

THE FORMATION AND EFFECTS OF  
TEACHER EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine the literature dealing with the formation and the effects of varying teacher expectations on students. The study focused on the characteristics of the self-fulfilling prophecy, the factors that lead teachers to establish expectations, and the effects that varying expectations have on students. This study helps educators develop an awareness of the powerful impact that teacher expectations have in every student's academic experience through information dealing with teacher behavior toward students based on their expectations. The study also provides a framework for teachers to implement strategies toward developing positive student achievement through expectations that encourage learning. This study examined the formation and effects of teacher expectations on students by examining and analyzing the literature, determining results from the research, and formulating recommendations to educators.

The findings of this study concluded that teacher expectations of students could play a considerable role in academics as well as self-esteem. The repetitious teacher interaction with low expectation students could eventually create labels. This student classification potentially altered teacher interaction with students as well as instructional methodology. Students experienced the effects of varied expectations through both verbal and non-verbal teacher actions.

The research concluded that lower teacher expectations affected achievement in student outcome and that the consequences could be significant when compounded throughout the entire educational process. Teachers can help students by being aware of the factors that influence varied teacher expectations, and by focusing on each student's individual needs and abilities.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The power of expectations in the lives of children begins long before they start their educational experience. Through family interaction at home and involvement in the community, children learn of expectations at an early age. What they believe about themselves is a direct result of the expectancies given to them by parents, other adults, and teachers. Evidence shows that teacher as well as parent expectations play an important role in a student's academic progress. Unfortunately in today's society many students are receiving less parental involvement that results in lower family and academic expectations. "There is a decline in parental participation as children progress in adolescence" (Patrikakou, 1997, p. 7). This trend has made it imperative that all students receive heightened expectations in their academic years. "Family stress, social alienation and cultural dislocation do exist in the country. They erode children's aspirations and they challenge the capacity of schools to achieve" (Bastian, 1988, p. 29). This erosion of social and parental expectations places a heightened level of responsibility on teachers to expect greater results and higher levels of classroom success.

As current reform issues begin to place more emphasis on raising the level of performance and achievement for all students, educators must now, more than ever, focus on developing and maintaining higher expectations for all

ability levels. Success in school does not solely depend on the student's abilities or their ambitions, but a combination of these abilities along with respect and the establishment of high expectations set by teachers. Krovetz (1999, p. 74) states, "When students are not treated with the respect that comes with knowing them and challenging them they drop out emotionally, intellectually, and physically." It is this lack of respect that can lead to stereotyping certain students resulting in lowered classroom expectations. "Adults often reminisce about lost opportunities to learn or remarks heard as students that have impacted their personal and professional lives. A careless remark, a misphrased question, or a facial expression unchallenged can result in negative expectations about self and learning" (Caruthers, 1997, p. 1). This type of personal impact initiates the development of what is known as self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ideas that suggest that using one's mind and abilities to establish varying expectations for students, and classroom practices that reinforce expectations based on abilities and not stereotypes, must be addressed if schools are to achieve the desired level of performance needed in today's society. Schools that track and group students by noted abilities tell students in an indirect way what is expected of them. The grouping of students in this manner becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Students begin to believe that their abilities and intelligence levels are exactly that which has been established through the practice of grouping in the classroom. "Children can find themselves driven into dumbness by a failure to challenge their curiosity to build on their natural drive toward competence" (Krovetz, 1999, p. 77). Teachers in turn can also use these labels

to not challenge these students while instead focusing on and challenging only the most motivated individuals.

High expectations in schools mean that all students are motivated to use their ability to its fullest potential. A single teaching episode or an isolated interaction between the teacher and a student can influence the student's perceptions of the learning environment and his or her motivation to achieve as well as develop positive self-confidence. Teachers must be aware of every student's academic ability and must strive to develop success in the classroom. "It needs to be more work for a student to fail a class than it is to get on board" (Krovetz, 1999, p. 79). Only when high expectations are set for all students from elementary to high school will a sense of success be developed for them. Teachers need to be persistent in warranting that students experience success.

#### Statement of the Problem

The level of expectations that teachers establish can have a dramatic effect on student performance as well as self-concept. Factors that influence the relationship between teacher expectations and a student's academic efficacy include understanding the self-fulfilling prophecy and how it develops, the factors that lead teachers to establish expectations, and the affects that varying expectations can have on students. Teachers, as well as other educational professionals who are not aware of these constituents could find it difficult to obtain academic success in their classroom.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to review the literature dealing with the formation and effects of varying teacher expectations on students in the classroom by focusing on the characteristics of the self-fulfilling prophecy, the factors that lead to the development of expectations and the effects that varying expectations can have on students. The conclusions formed through this study will help educators become aware of the impact that expectations have on students, teacher behavior associated with varying expectations, and strategies that will help develop positive student achievement through expectations that encourage learning.

### Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined.

Academic Efficacy – The belief that one’s self is competent enough to perform successfully in an academic situation.

Expectations – To think that something will probably happen; to look forward to.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy – A process by which someone’s expectations about an individual leads to the realization of those expectations.

Pedagogy – The art, science, or profession of teaching.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

In this chapter the formation and effects of teacher expectations on students have been explored. The chapter consists of three areas of research which include, understanding the self-fulfilling prophecy and its' development (including sustaining expectations and the halo effect), the factors that lead teachers to establish expectations toward students, and the effects that these varying expectations can have on students.

#### The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and How it Develops

I know, I am not blaming him. It is his way, isn't it? But it made such a difference to me that you didn't do it. You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will (Shaw, 1982, p. 558).

The preceding quotation demonstrates that one's level, acceptance, and success in society can be controlled greatly by how a person is treated by others. When a person is perceived as having lower standards or less status, he/she will be downgraded on society's scale. Likewise, an individual that is perceived as

having higher standards and treated better by society is likely to obtain a higher status on that same scale.

The same level of acceptance and success can be likened to students in the classroom through the level of expectations placed on them. Brandt (1984, p. 206) states, "There are really two kinds of expectations: positive and negative, each reflecting how we envision what is to come." As young children, general expectations made toward other children or adults are usually positive. Brandt (1984, p. 206) continues, "As we grow up and in the process experience disappointment, we develop negative expectations, mostly as a way to protect ourselves." This development of negative expectations as students mature can be greatly amplified if educators treat their classroom children in the same manner.

The expectations that teachers have for their students, whether positive or negative, and the theorization they make about their potential, can greatly influence those students academic achievement. Eccles and Jussim (1992, p. 948) state, "Teacher expectancies influence students academic performance to a greater degree than student's performance influences teacher expectancy." The influence of expectations from the teacher greatly dictates a students' success in school. Hilliard III (1991, p. 35) states, "Teachers are the mediators who provide or fail to provide the essential experiences that permit students to release their awesome potential." These experiences are bestowed through the level of expectations which teachers place on each and every student.

Whether teachers realize it or not, they many times behave differently toward students because of a belief or assumption they make about that student. This belief or assumption may incorrectly label a student as being a low achiever when in fact he/she is not. Hilliard III (1991, p. 34) makes the following statement explaining about all children being born with high ability, “What has become increasingly well documented however is that while maturation and nurturance may explain some aspects of thinking, teaching, and learning, babies start from a cognitive baseline that is nothing short of awesome.” The level of expectation, which is assigned to every student in the classroom, can drastically impact the potential for failure or success.

These expectations that teachers hold toward students are what set the basis for what is called a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nuberg, Judice, Virdin, and Carrillo (cited in Tauber, 1997, p. 14) define self-fulfilling prophecy in the following way;

The literature suggests that self-fulfilling prophecies are often mediated by expectancy-revealing perceiver behaviors; behaviors that suggest to a target how a perceiver feels about him or her. Such expressions may be communicated both nonverbally and verbally, either intentionally or not. Importantly, expectations influence such expressive behaviors, and these behaviors influence the action of others.

Janes (1996, p. 4), further describes the definition of self-fulfilling prophecy in education as, “self-fulfilling prophecies occur when teachers induce students to perform at levels consistent with their (teachers) initially erroneous expectations.

In other words, if a teacher believes a student to be bright then the interactions between the two may be such as to ensure that this expectation comes true.”

The phrase self-fulfilling prophecy was introduced early on by Robert K. Merton. According to Merton (1948, p. 195), “The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true.” Merton goes on to include education with regards to the self-fulfilling prophecy and how it evolves in teachers. “But, in some measures, like many other Americans, the teachers share the very prejudices they are being urged to combat” (Merton, 1948, p. 5). Even though the article by Merton did not specifically discuss education, the self-fulfilling prophecy’s impact on students can be understood and applied. “Merton first analyzed self-fulfilling prophecies as a societal phenomenon” (Hurley, 1997, p. 582). Since his discussion, research has concluded that three various types of expectations exist in the educational setting. These various types of expectations include, the Pygmalion Effect, Sustaining Expectations, and the Halo Effect. The self-fulfilling prophecy was first introduced by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in the field of education.

Rosenthal first explored the experimental effect of the self-fulfilling prophecy when he tested the theory on experimenters dealing with maze-running rats. “Those experimenters who had been led to expect better performance viewed their animals as brighter, more pleasant, and more likable” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992, p. 38). Rosenthal then joined with Lenore Jacobson in studying self-fulfilling prophecies in the classroom. Rosenthal and Jacobson’s

“Pygmalion” theory focused on the effects of teacher expectancies in relation to student achievement. “The experiment was designed specifically to test the proposition that within a given classroom those children from whom the teacher expected greater intellectual growth would show such greater growth” (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992, p. 61). The study emphasized that a teacher’s academic expectations of a student caused the pupil to correspond to those expectations, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. “The theory did not suggest how teacher expectations were translated into pupil performance...it still generated a massive amount of interest in the field of educational psychology and even in the public eye” (Brignull, no date, p.1). The Pygmalion study involved giving teachers false information about the students involved with the study. Approximately 300 students were tested with a non-verbal test of intelligence. The researchers noted the results and then fabricated those results when they gave them to the teachers. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992, p. 8) summarize:

20 percent of the children in a certain elementary school were reported to their teachers as showing unusual potential for intellectual growth. The names of these 20 percent of the children were drawn by a means of a table of random numbers, which is to say that the names were drawn out of a hat. Eight months later these unusual or “magic” children showed significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children who had not been singled out for the teachers’ attention. The change in the teacher’s expectation regarding the intellectual performance of these allegedly special children had led to an actual change in the intellectual

performance of these randomly selected children.

The results of the study found that at the end of one school year, the “special “ children (experimental group) had gained twelve IQ points on average, while the “normal”(control group) children had gained only eight IQ points (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992, p.75). When grades of the youngest children involved in the study (6-8 year olds) were examined, the “special” children (experimental group) in this group had better grades than the “normal”(control group) children. Brignull (no date, p. 2), states, “Teachers reported that “gifted” children were more interesting, curious, and happy and more likely to be successful in the future.” Rosenthal and Jacobson’s study concluded, “The results demonstrated the Pygmalion effect; that teacher expectancies can produce self-fulfilling prophecies” (Lee, cited in Brignull, no date, p. 2). Although their study has been criticized by other various researchers, one should not ignore the importance of the findings. When a student experiences negative expectations from teachers over time, the student’s self-concept and motivation to achieve may decline until the student’s ability to achieve to his or her potential is damaged.

A second type of expectation found in the classroom is the “sustaining expectation” effect. “The sustaining expectation effect occurs when teachers respond on the basis of their existing expectations for students rather than to changes in student performance caused by sources other than the teacher.” (Cooper & Good, cited in Bamburg, 1994, p. 3). Simmonds (1998, p. 5) explains the sustaining expectations effect as:

Teachers expect students to sustain previously developed patterns,

to the point that teachers take the behavioral patterns for granted and fail to see and capitalize on changes in student potential. And although self-fulfilling prophecy effects' can be powerful and dramatic when they occur, the more subtle "sustaining expectations effects" occur with increased frequency in most school cultures.

Bamburg (1994, p. 3) continues, "When a teacher misses an opportunity to improve student performance because he or she responds to a student based on how the teacher expects the student to perform rather than other indices showing improved student potential, a sustaining expectations effect has occurred."

Lumsden (1997, p. 3) states, "Sustaining expectations refer to situations in which teachers fail to see student potential and hence do not respond in a way to encourage some students to fulfill their potential." To summarize, the self-fulfilling prophecy creates a change in student performance. Sustaining expectations prevent change in student behavior and/or academic ability.

The third type of expectation relates closely to the sustaining expectation effect in today's classroom. Although not as prevalent, it is called the "halo effect." Tauber (1997, p. 15) explains the halo effect as, "One person places a sort of 'halo' over another person's head and through his or her eyes are rose colored glasses, this person can do no wrong." A neutral observer might realize that the inadequacies are quite evident. The person who has imposed the halo sees only what he or she wants to see, not what actually exists. Tauber (1997, p. 15) goes on to say:

Evaluation perceptions, then, not evidence, dictates the evaluations.

When perceptions differ from reality, the perceptions win out and, according to Kolb and Jussim (1994), a perceptual bias exists. Instead of beauty being in the eye of the beholder, although that too exists in school, we have the students' behavior and achievement being in the eye of the beholder – the teacher.

The result of this “halo effect” is mainly that of high expectation students being able to do no wrong in both behavior and academic achievement. Lower expectation students thus can do very little right in behavior and academic achievement.

It is worth noting that the sustaining expectations effect, as well as the “halo effect” can contribute toward and set into motion the expectations that can cause the development of the self-fulfilling prophecy. It is imperative to realize that expectations occur in various ways and can affect students greatly through their development.

In summary, the “halo effect” puts the student on a type of pedestal as a result of the teacher seeing the student through “rose colored glasses”.

Sustaining expectations prevent change through a lack of acceptance in the teacher toward a student when showing positive advancement toward academic achievement. The self-fulfilling prophecy is when a teacher's expectation toward a student brings about a change (either positive or negative) in student performance.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is not as simple as just believing or anticipating that a certain student or group of students will perform at the perceived level a teacher has placed them at. There are occasions where a teacher can accurately estimate the academic potential a student may have, but in most cases, it is not this estimation that forms the self-fulfilling prophecy. The development of the self-fulfilling prophecy begins with an often-incorrect perception of a student, but it is ultimately the series of steps after this perception that fulfills the self-fulfilling prophecy. Tauber (1998, p. 2) suggests a five-step model that explains how the self-fulfilling prophecy works.

1. The teacher forms expectations.
2. Based upon these expectations, the teacher acts in a differential manner.
3. The teacher's treatment tells each student what behavior and what achievement the teacher expects.
4. If their treatment is consistent, it will tend to shape the student's behavior and achievement.
5. With time, the student's behavior and achievement will conform more and more closely to that expected of him or her.

Teachers are just like any other individual. They express opinions on many different subject areas. These opinions are used to form varying expectations in their everyday life as well as toward the students who are in their classrooms. It is important to realize that every student's attributes as well as

demeanor can trigger an expectation. Tauber (1997, p.19) makes the following comment about the triggering of an expectation:

Perhaps the word triggering, as in the triggering of a gun, is a good word to use when discussing expectations. With a gun, once the trigger is pulled, things happen and they happen fast. There is no stopping them. The trigger triggers a response. Sometimes good things happen – a rabid animal is shot and destroyed, keeping children in the community safe. Sometimes bad things happen – a drive by shooting kills an innocent citizen. Once expectations are found, they too trigger a response – sometimes good, sometimes bad.

Once an expectation has been developed, it is astonishing as to what lengths the developer will go to in order to have them become confirmed. It is imperative that teachers refrain from forming these differential expectations so as not to hinder any student's achievement.

If a differential expectation is placed on a student the teacher may behave differently toward that student. Rosenthal (cited in Tauber, 1998, p. 3) cites a four-factor theory that explains how teachers convey expectations;

1. Climate: the socio-emotional mood or spirit created by a person holding the expectation, after the nonverbal communication (e.g., smiling and nodding more often, providing greater eye contact, leaning closer to the student).
2. Feedback: providing both effective information (i.e., more precise and less criticism of high expectation students) and cognitive information

(i.e., more detailed as well as higher quality feedback as to the correctness of higher expectation student's responses).

3. Input: Teachers tend to teach more to students of whom they expect more.
4. Output: Teachers encourage greater responsiveness from those students of whom they expect more through their verbal and nonverbal behaviors (i.e., providing students with greater opportunities to seek clarification).

These four factors that, cause an expectation to be effective, lead toward the differential treatment that a teacher might exhibit toward a student.

This treatment tells students how they are expected to behave and perform in the classroom. Tauber (1997, p. 26) states, "No matter what the source of information, whether it be verbal or nonverbal, the fact is that most of us are capable of deciphering what it is that others expect from us." When a student receives and understands these verbal and nonverbal expectations, and if it is consistent over time, their own expectations can change to match that of the teacher.

This consistent treatment from a teacher over time will affect the students' self-concepts, and interactions. Bamberg (1994, p. 2) states, "One should not ignore the importance of these findings, particularly in light of the evidence that the student often internalizes teacher expectation over time. When this internalization occurs, the student's self-concept and motivation to achieve may decline over time until the student's ability to achieve his/her potential is

damaged.” Tauber (1997, p. 27) states, “Early childhood and elementary age children are most at risk in believing teachers’ consistently delivered evaluations.” The effects from this consistent treatment can be detrimental to a student’s success and can eventually reinforce the teacher’s expectations.

If a student does not resist the teacher’s behaviors, the effects will reinforce the expectations placed on them, so that the student will eventually yield to those expectations more than they might have otherwise. At this stage the impact of the self-fulfilling prophecy has affected the student.

It is evident that this process can indeed impact the success of a student’s academic career. Research has shown (Bamburg, 1994, p. 3) that a significant percentage of teachers do not hold high expectations for academic achievement of students in their schools. Research also concludes that teacher expectations can and do affect students’ achievement and attitudes as well as how much and how well students learn (Bamburg, 1994; Cotton & Wikelund, 1997; Hurley, 1997; Lumsden, 1997; Reeves & Taylor, 1993; Simmonds, 1998).

It is important to note that having high educational expectations can warrant success for children in schools. Rosenthal showed the educational world that positive expectations from teachers are followed by positive performances by students. Unfortunately a teacher’s lowered expectation that is formed and directed toward a student can have a detrimental effect on their educational experience. Tauber (1997, p. 31) states, “What the self-fulfilling prophecy does is label someone and then have that person treated as if that label were correct.” Tauber (1997, p. 31) continues, “Labels are easy. We don’t have to get to know

the person. We can just assume what the person is like. Labeling deprives you of the most fulfilling relationships.” It is important to look at each student for what he/she is and develop a higher level of expectation for that student. A student who feels a positive feeling of self-worth and is challenged through higher levels of expectations will assuredly have a more positive experience in the classroom.

### Factors That Lead Teachers to Establish Expectations

In education today, it is commonplace to find classrooms filled with an assorted range of students. Educators are finding themselves teaching and guiding students who are very different from themselves. An example of this variation in student population could be especially found in urban schools where the population of students could be a high concentration of minorities. Special needs children are now mainstreamed into regular and vocational educational classrooms, as where before they were segregated by being placed in special education classrooms. Many schools find their student population ranging from upper class to immigrant students who do not comprehend or speak the English language. In order for teachers to effectively manage an assorted student body, which is much different from themselves, they must recognize and fully understand the factors that control the expectations they bring to the classroom. Cotton and Wikelund (1997, p. 7) cite the following factors which can cause educators to depress expectations for some students:

1. Gender
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Socioeconomic Status

4. Language Patterns
5. Tracking and Long Term Ability Group Tracking
6. Negative Comments about Students

Cotton and Wikelund (1997, p. 7) continue, "According to research, those teachers who hold low expectations for students based on these factors are rarely acting out of malice; indeed, they are often not even aware that their low expectations have developed based on spurious reasoning." It is imperative that an understanding as well as an explanation of these factors follows so as to better understand this role in the development of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Gender equity plays an enormous role in the expectations directed toward female students. Katsillis (no date, p. 5) explains that expectations found early in life are persuaded by gender. He explains,

In terms of parent expectations, it is indicated that parents have higher expectations for their boys. Boys pay (or perhaps are encouraged to pay) more attention to their friends' expectations as well as to their relatives and acquaintances' educational attainment. Female students, on the other hand, acquire higher expectations by being better students.

Spinthourakis (cited in Katsillis, no date, p. 6) states, "The higher achievement of female students has been shown to be true previously and it is attributed mainly to their high effort." The impact of gender biased teacher expectations can profoundly impact female students. Caruthers (1997, p. 3) states, "Teachers from grade school to graduate school ask males more questions, give them more

precise feedback, criticize them more, and give them more time to respond.”

Without some control of gender based teacher expectations, female students will continue to have a disadvantage in the classroom.

Students from minority races or various ethnic groups can also experience a disadvantage in the classroom as a result of teacher expectations. Obiakor (1999, p. 40) states, “ For many minority learners, how teachers understand and interpret their world views and how they are expected to perform affects their motivational and self-concept interpretation.” When teacher expectations of minority students are improperly lowered or raised, academic achievement and self-worth can be impacted. Hall (1993, p.181) states, “Expectations might be lowered for minorities which, given time, could undermine academic success.” Hall (1993, p. 181) continues, “With time, minority students could begin to believe the subtle messages from teachers about their ability and worth. The result could be that minority students might not realize their potential.” It has been well established that teacher expectations can be influenced by the ethnic background and race of a student. Parsons (cited in Caruthers, 1997, p. 4) states, “Teachers praise and encourage white students more, respond to them more, and pay more attention to them than to Mexican-American students.” Hall, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997, p. 527) state, “In the case of African Americans, the probability of encountering obstacles to academic success is high.” This obstacle in achieving higher academic success can be related to parents as well as ethnicity in the development of teacher expectations. Hall, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997, p. 527) go on to state, “The relationship

between poverty and academic achievement is complicated by ethnicity, because a disproportionate number of the poor are members of ethnic minority groups where long history of legal and racial discrimination have impeded their chances of academic and material success.” In many cases, race and ethnicity are associated with a lower–status background. This association can have detrimental effects on minority students when teachers form their expectations.

“Teachers, in general, expect more from middle and upper class students that from working and lower- class backgrounds” (Caruthers, 1997, p. 4). “Ethnic minority and poor children have been documented to be largely over-represented as targets of low expectations” (Weinstein, 1995, p.122). A student’s socioeconomic (SES) background is a factor which must be considered in the formation and communication of developing expectations. Tauber (1997, p. 95) states, “Americans are becoming more and more polarized. It can be argued that their polarizations can be attributed much more to the fact that we have created an ever-widening socioeconomic gulf between the haves and the have-nots, than to any differences in our skin color or ethnicity.” In schools, the socioeconomic background of each and every student can be easily assessed by students and teachers. School programs (such as free and reduced lunch) can single out students who belong to a lower social status. The expense or style of students’ clothing and students’ grooming habits can also trigger a socioeconomic projection that can greatly influence his/her acceptance from fellow classmates as well as teachers. A student who is unaccepted by peers also runs the risk of experiencing that same rejection from teachers. Often times,

the teachers' responsibility in this case is to foster peer relationships rather than reject the student and recognize him only on a lowered socioeconomic level.

It is not uncommon for these students to develop groups in which they spend their free time in school. Teacher expectations can then be found not only by the students' individual characteristics but by the group characteristics as a whole. "The expectations, then, that are held for the larger group extend to the individual students" (Tauber, 1997, p. 97). Clearly educators must treat all socioeconomic levels that they encounter on an equal basis. It is imperative for teachers to look past this hierarchy, status, and language barrier and realize that all students bring with them a unique set of strengths and individuality.

Language is a factor in making judgments, assumptions, and forming expectations about the academic possibilities of students. Obiaker (1999, p. 44) presents the following case-study which demonstrates the results of sometimes inappropriate expectations as a result of language;

Emilia was a 14-year-old immigrant from Mexico. She had only been in the United States for 3 months. She was experiencing some difficulties with her English language while trying to adjust to the American culture. She was shy and isolated herself from her peers. Her teacher acknowledged that she was very respectful and polite and tried several times to engage her in conversation but she said very little each time. It was six weeks into the school year and her teacher was not able to get much information from her. Her teacher recommended that she be tested for attention- deficit disorder and for emotional disturbances.

This case strongly presents a good example of the misidentifying expectations that can be placed on a student because of a language barrier. It is imperative that teachers do not misconstrue language or speech performance difficulties as deficiencies in academic achievement abilities. This misconception can cause teachers to inappropriately place students in underachieving groups.

Misconceptions about student abilities can lead teachers to undermine students' ability levels. Bamburg (1994, p. 7), states, "A factor that often contributes to teacher's low expectations for their students is an emphasis on ability rather than effort in assessing the academic potential of students." Ability is believed to be more easily measured by test records than by effort. Bamburg (1994, p. 7) continues, "This belief means that many American school children who perform poorly on standardized tests are perceived (and eventually perceive themselves) to have lower ability." This allows the self-fulfilling prophecy to flourish among children who are "tracked" into various groups based on their test scores, which are designed to measure intelligence. Tauber (1997, p. 106) states, "Unfortunately data gathered from many commonly administered school based instruments such as written tests...and so forth can be totally useless unless there is evidence that the measurements both are reliable and valid." Schools can use the test results to determine at what level of intelligence groupings the student should be placed. Students who score highly on standardized placement tests are grouped into levels of advanced thinking skills. The students who score poorly are placed into groups that focus on basic skills. Eccles and Jussim (1992, p. 951) state, "The main predictors of teacher

perceptions of students' performance are students previous standardized test scores." Groups can become a catalyst in the development of expectations. There are four main differences that exist between high and low ability-grouped classes. Simmonds (1998, p. 6) lists these as, "quality of knowledge, amount of time assigned to learning, amount of high quality teaching, and intellectual stimulation from peers." These four factors, combined or individually, can establish varying learning perceptions and expectations. Hilliard III (1991, p. 32) states, "I believe that tracking is unworkable and unproven as a guarantee that students will be challenged into the program of classes best suited to them." All too often teachers dealing with lower level groups have preconceived notions (often negative) about the students in these groups. These notions often are conveyed by test scores and teacher-staff discussion about the student. The result can be altered expectations for students who are placed in lower level groups.

The expectations that teachers form as a result of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language barriers, and tracking or ability grouping can easily be shared or conveyed among teacher discussions. This staff discussion results in lower level expectations being developed for the student. "Teachers expectations are sometimes influenced by the negative comments of other staff members" (Cotton & Wikelund, 1997, p. 7). Negative comments, regarding specific students, are often times spread throughout the entire teaching staff. Because teachers commonly work together as a whole unit, the perception of individual students as well as developed prophecies created by the teacher or

team members can significantly influence other teachers. Hurley (1997, p. 585) states, “ People may believe that a prophecy coming from a credible source is an unchangeable fact and will not alter their behavior to affect the outcome.”

Teacher expectations can dramatically affect students. The conveyance of teacher expectations about students to other staff members can dramatically influence how other teachers perceive those students.

The factors of gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, tracking or ability grouping and negative comments about students all play a major role in the development of lowered teacher expectations. Often times teachers are not aware that they have developed and acted on lower expectations which could dramatically affect students in their academic experiences.

### The Effects of Varying Expectations on Students

Varying expectations can influence students in many different and drastic ways. Achievement, motivation, and performance are but a few of the areas in which students may be affected during their educational experience. Research has shown that varying teacher expectations affect students differently according to their abilities. Gottfredson, Marciniak, Birdseye & Gottfredson (1995, p. 156) state the following:

From their first years in school, students are able to perceive differences in teacher expectations for their own performance and that of their peers. Young students perceive that low achievers receive more directions, rules, work, and negative feedback and that high achievers enjoy higher teacher

expectations for their performance and more freedom of choice. Low-expectation students receive more non-effort contingent feedback designed to control their behavior; consequently, those students are less likely to develop beliefs in the value of effort, are less persistent, and less successful.

Students who are labeled as low achievers, with poor records of academic performance, may be especially susceptible to lowered expectations. Eccles, Jussim, and Madon (1997, p. 793) state:

To improve academically, low achievers may need to compensate for their lower ability with hard work. However, hard work requires motivation, something that low achievers may have in short supply because of the higher frequency, with which they, in comparison to high achievement students, experience negative feedback. This suggests that negative expectations may undermine the motivation that low achievers need to compensate for their low ability.

The expression of negative expectations toward low achievement students can greatly affect their level of self-esteem as well as motivation. All too often, the negative feedback from teachers toward their students can be detrimental. Hurley (1997, p. 584) states the following, "Generally, researchers have found that the motivation of people with low self-esteem is more adversely affected by negative feedback than the motivation of people with high self-esteem."

Students who are struggling with low self-esteem and motivation may find it difficult to excel to a higher level because of a lack of interest in academics and

school in general. Eccles, Jussim, and Madon (1997, p. 793) state, “These students may give up trying to succeed in school, allow their achievement to decline, and thus ultimately fulfill their teacher’s negative expectations.”

The effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy are not only limited to those students with low ability. Often times expectations can impact all students who range in various academic talents. Factors, described earlier in this chapter, explained the ways in which teachers develop lowered expectations. The effect is thus felt by students through differential treatment as well as the pedagogy of these teachers. Teacher behaviors convey to a student the amount of success or failure they are likely to experience in the classroom. Janes (1996, p. 5) explains:

Much of the research and literature now holds fast to the notion that, although teacher expectations are an integral part of the issue, it is more a matter of how the expectations are communicated in differential treatment that actually affects student achievement. Current analysis of teacher expectations shows that while the expectations teachers hold for students may indeed be influential, the way in which a teacher responds or behaves as a result of these expectations is a more important variable. This behavior or response by a teacher can significantly affect the self-esteem, academic performance, and motivation of the student.

Research has shown that teachers do interact and behave with students differently as a result of the expectations those teachers hold toward the student. These interactions toward students, for whom teachers express lessened

expectancies, can greatly affect as well as limit a students' academic development. Cotton and Wikelund (1997, p.8) express the following types of differential treatment expressed by teachers as a result of varying expectations:

- Giving low-expectation students fewer opportunities than high-expectation students to learn new material.
- Waiting less time for low-expectation students to answer during class recitations than is given to high-expectation students.
- Giving low-expectation students answers or calling on someone else rather than trying to improve their responses by giving clues, repeating, or rephrasing questions as they do with high-expectation students.
- Giving low-expectation students inappropriate reinforcement, example; giving reinforcement that is not contingent on performance.
- Criticizing low-expectation students for failure more often and more severely than high-expectation students and praising them less frequently for success.
- Failing to give feedback to the public responses of low-expectation students.
- Paying less attention to low-expectation students than high-expectation students, including calling on low expectation students less often during recitations.

- Seating low-expectation students farther from the teacher than high-expectation students.
- Interacting with low-expectation students more privately than publicly and structuring their activities more closely.
- Conducting differential administration or grading of tests or assignments, in which high-expectation students-but not low-expectation students- are given the benefit of the doubt in borderline cases.
- Conducting less friendly and responsive interactions with low-expectation students than high-expectation students, including less smiling, positive head nodding, forward leaning, and eye contact.
- Giving briefer and less informative feedback to the questions of low-expectation students than those of high-expectation students.
- Asking high-expectation students more stimulating, higher cognitive questions than low-expectation students.
- Making less frequent use of effective but time consuming instructional methods with low-expectation students than with high-expectation students, especially when time is limited.

These differing interactions and behaviors exhibited by teachers as a result of lowered expectations can dramatically influence the achievement of lower expectation students. The irregularity of teacher pedagogy, as a result of expectations, can be responsible for variances in the learning outcome of

students. Teachers express their expectations of students with words, non-verbal interactions, and behaviors. This expression can enforce both positive and negative expectations that ultimately shape the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The self-fulfilling prophecy, whether carried out by the Pygmalion Effect, Sustaining Expectations, or the Halo Effect, can drastically impact the potential for student success. The factors that control expectations, which teachers bring to the classroom, play a large role in the development of the self-fulfilling prophecy. The occurrence of diminished expectations, and the instructional behaviors they foster, greatly influence the academic efficacy of each and every student. It is clear through research that students who have higher expectations placed on them in school will better succeed academically and with a feeling of positive self-worth.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Critique, Conclusion, and Recommendations

#### Critique

A review of the literature shows that teacher expectations play an immense role in a student's academic achievement. The research has concluded that there are various ways in which expectations are developed and carried out. The research also points out that there is a connection between the level of teacher expectancies and the performance of students both academically and emotionally.

The literature points to three different types of expectations and how they affect students. The Pygmalion Effect results in students living up to pre-established expectations formed by their teachers. Sustaining Expectations is the result of teachers expecting students to sustain earlier developed academic patterns. Finally, the Halo Effect derives its meaning from the sense that high expectation students can do no wrong while low expectation students can do very little right.

What the literature does not expand on is these three forms of expectations when they act together, and how each can further develop the level of expectation and the effect on a student. Not always do each of these expectancy formations occur independently. Many times the three corroborate to dramatically affect a student. The self-fulfilling prophecy fulfills a teacher's expectations about a student through the student actually living up to that

expectation. When a student performs at the expected lowered level, the door has been opened for the Sustaining Expectations Effect. Regardless of increased student performance, the teacher fails to notice and even refuses to notice improvement. This places the student in a gray area of achievement and will hinder future performance. This occurrence can then play into the outcome of the Halo Effect in which high expectation students can do very little wrong while low expectations students, while possibly making positive academic strides, can do very little right. Once these patterns have developed it can put low expectation students at a point of not being able to control their own destiny. This consistent treatment over time can dramatically affect the student.

The perpetual handling of low expectation students by teachers can eventually label that student. As a result of the decreased expectations, he/she is marked by educational staff, parents, and friends. This is especially true if a student has any other characteristics that aid in triggering a lowered expectation. All too often these characteristics place an unproven label and lowered expectations in which the student is unable to break away from. The effects of these expectations and labels are then carried out through the quality of classroom instructions received. Teachers can expound their expectations toward a student through both verbal comments and non-verbal actions.

Because teachers are human they too will form varying expectations toward students. Because we as humans are capable of interpreting and living up to what others expect of us, the power of expectations in education must not be overlooked.

## Conclusion

Information obtained through this research reveals that teacher expectations can affect student performance as well as self-esteem in the academic setting. Research shows that these expectations account for nearly five to ten percent of student achievement outcomes. Although this percentage may initially appear somewhat insignificant, it is important to realize it's consequence when compounded year after year in the schooling process. The effect of lowered expectations can also carry into a student's post educational experience. When a student is the recipient of lowered expectations or possibly labeled during their educational experiences, self-esteem levels can also diminish. Often times this lowered self-esteem or label that is obtained in school is fulfilled by the student, making it easier for people outside of school to express the same level of expectations.

The research also shows that younger children are more susceptible to lowered expectations, and their effects, than are older students. Preschool and elementary students, because of their fragile developmental stage, tend to listen more closely and take closer to heart the effects of altered teacher pedagogy. Likewise it is important to note that communicating lowered expectations seems to have a greater impact on decreasing student performance than communicating higher expectations does in raising performance. It is clear that diminished expectations are a powerful factor in a student's success.

It is important to note that most teachers form expectations on the principle of information found in school files. Most teachers will also change their expectations as student performance changes. It is unfortunate, however, that a small percentage of teachers will interact with lower expectations students in a way that will inhibit their academic growth.

It is essential to note that not all students can be taught using the same instructional approach. Setting very high expectations for all students will not necessarily produce positive outcomes from these students. Teachers should instead focus on the fact that different treatment of students can label or cause lower academic success in the schooling years. It is important to look at each student for what he/she is and develop a high level of expectations for that student. The old saying, “never judge a book by its cover” applies to this research. A student who feels a positive feeling of self-worth, and is challenged through higher levels of expectation, will assuredly have a more positive experience in today’s classroom.

### Recommendations

Although each student may be affected differently by varying expectation levels, the following recommendations may be used by teachers to help develop awareness and strategies when dealing with expectations in the classroom.

- Teachers need to understand the full impact of prejudice, bias and stereotyping in an educational setting. They should respect all students as individuals with diverse needs and interests.

- Use the abilities of all students to expand their learning and success in the classroom.
- Set goals for students that are both attainable and challenging.
- Focus on the social skills that various children bring to the classroom.  
Organize the classroom in a way that encourages open participation.
- Display your attitudes, beliefs, and expectations clearly to each student.
- Be careful of social stereotyping, labeling, and the bias of other educators.  
Evaluate students according to reliable documents, records, and their achievement in your classroom.
- Communicate to all students that they have the ability to reach the goals you have set in your class.
- Remember that students excel in different areas. Be sure to allow each student the opportunity to show his/her achievements and strengths to the class.
- When giving feedback to students, stress progress that relates to the student's previous level. Do not compare them with other students in the class.
- Re-teach in a different way instead of just repeating the same instruction if a student does not understand a lesson or specific concept.
- Provide students the opportunity to reflect on their responses. Avoid closing the door on students by providing them limited opportunity to respond to questions.
- Concentrate on extending kindness and inspiration to all students.

- As educators it is important to see intelligence as ever changing rather than fixed or rooted. This view of intelligence is less likely to produce a bias about what students will be able to achieve.
- Both teachers and administration need to sustain high expectations. To expect or allow students to do less is an injustice.

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