tended to: have a low initial expectancy for success, give up quickly when difficulty arises, attribute failure to lack of ability, attribute success to an external cause instead of to effort or personal ability, and following failure, experience a severe reduction in estimates of future success. Research established a variety of affective, cognitive, and behavioural manifestations of learned helplessness reactions. They are characterized primarily by their tendency to give up before they begin, their expectancy for failure and their lack of perseverance in completing a task (Greer & Wethered, 1987; Johnson, 1981; Mark, 1983; McKean, 1994). Other features that have been documented as being common to students who display "helplessness" include: lack of motivation, inability to associate results with effort, reluctance to attempt the initial task in which failure was experienced, listlessness and passivity, self-depreciating remarks, and low self-esteem (Balk, 1983; Bulkowsky & Willows, 1980; Greer & Wethered, 1987; Roveche, Mink, & Ames, 1981). Not only were they reluctant to attempt the initial task in which failure was experienced, but they also tended to avoid related activities (Greer & Wethered, 1987). As well, when learned helplessness students were faced with a setback, they were more likely to experience sadness and increased frustration than nonhelpless students. Learned helplessness is observable in student behaviours, such as: giving up quickly on a test, possibly staring at the paper, checking off answers at random, or making little or no effort; copying answers from others or from answer sheets if available; often working with a friend and

getting a friend to do work for them; if they become blocked during seatwork, awaiting for assistance instead of actively seeking solutions, usually working slowly and/or hesitantly; and getting frustrated over assignments and possibly quickly saying "I can't do it" (Medick, 1979; Spaulding, 1983).

The academic behaviours of the learned-helplessness student are similar to behaviours engaged in by students who have a work-avoidance orientation. Work-avoidant strategies, such as procrastination, premature giving up, copying work, or eliciting help frequently from others may arise from feelings of incompetency.

BOREDOM

In 1990, a National Educational Longitudinal study concluded that there are too many middle school students who are bored with their school work. Out of 25,000 eight graders, approximately half claimed they were bored in school most of the time (Rothman, 1990). Other studies conducted in America, Britain, Africa, and Norway also testified to the problem of student boredom. Robinson (1975), in a secondary analysis of data from the national sample of Young School Leavers in Britain by Morton-Williams & Finch, 1968, indicated that 66% of bored pupils felt that school was the same day after day. A survey of sixth graders in Norway by Gjesme (1977) revealed a strong correlation between ratings of dissatisfaction with school and with feelings of boredom at school. Vandewiele (1980) conducted a study on secondary school students in Senegal, Africa. Results showed that boredom was a widespread feeling among

Senegalese adolescents, and the frequency rate for boredom was remarkably high.

Larson and Richards (1991) reported that boredom in school was more frequent for high ability and high achieving students. Gjesme (1977), in his study on Norwegian sixth graders, stated that the students' boredom was not related to their intelligence. O'Hanlon (1981) declared that chronically bored students were no different from other students with respect to intelligence. It is apparent then that boredom is a pervasive problem that belongs to all students and most especially to our brightest and most capable students.

Reasons for Boredom in School

Larson and Richards (1991) said that boredom was related to understimulation and lack of challenge in the classroom. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) in his book, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety,* cited lack of challenge as a quality that could make learning or work a humdrum affair. People feel stagnant when what they do demands too little of their ability and effort (Wlodkowski & Jaynes, 1992). Bright students become bored because they do not receive adequate challenge from the curriculum and the teacher strategies employed are often unsuitable for their level (Feldhusen & Kroll, 1991).

Relevance of the school curriculum also appeared to play an important role in student boredom. Citing a 1968 work by Lanning and Robbins, Asbury (1974) suggested that economically disadvantaged students saw no purpose in an academic curriculum that was geared towards a socioeconomic middle class. The students involved in the Senegal

study were also convinced that their school curriculum was not adjusted to fit the African context. Vandewiele (1980) believed this was the reason for the boredom they so often experienced at school. Wlodkowski and Jaynes (1992) stated that meaninglessness did increase boredom. If students did not perceive a valued purpose to their assignments, the work would become wearisome. Finally, Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1994) cited lack of appropriate curriculum (one that has no personal relevance to the students) as a reason for boredom and underachievement.

Monotony is also frequently cited as a cause of boredom. Wlodkowski and Jaynes (1992) suggested that doing the same thing over and over again without any change becomes dull, no matter how exciting it may have been initially. Learning, with its demands for practice and routine, can easily become tedious to many students. It seemed then that high-ability students who found school work easier may be the most bored in school as they encounter activities that are repetitive, habitual, and unchallenging (Larson & Richards, 1991).

Alone or in combination, an unchallenging curriculum, a curriculum that has little meaning, and monotony are some of the causes of boredom in schools.

Characteristics of Bored Students

Robinson (1975) found that bored students were generally more hostile to school than other students, did not look forward to going to school most days, got irritated more often with teachers telling them what to do, and were more delighted when they had an

opportunity to take a day off school. Bored students were also less likely to think their teachers were really interested in them, and most of them thought their teachers forgot they were growing up. McGiboney and Carter (1988) reported that an adolescent who is high on boredom proneness presents a profile of a person easily upset and affected by feelings and is inactive and easily influenced by peers. Further to that, Tolor (1989) indicated that bored students are less satisfied with their personal existence, and they experience a diminished sense of self-worth and restricted self-expressiveness.

A clear picture then begins to emerge of bored students. It is one of students who are disinterested for a variety of reasons in school, who show little excitement about school, and who have an attitude that is not conducive to hard work and study.

Consequences of Boredom in School

Robinson (1975) reported a positive relationship between boredom and misconduct at school. Briscoe (1977) suggested that bright students who are bored in school will either withdraw into themselves, chronically skip class or remain in school only to daydream, clown around, or stir up mischief. According to Wasson (1981), students who score high on a susceptibility to boredom scale are more likely to show deviant behaviour at school than those who score low. Larson and Richards (1991), in their review of the literature on boredom in schools, stated explicitly that boredom among high school students is related to alienation (Tolor, 1989), disruptive behaviour (Wasson, 1981), negative attitude toward school (Robinson, 1975), disregard for rules (McGiboney

& Carter, 1988), and dissatisfaction with school (Gjesme, 1977). They also suggested that boredom diminishes attention, interferes with a student's performance, and is often given as a frequent reason for dropping out.

The findings presented in the previous section on boredom suggested that these students not only have the potential to become a problem in the classroom, either through disruptive behaviour or poor academic performance, but in fact, are often problems in the classroom. The behaviours and motives of bored students are similar to work-avoidant behaviours. Like students who pursue a work-avoidance goal orientation, bored students avoid school work either through absenteeism, diminished attention, or by engaging in behaviours that are in conflict with achievement. Work-avoidant students attempt to avoid school work through a variety of behaviours which may include those used by the bored student.

Behaviours that are displayed by passive-aggressive students, learned helplessness students, and bored students seem to be similar to the behaviours of students who adopt a work-avoidance orientation. The feelings that give rise to passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom, such as feelings of resentment and anger and feelings of incompetency, may also give rise to work avoidance. Is work avoidance a manifestation of mechanisms that are similar to those that arise in passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom? This is the research question that is addressed in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study sought first to determine the existence of a work-avoidance orientation in some students, and secondly, sought to identify students' reasons for their work-avoidant behaviours. Chapter 3 presents a description of the subjects, procedure, instrumentation, and data analysis.

Sample

A self-report goal survey was administered to 146 participants at three elementary and junior high schools in rural eastern Newfoundland. Of these, 20 students qualified to be interviewed by demonstrating a work-avoidant goal orientation. Of these 20, 9 were female and 11 were male, with 9 in Grade 6 and 11 in Grade 7.

Procedure

Before data collection, a letter was sent to the director of the school board responsible for the three elementary and junior high schools where the study was to take place (see Appendix A for sample letter to director) to seek permission to conduct the study in those schools. Once permission was obtained from the director, the principals of the schools and the homeroom teachers of Grades 6 and 7 in those schools were contacted by the author as to the purpose of the study and the procedure that would be followed (see Appendix A for sample letters to principals and teachers). Letters were then sent to the parents/guardians of all the Grade 6 and 7 students in the three schools, explaining the study and asking them to sign and return the consent form if they were

willing to have their child participate in the study (see Appendix A for sample letter to parents/guardians).

Only students with signed consent forms participated, which amounted to 146 students in three schools. The author then arranged times with the respective homeroom teachers to visit each school and class to administer the goal-orientation survey to the participating students. The survey was given to groups of 10-15 students at a time. The author was present for clarification of items and to assist students who had reading difficulties. Completion time of survey ranged from 8-10 minutes.

Results of the goal-orientation survey for the 146 students were tabulated and students who had a mean score greater than the scale midpoint of 2.5 on the work-avoidance items were considered to be work avoidant. A cluster analysis was performed on the data from the 146 goal surveys, and it confirmed the mid-scale split as well as identified two distinct work-avoidant clusters. Thus, students were selected as work avoidant if their mean score on the work-avoidance items was greater or equal to 2.5 and if they were in one of the two work-avoidant clusters. In total, 20 students met the criteria and were identified as "work avoidant."

These 20 students were then asked to participate in a personal interview with the author to investigate the underlying reasons for their work avoidance. All 20 students agreed to participate in the interview process. To conduct the interviews, a series of interview topics and questions were prepared beforehand (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted at the students' school during class time. They were

structured to last between 20-30 minutes. Students' responses were recorded on audio tapes. The tapes were transcribed.

Measures

The goal-orientation survey (Seifert, 1997) was a self-report four-point Likert scale that was used to assess the goal orientations of the students (see Appendix C). On a four-point scale, students rated how true each statement was for them (4 = definitely disagree, 3 = disagree, 2 = agree, 1 = definitely agree). Items were reverse scored. The three particular goal orientation variables that were assessed using this instrument were the performance, mastery, and work-avoidance goal orientations.

The performance scale contained six items that implied the students' goal was to demonstrate superior ability and to impress peers and the teacher. Examples are: "I want others to think I am smart," "I must get an excellent grade," and "I work hard so I won't look stupid to others" (α = .63).

The mastery scale had nine items that suggested that the students' goal was to learn new and challenging things and to improve themselves through education. Examples are: "I like solving difficult problems," "I try to improve myself through learning," and "I find difficult work challenging" (α = .79).

The work avoidance scale consisted of six items that suggested that the students' goal was to do only enough work to get by or to avoid work. Examples are:

"I try to pass with the least amount of work I can," "I do only what I need to do to get a good grade," and "I try to do as little work as possible" (α = .76).

The teacher behaviour checklist was a 21-item survey created by the author for the purpose of this study. It was intended to provide a measure of teachers' perceptions of work-avoidance behaviours in the target sample of 20 students. Teachers' rating of students' work avoidance was then compared with students' self-rating of work avoidance through a correlation analysis. Table 1 presents the correlations. The correlation between students' self-ratings of work avoidance and teachers' ratings of students' work avoidance was .398, which suggested that teachers' ratings of students tended to corroborate students' ratings of themselves.

The items in the checklist were constructed from a review of the literature on work-avoidant behaviours and attitudes. Examples of items include: "Does this student misplace/forget books, pencils, or other materials?" "Does this student appear to lack motivation and interest in school work?" "Does this student make excuses for not doing assignments?" and "Does this student complain that other students are preventing him/her from completing work?" Teachers rated on a 5-point scale the degree to which the statement described a particular student (5 = always, 4 = often, 3 = sometimes, 2 = seldom, 1 = never).

Table 1
Zero-order correlations between students' self-report of goal orientations and teacher ratings of students.

	Teacher	Work	Mastery	Performance
Teacher	1.00	0.3975	-0.1206	0.1149
Work	0.3975	1.000	-0.3000	0.1772
Mastery	-0.1206	-0.300	1.000	0.1189
Performance	0.1149	0.1772	0.1189	1.000

Personal interviews were conducted with the 20 work-avoidant students to gain information on why they were following a work-avoidant goal orientation. Seidman (1991) stated that "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour" (p. 4). He advocated interviewing as the best avenue of inquiry if one is interested in learning about students' experiences in the classroom and the meaning they make out of that experience. The average interview lasted 30 minutes.

As recommended by McCracken (1988), the interview topics and questions arose out of an exhaustive review of the literature on work avoidance, passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. This review enabled the author to specify categories and list topics from which the questions evolved. The three overriding topics for the interviews were: students' feelings of competency, students' feelings towards authority, and students' feelings about the curriculum.

Following this step, questions were formulated to develop the interview topics. The questions were of two main types, which are referred to by McCracken (1988) as

category questions and special incident questions. Category questions allowed the author to explore for specific features of the topics and special incident questions allowed the respondent to recall a particular situation or incident in which the topic was implicated. A sample of interview questions are as follows: "Sometimes school can be challenging. You may have a hard task, a subject that is difficult to understand, or your teacher may go too quickly for you. How often is school hard for you?" and "How does your teacher treat you?" The list of interview questions are presented in Appendix B.

DATA ANALYSIS

The goal orientation scores were analyzed using several procedures to identify the students with a work avoidance orientation. A mid-scale split and a cluster analysis followed by a series of within groups and between groups contrasts yielded consistent results, identifying 20 students from the pool of 146 as work avoidant. In the second procedure, the interview data from the 20 students was subjected to a qualitative analysis by the author. The process of interview analysis followed the steps proposed by Seidman (1991) in Interviewing as Qualitative Research. The Ethnograph software package was used to facilitate the interview analysis.

These data analysis procedures, the mid-scale split, cluster analysis, and interview analysis are explained in the following pages.

Mid-Scale Split

Results of 146 goal surveys were tabulated and students received a composite score on the three goal orientations assessed. Those students who had a mean score greater than the scale midpoint of 2.5 on the work avoidance items were potential candidates for a work-avoidance orientation. Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of the students who scored at or above 2.5 on the work-avoidance orientation.

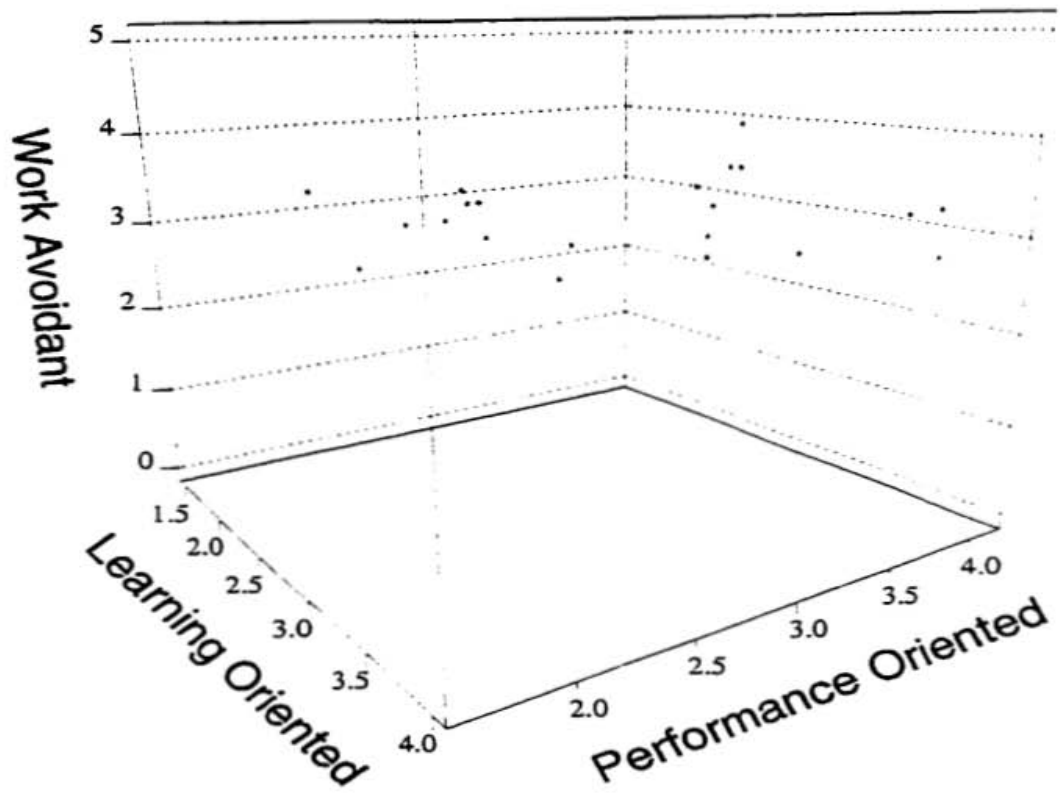

Figure 1: Profile of Mid-Scale Split - students who scored above 2.5 on the work-avoidance orientation.

Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis refers to the procedure that focuses on reducing or separating the data into relevant subgroups that differ in some meaningful way (Dillon & Goldstein, 1984; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1983). A number of possible clustering solutions ranging from two to ten were explored. The optimum number of solutions was determined from the Calinski and Harabasz statistic, the cubic clustering criteria (Milligan & Cooper, 1985) and the amount of variance accounted for.

The results of the cluster analysis suggested a seven-cluster solution which accounted for 72 percent of the multivariate variance. Descriptive statistics for the variable scores in each cluster are presented in Table 2.

Following the results of the cluster analysis, goal orientations were subjected to an omnibus repeated measures analysis with cluster membership as a between groups factor (Table 3). This was an omnibus test (α = .05) followed by within groups tests of simple effects (α = .01) and between group contrasts (α= .01).

The results of the omnibus test suggested a statistically significant cluster X goal-orientation interaction and the tests of simple effects within all clusters were statistically detectable, suggesting that students in all 7 clusters were more inclined to pursue one goal over the other. For each cluster, a profile of goal-orientation scores was conducted and analyzed (Figure 2). Inspection of Figure 2 indicated that clusters 4 and 7 are

Table 2
Means and standard deviations for the latent variable of goal orientation.

	Cluster 1 (N = 19)		Cluster 2 (N = 22)		Cluster 3 (N = 39)		Cluster 4 (N = 9)		Cluster 5 (N = 32)		Cluster 6 (N = 12)		Cluster 7 (N = 11)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Work-avoidance orientation	1.46	.34	1.34	.27	1.88	.29	3.03	.19	1.20	.25	1.08	.12	3.27	.48
Performance orientation	3.53	.33	2.37	.38	3.01	.30	2.58	.40	3.30	.41	2.23	.35	2.67	.33
Mastery orientation	2.69	.36	2.74	.42	3.05	.34	2.22	.42	3.59	.25	3.45	.24	3.22	.45

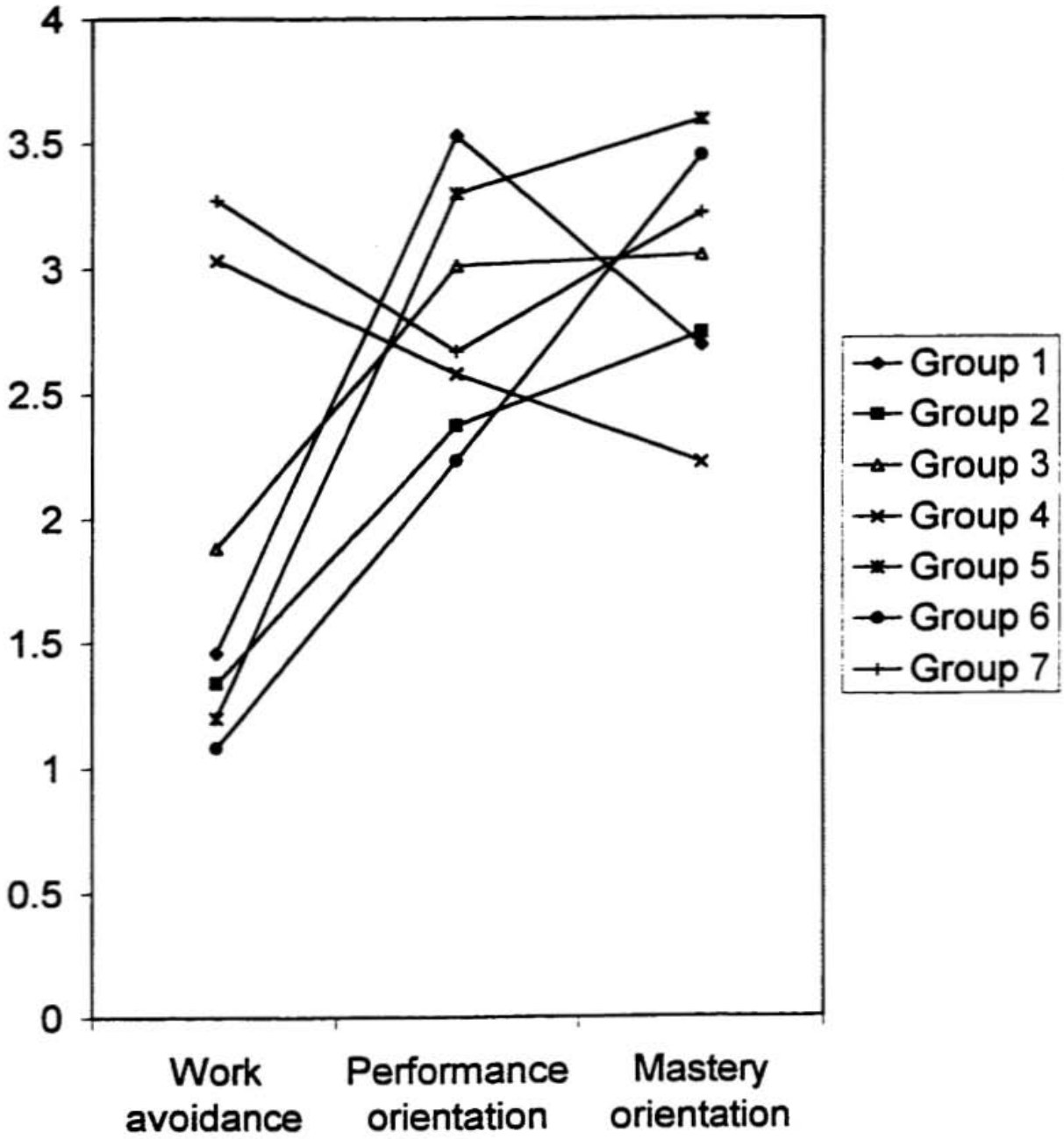

Figure 2: Profile of orientation scores by cluster.

clearly work avoidant. There was no statistically detectable difference between the two clusters on the work-avoidance goal orientation ($F_{6,130} = 3.17$, $p > .01$), but there was a statistically significant difference in work-avoidance scores between cluster 4 and the other clusters (smallest $F_{6,130} = 107.74$, $p < .01$). Students in cluster 7 were as likely to be mastery oriented as work avoidant ($F_{2,260} = .11$, $p > .01$) but were more work avoidant than performance oriented ($F_{2,260} = 16.50$, $p < .01$).

Cluster 6 could be described as mastery oriented. Students in this cluster reported mastery-orientation scores that were higher than their performance-orientation scores and their work avoidance-orientation scores (smallest $F_{2,260} = 74.42$, $p < .01$). However, there was no statistically detectable difference between mastery-orientation scores of students in cluster 6 and students in cluster 7 or cluster 5 (smallest $F_{6,130} = 2.65$, $p > .01$). But the mastery-orientation scores of students in cluster 6 were higher than in clusters 1, 2, 3, and 4 (smallest $F_{6,130} = 16.31$, $p < .01$).

Students in cluster 5 could be described as being either mastery or performance oriented. Neither goal was dominant and scores were high on both goal-orientation scales ($F_{2,260} = 11.40$, $p > .01$). Further, there was no statistically significant difference in the mastery-orientation scores of students in cluster 5 and the students in cluster 7 ($F_{6,130} = 11.67$, $p > .01$). Students in cluster 7 were as mastery oriented as students in clusters 5 and 6. As well, there was no statistically detectable difference between clusters 5 and 7 on performance-orientation scores ($F_{6,130} = 11.67$, $p > .01$). Students in cluster 7 were as performance oriented as students in cluster 5.

Cluster 4 could be described as work avoidant. Students in cluster 4 had marginally higher work-avoidance orientation scores than performance scores ($F_{2,260}$ = 7.59, $p < .02$) and work-avoidance scores were also higher than mastery scores ($F_{2,260}$ = 24.60, $p < .02$). Further, cluster 4 had lower mastery-orientation scores than cluster 7 (largest $F_{6,130} = 51.56$, $p < .01$). Also, there was a statistically detectable difference in performance-orientation scores between cluster 4 and cluster 7 ($F_{6,130} = 61.26$, $p < .01$). Thus, although we had two work-avoidant clusters, clusters 4 and 7, both had different profiles. Cluster 7 students had higher scores on the performance and mastery-orientation scales than did the students in cluster 4.

Table 3
Summary statistics of a repeated measure ANOVA (goal orientation by cluster membership) followed by within cluster tests of simple effects.

Source	df	MS	F	p
Cluster	6	6.507	67.57	< .0001
Error	130	0.09		
Goal orientation	2	43.14	366.74	< .0001
Goal orientation x cluster	12	6.00	51.03	< .0001
Error	260	.12		
Cluster 1	2	20.53	174.55	< .01
Cluster 2	2	11.53	98.04	< .01
Cluster 3	2	16.68	141.84	< .01
Cluster 4	2	1.47	12.47	< .01
Cluster 5	2	47.17	401.14	< .01
Cluster 6	2	16.81	142.93	< .01
Cluster 7	2	.68	5.76	> .01

Interview Analysis

The interviews were analyzed following guidelines presented by Seidman (1991) in his book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research.* The data analysis was facilitated through the use of a computer software package called Ethnograph (Seidel, Friese, & Leonard, 1995).

The following steps in the procedure of qualitative data analysis were used:

Transcription

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed into written text by the author. They were then entered into a computer-based word-processing program.

Reading and Studying the Transcripts

The transcripts of the interviews were read repeatedly by the author in an attempt to gain a sense of the students and their general experience. During these readings, any passage that appeared to be relevant to the research topic was marked by brackets. These passages would have, in a general sense, conveyed something about work avoidance, helplessness, boredom, or feelings of anger and resentment.

Import and Number Data Files Procedure

The Ethnograph computer program read the transcripts on the word processing program and converted it into an Ethnograph data file. Every line of data was assigned a number. This facilitated coding.

Code Procedures

In determining which excerpts would be marked and coded, the author followed Seidman's (1991) suggestion and used the following questions as a guide:

1. What is the subject of the passage being marked?
2. Are there words or phrases that seem to describe them?
3. Is there a word within the passage itself that suggests a category into which the passage might fit?
4. Is the excerpt or passage relevant to the research question?

For the purpose of this study, the interview was intended to capture the students' reasons for work-avoidant behaviours. Specifically, the author was interested in knowing if the students were angry, resentful, had feelings of incompetency, or were bored. Thus, the coding system used by this author reflected those general categories. Passages or excerpts were marked and coded with symbols such as: WA for work avoidance, LH for learned helplessness, ANG for anger, etc. These terms were used to denote a general description. These passages were then given subcodes, for example, LH applied to lines 8-15 in Interview 086, but within that passage lines 8-10 may have reflected low self-esteem, therefore, subcode LSE would have been assigned to lines 8-10. This process was done for all 20 interviews.

Identifying Themes from Codes and Categories

Passages or excerpts were marked and coded to reflect general categories, such as, learned helplessness, boredom, work avoidance, and anger and resentment. They were also assigned codes to reflect specific characteristics of each category. After this had been completed, each transcript was examined for connections and patterns between

codes and categories. In this way, a composite picture of each student began to emerge. At this stage, the interviews were sorted according to the overriding themes of anger and resentment, helplessness, and boredom. Out of the 20 work-avoidant students interviewed, 10 interviews were chosen as being illustrative of the hypotheses put forth. These interviews are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

STUDENT INTERVIEWS

This chapter presents the interviews of 10 of the work-avoidant students. Responses were examined and, consequently, students were grouped according to their having expressed principally one of the following three major themes: feelings of resentment and anger, feelings of incompetency, and boredom. The chapter is arranged according to the noted themes. Section one concentrates on students who express feelings of anger and resentment which may lead to reduced work effort. The second section focuses on those students who convey feelings of incompetency and who demonstrate behaviours similar to learned helplessness. The third section of the chapter is devoted to those students who emerge as bored.

Analysis of the data suggested that there were two work-avoidant clusters, both with differing profiles, but in comparison to other clusters, having the highest work-avoidant mean score. These students were interviewed for the purpose of identifying possible feelings of resentment and anger, incompetency, and boredom.

Resentment and Anger

Any individual may engage in passive-aggressive behaviour as a means of relating to others. Although the feelings underlying passive aggression, that is anger, resentment, and irritability, are not readily identifiable by the aggressor, behaviours are a way of expressing these feelings (Fine et al., 1992). Three of the students interviewed described various student-teacher interactions which, upon examination, revealed certain

characteristics like feelings of resentment and anger that may have caused their work avoidance.

This first interview was with a Grade 7 female student (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.0). Ratings from the Teacher Checklist also suggested that she demonstrated many work avoidant behaviours. For example, she was rated as always forgetting to copy down homework assignments, always misplacing/forgetting books, always spending exceptionally long periods of time getting ready to work, always needing directions repeated, always giving up easily, and always requiring frequent assistance. It was interesting considering the information provided by the teacher that this student expressed deep concern over how she is viewed by others. This concern was revealed in both the Student Survey (Ego-Social Scale Score = 3.3) and in her interview. Her response to the following question acknowledged the existence of a competency issue.

How often are you presented with material that you already know and understand?

> *Sometimes I get a lot of it and I gets things wrong, because I am not trying that hard, because I already know it. Everybody thinks I don't know it.*

Here, reduced effort was offered as an excuse for not achieving as not to throw her ability into question. Work-avoidant students, like ego-oriented students, display concern over their ability as perceived by others. However, the most prevalent feature to emerge from the interview was the feeling of resentment and hostility that was directed towards the teacher, who represented authority. The student initially gave the impression that the teacher is nice but strict, then quickly provided details about how much this particular teacher bothers her, finally culminating with a declaration of hatred towards the teacher.

Describe your teacher for me.

She's nice, strict, and she don't smile.

No?

She don't smile at all. I never saw her with a smile on her face.

How does your teacher treat you?

She treats me like every other student, except sometimes she treats me like she's my mother.

How do you feel about that?

I feel right uncomfortable, because, I mean, the only person I want treating me like my mother is Jane, and of course, my mom, but she's not there.

Explain what your teacher does to make you feel like that.

Like, say I was eating something like a bag of chips and she goes, Now you're supposed to be eating something healthy before you eat that. And, you got all your homework? Make sure you got all your homework.

You believe it's only you she's treating like that?

Yeah. Now, you got to wear your glasses.

Do you sometimes feel angry at your teacher?

Yeah, when she does that. Like, in Language Arts, everything is going through my mind, like the teacher is teaching something and everything is going through my mind, and sometimes I blurts it out, which could get me into a lot of trouble.

This thing you're blurting out, is it to do with Language Arts?

I goes, oh, sometimes I blurts it out, I hates her, and she's there looking at me.

Why would you blurt that out?

I can't help it.

Is that how you feel about your teacher?

Well, sort of.

Why?

Because she makes me feel like I'm a baby and like I'm 13 and I don't need to be treated like a baby, and it's my grades, my everything, my marks that she don't need to worry about. Rather it's me. I got to worry about it, and I'm trying my best but it don't seem like its good enough.

Do you behave differently for some teachers than for others?

Yeah.

Explain that to me, please.

Well, my science teacher, he's alright. He's funny. I have no problems with him because he makes you laugh.

Do you think you do more work depending on the teacher?

I think I does more work for him than for any other teacher, because he makes it funny, and I don't have time for people that all the time are nagging you about having your homework done. That makes me not do it because I feel like, well, who cares?

The student appeared resentful over the teacher's treatment of her, which she perceived as being different from how the other students were treated. She seemed to resent the authority this teacher represented and the particular style of interaction the teacher had adopted with her. This student had aligned the teacher with the role of a parental figure which sparked deeper resentment and hostility. This was indicated in the marked preference for the Science teacher whom she described as being "funny" as opposed to the Language Arts teacher who was "nagging, nagging, all the time." The student seemed to resent the perceived interference from the teacher. Thus, her performance was significantly and deliberately down-graded in the classes this teacher was responsible for. She acknowledged the difference in her work habits:

> *I think I does more work for him than for any other teacher, because he makes it funny, and I don't have time for people that all the time are nagging you about having your homework done. That makes me not do it because I feel like, well, who cares?*

Further to this, she seemed to be proud of her poor hand-writing skills. Statements such as, "But I know one thing. I don't do my best writing in school. I can't even pick it out

and that's bad," suggested a conscious effort to underachieve. Again, the deliberateness of her actions stands out even to the point where she admitted, "I gets it wrong because I want to get it wrong." Perhaps, her academic behaviour stemmed from the anger and resentment she felt; these feelings may have led her to reduce the amount of effort she applied to her school work and contributed to her uncaring attitude.

These feelings of resentment and anger were also an integral part of this next student's interview. She was a Grade 6 student whose responses on the survey placed her in the work-avoidant cluster (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.0). The description that emerged from the Teacher Checklist was that of a student who always finds it difficult to work in groups, always has difficulty in getting along with other students, often complains that others prevent her from completing work, often does not complete tasks in the manner requested, often needs directions repeated, often has difficulty concentrating in class, and often displays poor work habits and study skills. The reduced work effort this student demonstrated may be due to the feelings of resentment and hostility she harboured against the teachers. The following passage from her interview focused on her relationship with two particular teachers and even provided a glimpse into some of her earlier experiences with teachers.

Describe your teacher for me.
Nice, funny, sometimes gets mad at people.

Do you sometimes feel angry at your teacher.
No, but my friend does.

And you don't?
Not that much.

Do you ever feel the need to get back at your teacher?
Sometimes.

Explain that to me, please.
Like if she tells you ... I don't know.

Give me an example, then.
I had a stress ball in my desk, and I wasn't playing with it. I was waiting for recess. And she sees it in my desk and took it from me, and never gave it back to me.

And, you were angry?
Yep.

What did you want to do?
Go to her desk and get it back.

What did you do instead?
Nothing.

Do you behave differently for some teachers than for others?
Yeah.

Why is that?
I don't know.

Give me an example.
I don't like one of my teachers.

What is it about that teacher that bothers you?
If you just don't get one little thing done, he gives you a note.

What does the note mean?
No homework done.

Have you received a lot of notes?
Yes.

Why is it you don't do your homework for this teacher?
I don't know.

Does it have anything to do with the teacher?

Maybe, bosses you around too much.

So, because he bosses you around, then you decide to do what?

Well, one day no one else had their hand up and I was answering most of the questions, and he bawled at me because I was answering too many questions. And no one had their hand up.

What did you do?

I was mad then cause I told mom about it, and mom got savage. Nobody else had their hand up. He told me to just sit there and be quiet.

So, the next time you were in his class, did you put your hand up to answer any questions?

No.

Do you participate in his class now?

Sometimes.

Why do you think you do work for some teachers but not for others?

Because some teachers don't bawl at you, and some do. And the work is boring.

Describe this teacher for me.

Mean.

How?

If you just ask your friend about something, he'll tell you to be quiet, and he'll move her seat away, he did that today.

So, you are more likely to do work for this teacher or your regular teacher?

Regular teacher.

Because?

He's not that good to me.

How does your regular teacher treat you?

Not that often she lets me go to the washroom, and if I have my hand up to answer a question, she tells me to put it down.

Why?

She does that to mostly everybody.

What is it about your teacher that bothers you?
She bosses you around like he does, they're the same thing, but he's meaner.

Any other teacher like that?
My teacher last year. I don't like her. She's grouchy.

How do you feel about your teacher?
I don't like her that much. She's bossy and she gives too much homework.

It seemed that this student had a problem with those whom she perceived as being "bossy." Her resentment towards those in control is evident. It is interesting that out of three teachers she focused on, she noted the same trait in each one. It would seem highly probable that her resentment would spill over into her motivation to achieve.

Another interesting trait of this particular student was how she down-played her role in the conflicts that occurred between her and the teachers. A case in point would be as follows:

I don't like one of my teachers.

What is it about the teacher that bothers you?
If you don't get one little thing done, he gives you a note.

What does the note mean?
No homework done.

Have you received a lot of notes?
Yes.

It would seem that incomplete homework assignments were a recurring problem. However, she seemed to be angry that she was treated like this. She interpreted this work-avoidant behaviour as insignificant and minimized the offense with a phrase like "If you don't get one little thing done." By doing this, she maintained her image of

being unjustly persecuted by authority figures and also her belief that teachers are mean and petty.

The words or phrases selected by this student to describe her teachers paint an unflattering picture. Phrases, such as "bosses you around too much," "mean," "he's not that good to me," "she bosses you around like he does," and "she's grouchy," illuminate her issues. Resentment towards authority, anger at external demands and feelings of persecution were very much a part of this student's way of life and possibly impacted significantly on her achievement behaviour.

The third student who actively expressed anger at authority, through disregard for rules and disruptive behaviour, was a Grade 7 male student. From the Teacher Checklist, this student was one who always forgets to copy down homework assignments, always misplaces personal belongings, always makes excuses for not doing assignments, often spends exceptionally long periods of time getting ready to start work, often needs directions repeated, often does not complete tasks in manner specified, often finds it difficult to work in groups, often has difficulty concentrating in class, and often displays poor work habits and study skills. These teacher descriptors corresponded nicely to the information provided by the student in the Student Survey (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.6) and to information provided in the interview. His interview provided anecdotal information that suggested he had minimal interest in academic achievement, yet, did not appear to think himself incompetent. The following passage illustrated these points:

What is it about all the others that you don't like?

I don't like Science because it sucks. Social Studies I don't like because we're doing a project on across Canada, and I'm only at the fourth one, and everyone else got their's done.

Why are you behind?

I was late getting started, looking for all that information.

How about Language Arts?

I don't like that cause you have to write too much.

You don't enjoy that?

No, that's what we got in there now. I was playing with my exercise book.

Why?

Cause I wouldn't have to listen to the teacher talk about Language.

What do you think of yourself as a student?

Not a good student, not a bad student, so kind of in-between.

What makes you "not a good student?"

Well, I don't listen that much, and I almost got suspended, I mean kicked off the bus. And, that's it for bad. For good, I help the teacher pass things out, I'm the one getting the temperature for our Science project, and you might as well say I'm friendly to people. That's all for good.

How do you think you are doing in school?

Well, sort of in-between too cause I don't bring home no work. I've been here a couple of months, and I've only brought it home 2 or 3 times.

Why is that?

Well, whenever I go home, I go up to my friend's place and we go out so I don't bring home my homework.

Do you think you are doing the best possible work that you can do?

Yeah, I am doing the best I can.

You are?

Yeah, compared to up there. I was up there for almost a year, brought my homework home about four times for the year, so it's pretty bad up there.

So, you think you are doing better here?

Yeah, I used to get detention every day up there, I'd skip it and I would get two more detentions. It was pretty bad.

Is school boring for you?

Well, school's a little drag sometimes. But, you have to get your education sometime.

What makes it boring?

Well, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, Religion, Health, all that is what makes it boring.

What else makes it boring?

Well, maybe because I like doing something else. Well, if the teacher is talking or doing something on the board, I'm always drawing.

What kinds of things do you do instead of doing work in your classroom?

Well, like talking to a friend, clearing out my desk, or something like that.

Do you sometimes feel angry at teachers?

Well, yeah. When she gives out homework, it makes me mad because we got homework, and I didn't want any so I don't bring it home.

Do you ever try to get even with the teacher?

Only up there, I skipped school getting even with her.

With your teacher in New Brunswick?

Yeah, I even phoned the school and gave her a crank call.

What bothered you about the teacher?

Well, she was always picking on me, always giving me detention, like some guy wrote bad words on the window and she came to me saying "You wrote the bad words on the window, didn't you?" And I goes, "No, because I was in the cafeteria all lunch time." She said, "Yes, you did. So, you got detention for four days, four hours after school." So, I said, "All right," then, I don't go. Right? The teacher treats me bad, I'll treat her bad. I kind of got even with those teachers up there.

Do you behave differently for some teachers than for others?

Yeah, it all depends on what kind of teacher it is. Like if it was a nice teacher who helps you out a lot, I'd respect her, but if she blames stuff on you, treat her like crap.

When you obtain a low grade or a poor evaluation in school, how does this make you feel?

I don't really care what I get as long as I pass.

A number of interesting points emerged from this interview. Foremost were the classic work-avoidant behaviours, such as not completing homework assignments, displaying behaviours that compete with academic tasks, that is, talking, drawing on his exercise book, clearing out his desk, and procrastination. As well, the student seemed to have been prone to receiving detentions and clearly had an established preference for subject areas that he found easy and that required little effort on his part, such as Gym.

Second, the phrases chosen to describe himself as a good student, such as "I help the teacher pass things out, and you might as well say I'm friendly to people. That's all for good," bring to mind a picture of a student who may act on his/her hostility but disguises it. The literature suggested these students are often perceived as friendly as their aggressiveness is covert as opposed to overt.

The impression given in the interview was that the student's way of displaying his anger may have changed. The resistance to external demands and resentment towards authority were present, but his manner of expressing his feelings seemed to be less openly hostile. He had recounted incidents of misbehaviour from his previous school which he attributed to his relationship with his teachers at that time. He said, "The teacher treats me bad, I'll treat her bad. I kind of got even with those teachers up there." In reference to his current schooling, the information he provided did not suggest that his work habits had improved, just that he was not so overtly aggressive. Perhaps, instead, his feelings of anger and resentment were expressed through his academic

behaviours, such as procrastination, not completing homework, and fooling around in class.

In all three interviews, the recurring motif was one of feelings of anger and resentment and reduced work effort. These students seemed to possess underlying feelings of resentment and hostility which were displayed through work-avoidant behaviours.

Learned Helplessness

In the literature on learned helplessness, particular behavioural, cognitive, and affective characteristics emerged as belonging to students who displayed learned helplessness. Some of these were: an expectancy for failure, an unwillingness to try the original task in which failure occurred, listlessness and passivity, self-depreciating remarks, and low self-esteem (Balk, 1983; Bulkowsky & Willows, 1980; Greer & Wethered, 1987; Roveche et al., 1981). As well, sadness and frustration were experienced more often by helpless students than nonhelpless students when failure was encountered. Behavioural manifestations of learned helplessness included waiting for assistance instead of actively seeking solutions, working slowly or hesitantly, exerting little or no effort, getting frustrated over assignments, and quickly saying, "I can't do it" (Medick, 1979; Spaulding, 1983). From the Teacher Checklist, Student Survey, and the interview, three of the students seemed to show frustration, low self-esteem, feelings of sadness and futility, and withdrawal of effort, which, from a learned helplessness view, would lead to work avoidance.

This first student was a male Grade 6 student (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.0). The Teacher Checklist of work-avoidant behaviours highlighted behaviours such as: forgetting to record homework assignments, misplacing books, giving up easily when faced with a problem, requiring frequent assistance, appearing to lack motivation and interest in school work, and in the teacher's opinion having poor work habits and study skills overall. Combining the information gathered from the Student Survey, the Teacher Checklist, and his interview confirmed his work-avoidance. For example,

So, you are convinced you cannot do well in French?
Yep.

Is there another subject you feel that way about?
No.

How did that happen with French?
All the time gets low marks.

What does that make you think when you get low marks in French?
I don't know, that I don't know French.

How do you behave in French class?
Stays in my seat.

What do you do during French class if you don't understand it?
I just does some crossword puzzles in the French book.

What does your French teacher say?
Me and Jim have to do a journal entry for a whole period. I had only 2 words down and Jim had 3.

What was her reaction to that?
She was mad.

Why did you only get 2 words down in that period?
Cause I don't know them.

If you come to something in French class that you don't know, what do you do?
Ask the teacher.

Did you ask her about the journal entry?
She had it all on the board, but I couldn't understand it.

You couldn't understand it, so you just sat there and waited for the period to be over?
Yeah, I was happy today when we had no French. She was sick.

What do you think will happen if you have a choice between doing French and another subject?
I wouldn't do French. When I gets to grade nine, I'm going to drop French.

What kind of comments were on your report card?
Daydreams a lot.

Are you daydreaming a lot?
Yeah.

Why?
A lot of times I pays attention, but when she's writing things on the board, I usually stays there and daydreams. Then I has to catch up.

This student seemed to be experiencing an acute response to a particular subject. The references to having had continuous difficulty with French, obtaining low marks, and the conviction of not being able to achieve satisfactorily in French, all translated into minimal effort being applied in French class. A faulty thought pattern that exists in learned-helpless students is "I'm not going to get it right, so why bother trying?" It would seem that this is a guiding principle that this student has adopted when it comes to French. As Mark (1983) stated, "They give up before they begin a task and have adopted an attitude of expected failure" (p. 1).

This student also displayed many other characteristics that resemble key features of learned helplessness: the tendency to await assistance instead of seeking out help from the teacher or classmate, the attribution of failure to low ability, and the expectancy for future failure. In the following interchange, the negative impact of perception of low ability becomes obvious.

Do you have any brothers and sisters?
One sister.

Is she in school?
She's out of school now.

How did she do in school?
Good, better than I'm doing.

How do you know that?
She does better at tests, she has way higher marks.

What do you think of that?
She's better than me at school.

How does that make you feel?
I don't know.

This student believed that higher grades indicate higher ability. Therefore, the inverse must be true: low grades means low ability. Citing a 1973 work by Dweck and Repucci, Craske (1988) emphasized that perception of low ability leads to negative affect and lowering of self-esteem in learned-helpless students.

Learned helplessness is observable in many student behaviours such as giving up quickly on a test, checking off answers at random or making little or no effort. This student's behaviours, such as, daydreaming, doing crossword puzzles during class time,

and not completing class assignments can be viewed as arising out of a work-avoidance orientation. In actuality, this student has given up on French, although technically, he will continue to occupy a space in the class until grade nine. McKean (1994) explained that the difficulty is compounded for learned-helpless students when they give up on an academic task because it results in a future failure to learn the necessary skills or information on which subsequent success is dependent upon.

The next student was a Grade 7 male who apparently had convinced himself that high academic achievement was not possible despite the amount of effort that was applied. His Work-Avoidant Scale Score was 2.8, and on the Teacher Checklist, he was rated as often or sometimes displaying work-avoidant behaviours. Requiring frequent assistance, displaying little confidence in his ability, forgetting to copy down homework assignments, and needing directions repeated to him were some areas that stood out in the Teacher Checklist. These behaviours seemed unlikely for a student whose Work-Avoidant Scale Score was only 2.8 unless these were strategies used to fool the teacher into believing that he was capable but he was just not trying. His belief that he was doing as much as he could to achieve success revealed itself in this excerpt from his interview:

When you received your report card, how did that make you feel?
I felt like I wanted to get higher marks, and I was already trying my hardest, so I thought that I can't get no higher mark.

Do you still think that way?
Sometimes.

What did your mom say?

That I got to get higher marks. Dad said if I don't get the marks up I won't be allowed out in the boat this summer.

How about your teachers, what did they say?

I got to get my marks up.

How does all that make you feel?

Just sad sometimes. Cause I'm trying my best, and they gets mad at me.

One of the most noticeable features of this exchange was the negative association that has been established in his mind between effort and achievement. This student believed that, because effort was not resulting in the desired consequences, then there was a more important attribute missing, that is, ability. It was interesting to note that although he saw himself as trying his best, his teacher portrayed him as a student who had withdrawn effort, through not completing homework, failing to copy down homework assignments, giving up on tasks, and displaying other academic behaviours that were incompatible with full effort being applied. Perhaps for this student's self-image, it was better to be perceived as not trying instead of not being capable (Ego-Social Scale Score = 3.0). His view of self was revealed in the next few lines of the interview:

Sometimes school can be challenging. You may have a hard task, a subject that is difficult to understand, or your teacher may go too quickly for you. Is school ever hard for you?

Yeah, when the teacher goes too fast with the work. Others gets it and sometimes I don't.

How does that make you feel?

That I'm not as good as the rest of them.

Is that what you think?

Yes.

What do you do then?
Sometimes I asks some smarter students.

Is there pressure to do well in school?
Sometimes, when its hard.

Do you think you cannot get higher marks no matter what you do?
Yeah, especially in Health and Social Studies.

How do you feel about them?
They're too hard. I don't understand.

The student's self-esteem had been severely impacted on, as phrases such as "I'm not as good as the rest of them," and "Sometimes, I ask some smarter students" illustrate. Here, we see the self-depreciating remarks and low self-esteem which may lead to reduced motivation. The student's feelings of sadness and futility, affective characteristics associated with learned helplessness, were directly and implicitly stated throughout the dialogue: "I was trying my hardest so I thought that I can't get no higher marks" and "Just sad sometimes. Cause I'm trying my best and they gets mad at me." If, as Miller (1986) suggested, learned helplessness occurs when a student experiences failure despite effort, then this student's experience seems markedly similar to learned helplessness. Martino (1993) summarized this concept as follows: "Their sense of self-worth has deteriorated. They have convinced themselves their problems have resulted from low ability, and they believe there is little hope for change" (p. 19).

This next student was also male and in Grade 7. His teacher rated him very high on work-avoidant behaviours, receiving scores of mostly fours and fives in all items on the Teacher Checklist. His own rating on the work-avoidant items on the Student Survey

were also high with a score of 3.6 on the Work-Avoidant Scale. It would seem then that he is work avoidant. His reasons for his work-avoidant behaviour can be found in his interview and are similar to the patterns of learned helplessness. Characteristics, such as frustration and worry over evaluation, that preoccupy the learned helpless student emerged throughout this student's interview.

Do you get all your work completed?
Not all the time, no.

What happens?
I gets stuck and that. I finds Math hard.

When you get stuck on something in Math, what do you do?
I asks the teacher for help.

How often is school hard for you?
When I does Math.

What makes it hard for you?
I gets stuck, the teacher is gone, and you got no one to help you.

What do you do then?
Wait for the teacher to come back, goes on to the next one.

Do you sometimes feel angry at teachers?
Yeah.

Why?
Gets all stressed out about my work.

What specifically do you get stressed out about?
Math.

What are you afraid of with Math?
Failing.

You said sometimes your teacher bawls at you to start your work again. What makes you stop?

I just stops.

What do you do when you stop doing your work?

I fiddles in my desk.

How was your report card that just went home?

Bad, but better than last time.

What kind of comments are on your report card?

I don't know. I didn't read it.

What did your mother say about it?

Well, I didn't get grounded. She said it was a bit better than last time.

What is it about school that bothers you?

Gets all stressed out about my work.

Is it math in particular that stresses you out?

Math and other stuff. Religion and that's all.

When you obtain a low grade or a poor evaluation in school, how does this make you feel?

Bad.

And what do you want to do when you get it?

Rip it up.

McKean (1994) stated that one of the cognitive effects of helplessness is increased frustration when faced with a setback. This student experienced a similar reaction when he encountered difficulty as can be seen from his words: "I gets stuck, and you got no one to help you," and "Gets all stressed out about my work." These phrases bring forth a different picture of a problem than phrases such as "I'm having trouble," or "I'm a little worried." Learned-helplessness students tend to react differently to problems than

nonhelpless students. They are not efficient problem solvers and view the problem as insurmountable instead of as a challenge. Also, learned-helplessness students create the impression that everything is difficult about the subject area as opposed to isolating a specific area. It has been suggested in the literature that learned-helplessness students are not only reluctant to attempt the initial failed task, but they also try to avoid related activities (Greer & Wethered, 1987).

The interviewee gave the impression that he engaged in work-avoidant behaviours in school. References to "stopping work," "fiddles in my desk," "talking, fooling around," and not completing assigned tasks were some of the behaviours he may have chosen to use as a coping mechanism. The implication of work-avoidant behaviour was strongly supported by the Teacher Checklist. His deep concern over failing suggests that he is interested in protecting his self-image (Ego-Social Scale Score = 3.3). Brophy (1995) asserts that the pressure to achieve, coupled with the threat of humiliation if failure occurs, conspires to prevent helpless students from engaging in any action that may further damage their self-worth. A withdrawal of effort, in combination with a display of bravado through various behaviours, leaves learned-helpless students with an illusion of self-worth. It is ultimately better for failure to be perceived as due to lack of effort and disinterest than to low ability.

The three interviews that were selected represent learned-helpless styles that are prevalent in classrooms through Newfoundland. Low self-esteem, perceptions of low ability, and feelings of futility and frustration often lead to a withdrawal of effort and result in work-avoidant behaviours.

Boredom

As early as 1960, boredom was defined as resulting from a scarcity of external stimuli or as resulting from external stimuli that was excessively monotonous (Robinson, 1975; O'Hanlon, 1981). The presumption is then that bored students are motivated to engage in diversionary tactics in order to vary the activities or escape the situation completely (O'Hanlon, 1981). These tactics include falling asleep, daydreaming, clowning around, and skipping class (Robinson, 1975; Briscoe, 1977). The literature on boredom in schools also suggests that bored pupils do not look forward to going to school most days and are more delighted when they have an opportunity to take a day off.

A host of reasons are supplied in the literature to explain the existence of boredom in schools, they include: lack of adequate challenge, a curriculum that is not relevant, excessive lecturing by teachers, lack of variety, and monotony (Larson & Richards, 1991; Robinson, 1975; Wlodkowski &Jaynes, 1992). The reasons supplied by the students in this study for their boredom resemble those that have emerged in the literature review.

This first student who appeared to fall under the category of bright but bored was a Grade 7 male (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.3). His responses also indicated that he is not interested in learning for its own sake, which would be a task-mastery orientation (Task-Mastery Scale Score = 2.2).

The Teacher Checklist also suggested the existence of a work-avoidance orientation. Problem areas included: lacking motivation and interest in school work, complaining of classwork being boring, and displaying poor work habits and study skills. This student was not perceived by the teacher to have a competency issue; he was not rated as requiring frequent assistance, lacking in confidence, or seen as having difficulty in completing assignments.

From the Teacher Checklist, it would seem that he is a capable student but uninterested. From his own Student Survey, it seems that he is indeed uninterested to the point of being work-avoidant. From the interview, we are provided with information regarding his disinterest.

How do you think you're doing in school?
I don't know. All right I suppose.

Do you think you're doing the best possible work that you can do?
No.

No? Why not?
I don't know.

But you don't think you are doing it?
No.

Is school ever boring for you?
Yes, all the time.

Why is it boring?
Don't do nothing.

What do you mean do nothing? What makes it boring?
Just sitting down, teacher talking, makes no sense.

When do you mostly get bored?
In French, Religion, and Health.

When you find yourself feeling bored, what kind of things do you do to relieve the boredom?
Just sits there.

Do you daydream, mark on your books, or do anything else?
Just sits there and be's bored.

What kind of student do you think you are?
I don't know, an in-between.

If you could change anything about school, what would it be?
No French.

What is it you don't like about school? Do you not like doing work in school?
Don't like doing nothing. I'd rather stay home - go trouting, hunting, anything but school.

Because?
School is dull.

This student seems to have disengaged from the school culture. He cites inactivity and meaningless as contributing factors to the belief that "school is dull." From the interview, it is possible to detect a hostile attitude towards school. When asked what he does if he encounters difficulty in school, he responds with "complains to the teacher." His choice of verbs may be an indicator of his negativity. His response style was brief and sparse, as if even the interview was a bother to him. Robinson (1975) found that bored students were more hostile to school than other students, and Gjesme (1977) revealed that there was a strong correlation between feelings of boredom and general dissatisfaction. Relevance of the school curriculum appears to play an important role in

this student's boredom. His interest and preference for activities such as hunting, fishing, and trouting are not supported by the school. The traditional school culture does not meet this student's needs. He is particularly aware of his feelings of dissatisfaction with school and he acknowledges his boredom readily:

Is school ever boring for you?
Yes, all the time.

Nor is this student motivated to achieve through the use of evaluative procedures, for example,

When you obtain a low grade or a poor evaluation in school, how does that make you feel?
Don't care.

You don't care about it?
No.

How about your teacher? What does she have to say about it?
Nothing.

What do your parents say?
Bawls at me, tells me to work or study harder.

Actually, he dismissed the power of evaluation by affirming that it did not matter to him if he received a bad report. This lack of concern towards school was seen in his interview responses, his Student Survey, and could also be gathered from the Teacher Checklist. It is fair to suggest that this student's feelings and opinions about school are summed up best by his own words, "School is dull."

Similar to the first student identified as being bored, this second student, a girl attending Grade 6, did not emerge on the Teacher Checklist as displaying work-avoidant

behaviours. Perhaps, she does enough to keep the teacher off her back, but she herself feels that she is not working at her potential. What the Teacher Checklist did tell us was that she was confident, capable of completing tasks and assignments, usually prepared for class, occasionally complained class work was boring, and sometimes appeared to lack motivation and interest in school work. However, she identified herself as work avoidant through her responses on the Student Survey (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 2.8). In a sense, she is self-described work avoidant. From her interview, she presented as quiet, capable and underchallenged. Excessive lecturing by the teacher and material that was repetitious appeared to be the main causes of her boredom.

Is school hard for you?
No.

Is school ever boring for you?
Sometimes.

When do you mostly get bored?
When the teacher is talking for a long time.

What do you do when you bored?
Put my head on the desk.

Why is it boring?
Makes the time go slowly.

What makes it boring?
Nothing to do, just listen to the teacher.

When do you mostly get bored?
Just sometimes when the teacher is talking, explaining something we already knows.

How often are you presented with material that you already know and understand?
Mostly in Math.

Earlier in the interview, she had indicated she disliked Math, although it was easy for her. Perhaps, her dislike stems from her boredom with a subject that is easy and with a subject where she is presented with material she knows and understands. Further into the interview, she described her relationship with the teacher as good, although sometimes the teacher got angry at her for talking to other students while she was supposed to be working. She explained her misbehaviour as follows:

What is your teacher doing when you are turned around talking?
Writing down notes or we're supposed to be doing work.

Why is it you're talking when you are supposed to be working?
Usually, I has it all done then.

What is it about your teacher that bothers you?
Not much, only if she talks too long.

When asked how she felt about school, she responded by suggesting it was okay sometimes; for instance, if they had gym or something fun to do, but the same material over and over again bothered her. In her words,

> *Math, same stuff over and over again. Social Studies is okay, but the teacher talks a lot, she explains stuff and I already know it.*

However, despite her negative perception of school, her academic self-esteem had remained intact, as can be seen from this comment:

How would you describe yourself as a student?
Sometimes quiet, kind of smart.

Out of this interview arises a picture of a capable student who was bored with school. She admitted herself that school was not hard and she was "kind of smart." Yet, she is negative about school and has rated herself as a work-avoidant student. She

was bored with school. In the literature on boredom in schools, monotony was frequently cited as a major cause of boredom. A statement such as, "Math, same stuff over and over again. Social Studies is okay, but the teacher talks a lot, she explains stuff and I already knows it" is an indication of monotony. It is interesting that Math is the subject she identified as her least favourite. It was also the subject where she mostly encountered material that she was already familiar with and that she found easy. As well, it was the area where the teacher engaged in frequent chapter reviews. Larson and Richards (1991) emphasized that learning, with its demands for practice and routine, can become tedious. For bright students who are often under-challenged, boredom is a natural consequence of activities that are repetitive and habitual.

The next student, a Grade 6 female, provided us in her interview with a sample of behaviours that are concomitant to boredom. Again, the Teacher Checklist did not suggest that she displayed work-avoidant type behaviours. According to her teacher, she was confident in her ability, did not experience difficulty in completing assignments, and was generally prepared for school. Yet, this student had rated herself as work avoidant through her responses on the Student Survey (Work-Avoidant Scale Score = 3.0). Similar to the previous student, she is self-described work avoidant. From the interview also, her confidence in her ability to achieve successfully was stated clearly:

How do you think you are doing in school?
Great.

Sometimes school can be challenging. You may have a hard task, a subject that is difficult to understand, or your teacher may go too quickly for you. How often is school hard for you?

Not very much.

Thus, it would seem her dislike of school, which she also alluded to during the interview was not due to an incompetency factor. This was also evidenced by the teacher's ratings. The reason given by this student for not enjoying school was boredom. The excerpt from her interview illustrated this:

Why do you like coming to school? Or do you like coming to school?

No.

Why not?

I don't know.

What would you rather be doing than coming to school?

Be outdoors - playing.

Is school ever boring for you?

Sometimes.

When do you mostly get bored?

When we got Health and Social Studies.

What makes it boring?

When the teacher is reading, I falls asleep.

When you find yourself feeling bored, what kind of things, if anything, do you do to relieve the boredom?

I try to listen, but I don't.

What happens when you get bored?

Daydreams lots of time, gets sleepy, plays with my books on my desk.

Robinson (1975) mentioned that daydreaming and falling asleep were a set of sedentary strategies used to deal with boredom. Also, notice that the student struggled

to maintain interest, but finding it impossible, tried to find a way to cope with the situation through the use of diversionary activities. The student gave the impression that she was quite capable, she pointed out that she never had a low mark before, and she believed she was doing great in school. However, despite this, she did not like doing work in school, and she preferred Gym class perhaps for the variety it offered. Feldhusen and Kroll (1991) suggested that bright students became bored because they did not receive adequate challenge from the curriculum and the teacher strategies employed were often unsuitable for their level. It was apparent that text reading by the teacher was a strategy that created boredom for this student.

The last student in this section was a Grade 7 male student who found that lecturing, as a teacher strategy, elicited feelings of boredom in him. His Work-Avoidant Scale Score was 2.8. The Teacher Checklist suggested that while this student was confident in his ability level, he sometimes encountered difficulty in completing assignments, and also at times appeared to lack motivation and interest in school work. According to the teacher, he also demonstrated work-avoidant behaviours such as: forgetting to copy down homework, needing directions repeated, and spending exceptionally long periods of time getting ready to start work. This student's own words revealed his underachievement behaviour:

What are some things you don't like about school?
Doing my work.

Do you mean work in school or homework?
Homework.

How about work that's assigned in class?
It's okay.

What is it about homework that you don't like?
I got to do it at home.

What would you rather be doing?
Watching T.V.

Do you think you are doing the best possible work that you can do?
No.

Why not?
Some nights we has a test and I don't want to study.

No, why not?
I'm not in the mood for it.

There was no evidence to suggest that he believed his ability was endangering his achievement, rather, it was the amount of effort he exerted, which was under his own control. In the interview, he gave the impression that his achievement is satisfactory for him but that his parents encouraged him to attain 80s or higher. His response to his parent's concern suggested that he did not question his ability and that the status quo was okay with him, "I tells her it's impossible to do that in every test. I tries my best." In response to experiencing boredom in school, his reply was as follows:

Is school ever boring for you?
Sometimes.

What makes it boring?
When they're talking, talking, talking, and talking.

Why is it boring?
I don't know.

When you find yourself feeling bored, what kind of things, if anything, do you do to relieve the boredom?

Draw stuff on the back of my book. When I don't want to do it, I'll draw on the back of my book. But if I want to do it, I'll ask the teacher to explain it to me.

This interviewee seems to be an average student, behaviourally and cognitively. His statements suggested that his achievement was acceptable, and it appeared he was not disruptive. Yet, he acknowledged that (a) he did not like doing work in school, (b) he preferred to watch T.V., and (c) he was not doing the best work that he could do. Generally, it appeared that this student was somewhat uninterested in school although he expressed some level of concern over evaluation. This concern was ironic considering his comment, "Some nights we has a test I don't want to study."

The primary source of boredom for this student was teacher lecturing which led him to engage in a diversion tactic, like "Draws stuff on my book." O'Hanlon (1981) proposed that bored students were motivated to engage in diversionary tactics in order to escape the situation completely. These diversionary tactics were work-avoidant behaviours.

These students had little difficulty saying they were bored in and with school. The reasons may vary slightly, from one student to another, but the result was the same, there were certain school practices that conflicted with the motivation to learn. Wlodkowski and Jaynes (1992) asserted that "By virtue of their size, requirement for routine, order and practice, and typical populations, schools are a natural haven for boredom" (p. 12).

Summary

The data collected here indicated that resentment and anger, beliefs of incompetency, and boredom may give rise to work avoidance. Students' phrases and the behaviours students reported indicated that these mechanisms (resentment and anger, beliefs of incompetency, and boredom) parallel some aspects of passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. It is important to note that this was an exploratory study and sought only to provide evidence of association between the mechanisms that arise in work avoidance and those that arise in passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. Future work may provide stronger evidence of causality.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section summarizes the project and the findings of the study and presents the discussion. The second section contains recommendations for dealing with students who have some characteristics similar to passive-aggressive, learned-helplessness, and bored students. The last section presents the conclusions, implications for future research, and limitations of the study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between the work-avoidance goal orientation and its manifestation of mechanisms (anger and resentment, incompetency, and boredom) and their similarity to the mechanisms that arise in passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom.

Data was analyzed to identify students who had a predominant work-avoidance orientation. Subsequent interviews revealed work-avoidant students who possessed feelings of anger and resentment, beliefs of incompetency or who were bored. These feelings often lead to reduced work effort on the part of the student. It was found that these mechanisms (i.e., feelings) that gave rise to work avoidance were markedly similar to the mechanisms that give rise to passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. This study and its findings have important implications for the education system with respect to dealing with angry and resentful students, students who feel incompetent, and bored students.

Discussion

Previous research on achievement motivation firmly established the important role of goal orientations in motivation and learning. The research paid particular attention to task-mastery goals and ego-social goals and their corresponding learning styles. Most recently, a third goal orientation emerged; this was the work-avoidant goal. This work-avoidance orientation was predictive of certain types of learning behaviours, such as avoiding work, getting work done with minimal effort, eliciting help from others, copying work, guessing at answers, and escaping teacher constraints. The work-avoidance orientation was positively associated with ego-social orientation and negatively associated with the task-mastery orientation.

A qualitative analysis of the interviews of work-avoidant students suggested that out of 20 students, half of the students displayed characteristics that paralleled some aspects of passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, and boredom. The information provided by the student interviews illustrated substantial differences amongst the work-avoidant students. The angry-resentful work-avoidant students tended to be motivated by their resentment towards authority, as represented by teachers or parents. In contrast, the work-avoidant students with competency issues were notable by their apathy and sadness. Their behaviours were guided by the premise that "I cannot, so why try?" Bored work-avoidant students were neither questioning their ability nor concerned with expressing their anger. They tended to be on the average more hostile towards school than other students and more bothered by a repetitive and unchallenging curriculum.

It is difficult to compare the quantitative and qualitative results of this study with other studies apart from validating the existence of the three known goal orientations. However, this study has in fact replicated the findings of many others by identifying the three goal orientations as task-mastery, ego-social, and work-avoidant. Yet, there exists a paucity of research on the work-avoidance goal as compared to the research information available on task-mastery goals and ego-social goals. Further to that, no studies were found that examined work avoidance in conjunction with passive aggressiveness, learned helplessness, or boredom. Be that as it may, there are a significant number of studies in existence that address these issues as separate entities. It is from that body of work, in combination with the literature that is available on work avoidance that enabled this author to suggest that work avoidance may be a manifestation of mechanisms that parallel some aspects of passive aggression, learned helplessness, and boredom.

Considering the widespread student motivation problems that the educational system is faced with, and given our knowledge that achievement is a goal-directed behaviour, then it would seem logical to focus attention on the work-avoidance orientation as it has many unproductive learning behaviours associated with it.

If, as this study suggests, work-avoidant students can indeed be identified as belonging to particular subgroups, then, too, the educational interventions can be more specific and hopefully more effective. Thus, improvements in the area of student motivation may arise from further research on work avoidance and its possible manifestation as mechanisms, such as resentment and anger, incompetency, and boredom.

Recommendations

Passive-Aggressive Students

Hardt (1988) strongly recommended the use of praise and encouragement with passive-aggressive children. She maintained that it was necessary to reinforce successful completion of tasks by these students to ensure continued effort. An additional suggestion of Hardt's was to pair passive-aggressive students with non-passive aggressive students. This would provide the opportunity for modelling and socialization. Both Perry and Flannery (1982) and Frances and Widiger (1990) recommended assertiveness training for passive-aggressive students. This training would enable passive-aggressive students to express their anger openly and in an appropriate fashion. Frances and Widiger (1990) also suggested psychoeducation as an alternative strategy for dealing with passive-aggressive students. The aim of such a program was to make these students aware of the impact of their behaviour on others and enable them to see why people became so frustrated with them.

Counselling, as an intervention for passive-aggressive students, was also a strategy that was proposed by Weiner (1970) and Parsons (1983). Weiner believed that counselling should be two-pronged, aimed at both parents and students. He maintained that if students were using grades as a way of retaliating against their parents, then parents should be advised to relax any pressure they were putting on their children and cease to complain about their children's performance, thereby reducing the effectiveness of poor grades as a weapon. For students, he proposed brief counselling aimed at helping students clarify their values, realize their strengths and abilities, and attempt to

move students towards developing an intrinsic motivation. Parsons, on the other hand, advised that extensive counselling may be necessary for students who display typical passive-aggressive behaviours. He prescribed training in assertive behaviour and communication skills to reduce the need for passive-aggressive type responses.

Medick (1979) cautioned that regardless of the intervention, a "passive-aggressive child who is a pro does not give up on passive-aggressive behaviours easily. The road to more positive sustained behaviour is somewhat inconsistent, involving a few steps forward and then a few back" (p. 132).

Learned Helpless Students

The more recent literature on learned helplessness advised that "these students need assistance in regaining self-confidence in their academic abilities and in developing strategies for coping with failure and persisting with problem solving efforts when they experience difficulties" (Brophy, 1995, p. 199). Citing works by Good and Brophy (1994, 1995), Brophy (1995) recommended attribution retraining and mastery learning approaches for use with learned helpless students. The attribution retraining program has as its ultimate aim changing students' attributions of failure from a cause such as a lack of ability to a cause such as insufficient effort or the use of an inappropriate strategy. Mastery learning approaches were intended to assist students in setting reasonable goals and helping them realize they have the potential to achieve their goals if they apply themselves.

Consistent with attribution retraining and mastery learning approaches were three strategies devised by Greer and Wethered (1987) for counsellors working with learned helpless students:

1. Develop realistic attribution. Help students identify realistic reasons for failure and success. Point out the reasons for failure, stressing causes that are external, inconsistent, or specific to the situation.
2. Provide feedback. Undue attention should not be given to the helpless students. Students should be encouraged to believe in their own potential and invited to examine past experiences for evidence of control.
3. Provide success experiences. Emphasize that errors may be attributed to insufficient efforts or an ineffective strategy. Parents and teachers should encourage students to seek out activities that provide experiences of control and success.

All the above approaches for parents, teachers, and counsellors have as their guiding tenet, "These children will not be failures but merely children who fail to try" (Greer & Wethered, 1987, p. 161). That is why it is essential for these students to participate in learning experiences.

Bright-but-Bored Students

Baum, Renzulli, and Hébert (1994) conducted a project which involved seventeen bright but underachieving students. They found that by involving the students in a

creative venture, fourteen improved academically during that year and in the year following the intervention. This study and others by Baum and Renzulli indicate that completing a meaningful project or work that had a personal significance to students resulted in increases in self-esteem, overall motivation, and academic self-efficacy. Also, "research on high ability students, in general, indicates that allowing students to pursue topics of personal interests and in their preferred styles of learning often results in high levels of achievement" (Baum et al., 1994, p. 48).

The approaches that had been most successful in dealing with high ability underachievers tended to have certain features in common. They were student centered, highlighted students' strengths, and respected the interests of the students. Other options that were available for working with bright but bored students included curriculum compacting and grade skipping. Curriculum compacting allowed students to finish the material faster and turn to something that interested them. Hallahan and Kauffman (1994) believed that permitting students to skip grades or subjects was a way of responding to high ability underachievement. This made school more challenging and interesting. However, earlier authors, such as Davis (1984), cautioned against grade skipping unless the social and emotional maturity of students would permit a successful transition.

Feldhusen and Kroll (1991) offered some general suggestions regarding students who are bright but bored. They advised that the classroom teacher should be able to offer instruction to the differing levels of ability present in the classroom or there should

be separate full-time classes for these students. They recommended grade skipping if either one of the above options was not available. Wlodkowski and Jaynes (1992), in their article entitled "Overcoming Boredom and Indifference," listed a series of eight steps that were intended to combat against student boredom:

1. Provide variety in learning. Alternate instructional methods.
2. Connect material to be learned with student interests.
3. Be unpredictable. Create a feeling of enjoyment and anticipation in the classroom.
4. Use original and innovative teaching methods and content with students as much as possible.
5. Give students questions and tasks that require analysis, reflection, and clarification. Take their thinking beyond rote memory.
6. Encourage students to be active participants as opposed to passive listeners.
7. Provide consistent feedback. This will enhance their motivation to learn as they have a chance to correct errors and to receive encouragement from their teachers.
8. Construct learning experiences that have natural consequences or finished products.

Conclusions

Analysis and synthesis of all data from the literature and research led to the following findings:

1. It has emerged from the research on achievement motivation that there are primarily three goals that direct achievement performance. They are task-mastery goals, ego-social goals, and work-avoidance goals. This finding was replicated in this study.
2. Data collected indicated that anger and hostility, learned helplessness, and boredom may give rise to work avoidance. Passive-aggressive behaviour may also result from feelings of anger.

Implications for Future Research

1. Motivating students to achieve is a problem that is plaguing the school system. Given our knowledge that achievement is a goal-directed behaviour, further study into the work-avoidance goal orientation would be beneficial.
2. More research to further support the concepts and dimensions of work avoidance is needed.

Limitations of the Study

1. Passive aggression is a clinical diagnosis which cannot be made on the basis of the students' interviews. It was not the author's intent to provide a clinical diagnosis; rather, the purpose was to draw attention to the apparent anger and resentment expressed by some students and the subsequent work avoidance.
2. This project was a multi-stepped study which perhaps could have been broken into two or three separate studies, allowing the work and its consequent results to be more manageable.

3. The qualitative analysis of the data conducted by the author was not validated in any other way (i.e. by additional blind analysis).

4. Several of the interview questions could be interpreted as leading or encouraging certain responses. This is an inherent risk associated with qualitative data collection.

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Appendix A

Letters to Director, Principal, Teachers, Parents/Guardians

Letter to Director

January 27, 1997

Dear Sir:

As you are aware, I am currently on educational leave for the purpose of completing my thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Educational Psychology. My thesis has, as its focus, a particular subgroup of students who are classified in the research on achievement motivation as work-avoidant students. My research involves identifying such students and documenting specific characteristics.

From the data gathered, those students who are identified as work avoidant would be asked to participate in a taped interview (audio). A student can decline to be interviewed or refrain from answering any questions that he/she is uncomfortable with.

There is also a behaviour checklist for teachers of these "work-avoidant" students to complete. Participation in this study by teachers and students is on a voluntary basis, and they can opt out at any time. For a student to participate however, parental consent must be given.

These activities would be conducted to ensure the minimum loss of class time, but they will occur during the school day. All information gathered is confidential. Taped interviews will be erased, and student questionnaires and teacher checklists will be shredded and discarded at the conclusion of this project.

This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee and is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Tim Seifert. If you have any questions about the proposed study, you can contact me at 726-9630 or Dr. Tim Seifert at 737-4470. I am enclosing a copy of the student questionnaire, teacher checklist, and parent information letter for your perusal.

If at any time you wish to speak to a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning of Graduate Programs.

Please give me notice of your decision with regards to conducting this study in the aforementioned schools as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon Jarvis

Enclosures

Letter to Principal

January 27, 1997

Dear Principal:

Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to conduct my research in your school. The research will involve identifying work-avoidant students and documenting the reasons for work-avoidant behaviours. The study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee.

Parents of students attending grades six and seven will be asked to give their consent to allow their children to participate in this study. Once parental consent is obtained, the students will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to assess their feelings towards school, school work, school personnel, and themselves as students. This questionnaire will take about ten minutes of the students' time. Those students who are subsequently identified as work avoidant will be asked to participate in an interview. This interview will be recorded on audiotape and will take approximately thirty minutes. A student can decline to be interviewed or can refrain from answering any question(s) that cause him/her to be uncomfortable. Teachers will be asked to complete a behaviour checklist on only those students who have been identified as work avoidant.

These activities will be conducted to ensure the minimum loss of class time, but they will occur during regular school hours. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and students and teachers can withdraw at any time.

All information collected will be treated with complete confidentiality and no student, teacher or school will be identified. The taped interviews will be erased, and the student questionnaires and teacher checklists will be shredded and then discarded at the conclusion of this research project.

Letters of explanation will be sent to parents and teachers. Copies are enclosed for your records. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me at 726-9630 or my supervisor, Dr. Tim Seifert, at 737-4470. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs.

I will be in contact with you to arrange a time for administering the questionnaire in your school.

Thank you again for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon Jarvis

Enclosures

Letter to Teachers

January 27, 1997

Dear Colleague:

My name is Sharon Jarvis, and I am currently involved in a research project for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements for the Master's Program in Educational Psychology. The focus of this research is a group of students who have been identified in the research on achievement motivation as work avoidant. My research involves identifying such students and documenting the reasons for work avoidance.

Your school board has given me permission to work with the grade six and seven students of your schools. Depending on parental consent, your students will be completing a brief questionnaire relating to feelings towards school, school work, school personnel, and themselves as students. This will take about 10 minutes to administer. From the data gathered, those students who are identified as work avoidant will be asked to participate in an interview. This interview will be recorded on audiotape and will take approximately thirty minutes of the student's time. A student can decline to be interviewed or can refrain from answering any question(s) that cause him/her to be uncomfortable. Parents will be asked to complete a consent form and return it to you regarding their child's participation.

Your involvement in this study, through the completion of a behaviour checklist on the work-avoidant students, would be greatly appreciated. However, participation is voluntary for both students and teachers, and you or your students can withdraw at any time.

All information collected will be treated with complete confidentiality and no child, teacher, or school will be identified. The taped interviews will be erased, and the student questionnaires and teacher checklists will be shredded and then discarded at the end of this research project.

This research project has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 726-9630 or my supervisor, Dr. Tim

Seifert, at 737-4470. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs.

Enclosed for your records is a copy of the letter that will be sent to parents.

I will be in contact with your school administration to discuss a time that I can visit your school to administer the questionnaire.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon Jarvis

Enclosures

Letter to Parents/Guardians

January 27, 1997

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Sharon Jarvis, and I am in the process of completing my Master's Program in Educational Psychology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As part of this program, I will be completing a research project in the area of achievement motivation. It is my intention to carry out this research with grade six and seven students.

As part of this study, your son/daughter will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to see how your child feels about school, school work, school personnel, and themselves as students. This will take about ten minutes to complete. Following the questionnaire, some students may be asked to participate in an interview. This interview will be recorded on audiotape and will take approximately thirty minutes of your child's time. A student can decline to be interviewed or refrain from answering any question that he/she is uncomfortable with.

These activities will be conducted to ensure the minimum loss of class time; however, they will occur during the regular school day. Participation in both parts of the study are entirely voluntary, and your child can withdraw at any time.

All information gathered is confidential. No child's name or any other identifying information will be used in reporting this study. The taped interviewed will be erased at the conclusion of this project, and the student questionnaires will be shredded and discarded.

The school board and school officials have given their consent to proceed with this study. It has also received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee.

If you are in agreement with having your child participate in this study, please sign the attached form and return it to your child's classroom teacher. If you have any questions or concerns, you may contact me at 468-7242 or my supervisor, Dr. Tim Seifert, at 737-4470. If at any time you wish to speak to a

resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely yours,

Sharon Jarvis

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I _____ (parent/guardian), hereby give permission for my child _____ to take part in a study on student feelings about school, school work, and themselves as students. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that my child and/or I can withdraw permission at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified.

Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

I would appreciate it if you would please return this sheet to the classroom teacher by _____.

Appendix B

Interview Topics/Questions

Interview Topics/Questions

Interview Topics

1. Assess students' feelings of competency (learned helplessness).

2. Ascertain students' feelings towards authority figures, such as the teacher and the parent (passive aggressive).

3. Gather information on students' feelings about the curriculum (challenging vs. unchallenging; relevance vs having little meaning) (bright but bored).

Interview Questions

1. What are some things you like about school?

2. What are your favourite subjects?

3. What are your least favourite?

4. Sometimes school can be challenging. You may have a hard task, a subject that is difficult to understand, or your teacher may go too quickly for you. How often is school hard for you?

5. When you come to something you don't understand, either in a textbook, a workbook, or in a class discussion, how do you feel? What do you think of yourself as a student? What do you do then?

6. How do you think you are doing in school?

7. Do you think you are doing the best possible work that you can do? If no, why not?

8. Is school ever boring for you? When do you mostly get bored?

9. When you find yourself feeling bored, what kind of things, if anything, do you do to relieve the boredom?

10. How often are you presented with material that you already know and understand (repetitious)?

11. How does your teacher(s) usually present a lesson in class? What do you think of their particular method? Do you prefer something different? If yes, What?

12. Are there certain subjects that you find easy? What are you usually doing in these classes?

13. Describe your teacher for me.

14. How does your teacher treat you?

15. What is it about your teacher(s) that bothers you?

16. How do you feel about your teacher?

17. Do you behave differently for some teachers than for others? If yes, why do you perform poorly for some?

18. When you obtain a low grade or a poor evaluation in school, how does this make you feel? What kind of reactions do your teachers and your parents have towards your performance? How does their reaction make you feel?

19. What do your parents think of school? Is there any pressure to do well in school? How do you feel about that?

Appendix C

Goal-Orientation Survey

Student Survey

Name: _____

Date: _____

Below are some sentences about school. How true is each sentence for you? Read each sentence carefully. If that sentence is true for you, circle the number 4 for **Definitely Agree**. If it is not true for you, circle the number 1 for **Definitely Disagree**. If it is a little bit true, circle the number 3 for **Agree**. If it is sort of not true, circle the number 2 for **Disagree.**

School is a place where ....

	Definitely Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Definitely Agree**
I really like to learn how things work.	1	2	3	4
I like solving difficult problems.	1	2	3	4
I want others to think I am smart.	1	2	3	4
I try to do as little work as possible.	1	2	3	4
I find the things we do really interesting.	1	2	3	4
I try to learn things so I can better myself.	1	2	3	4
I try to get the highest grades.	1	2	3	4
I try to avoid doing a lot of work.	1	2	3	4
I try to improve myself through learning.	1	2	3	4

	Definitely Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Definitely Agree
I work hard so I won't get a bad grade.	1	2	3	4
I do only what I need to do to get a good grade.	1	2	3	4
I like learning new things.	1	2	3	4
I like working on problems that make me think.	1	2	3	4
I work hard so others will say nice things about me.	1	2	3	4
I do just what I need to do to pass.	1	2	3	4
I enjoy learning about different things.	1	2	3	4
I find difficult work challenging.	1	2	3	4
I must get an excellent grade.	1	2	3	4
I work hard so I won't look stupid to others.	1	2	3	4
I try to pass with the least amount of work I can.	1	2	3	4
I try to do the easiest work I can.	1	2	3	4

Appendix D

Behaviour Checklist - Teacher

Teacher Checklist

Student Name: _____

1. Does this student forget to copy down homework assignments?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

2. Does this student misplace/forget books, pencils, or other materials?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

3. Does this student spend exceptionally long periods of time getting ready to start work?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

4. Does this student need directions repeated to him/her?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

5. Does this student give up easily when faced with a problem?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

6. Does this student require frequent assistance?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

7. Does this student have confidence in his/her ability to complete classroom assignments successfully?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

8. Does this student become so discouraged that he/she "gives up" or fails to complete assignments?

   Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

9. Does this student appear to lack motivation and interest in school work?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

10. Does this student have difficulty completing assignments?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

11. Does this student not complete tasks in the manner requested?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

12. Does this student make excuses for not doing assignments?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

13. Does this student come up with varied physical complaints to avoid doing work?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

14. Does this student find it difficult to work in groups?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

15. Does this student have difficulty getting along with other students?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

16. Does this student complain that other students are preventing him/her from completing work?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

17. Does this student like to act silly or play the role of the class clown?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

18. Does this student complain that class work is boring?

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

19. Does this student frequently make comments, such as, "I couldn't help it" or "He made me do it?"

Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

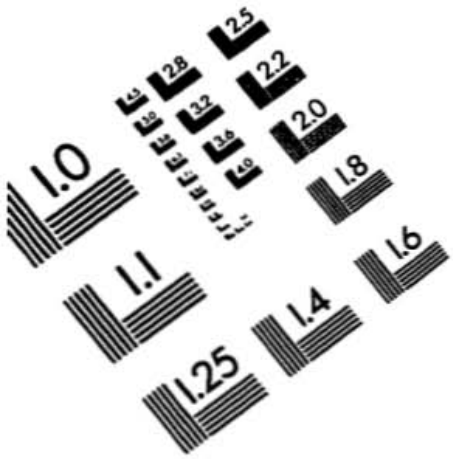
20. Does this student have difficulty concentrating in class?

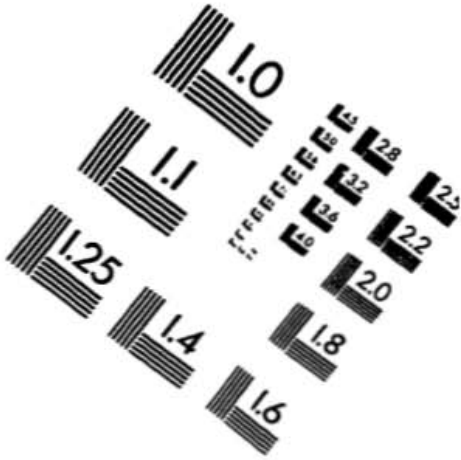
Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

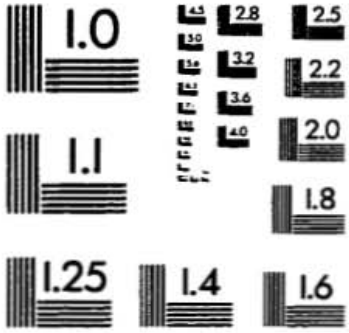
21. Does this student display poor work habits and study skills?

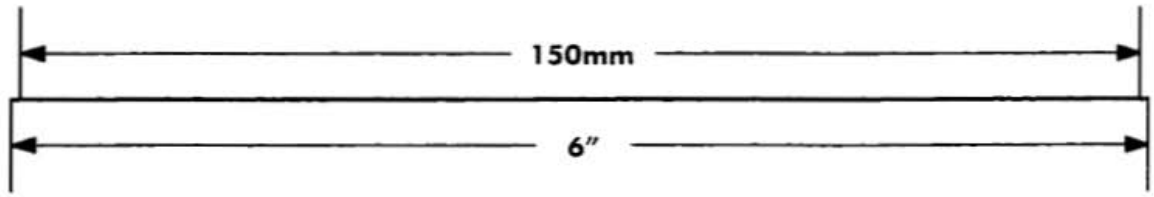
Always____ Often____ Sometimes____ Seldom____ Never____

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA–3)









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