

Teacher Expectations of Students

▶ A self-fulfilling prophecy?

Teachers are the single most important in-school factor that affects student achievement. As a result, over the last decade state leaders have taken aim at increasing educator effectiveness, including requiring the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems. Such systems are intended to better identify high- or low-quality teaching using objective student data and observational rubrics that assess critical skills. As new evaluation systems begin to be implemented, researchers continue to call attention to the slight nuances in teacher behavior—rarely identified during classroom observations—that can significantly influence students' learning progress and achievement.

A growing body of research suggests that the expectations a teacher sets for an individual student can significantly affect the student's performance. Teacher expectations can, for example, be based on student characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and family income level, or indicators of past performance. These expectations can cause teachers to differentiate their behavior towards individual students, such that teachers set lower expectations for some students, provide briefer (or no) feedback on student errors—and less positive feedback after correct answers—and grant students less time to answer questions. All of these teacher behaviors, when repeated day in, day out, over the course of

a year or multiple school years, can negatively impact student performance and ultimately perpetuate the achievement gaps that plague the American education system. While varied expectations for students are rarely developed out of malice, teachers need to be aware of the consequences of different student expectations and understand how to correct them.

This issue of *The Progress of Education Reform* provides a review of the research on the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement. It also explores how policy can be used to improve the way schools are evaluating for, monitoring, and providing training to teachers on the potential negative effects of rigid teacher expectations.

What's Inside

- ▶ Learn how expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy
- ▶ Research on the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement
- ▶ How policies can be used to minimize negative effects of teacher expectations



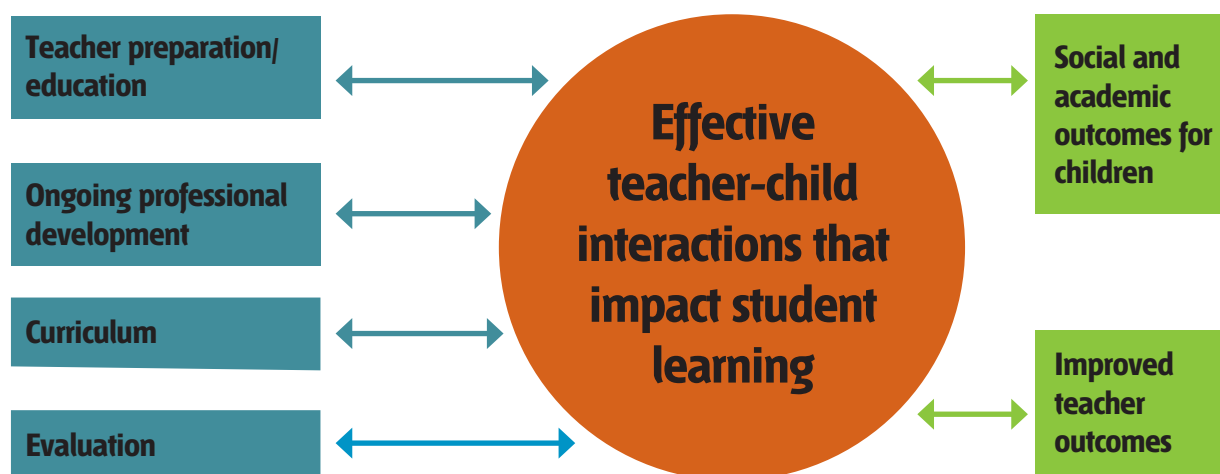
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The Role of Effective Interactions in Creating Opportunities to Improve Children's Outcomes



Source: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, *Measuring and Improving Teacher-Student Interactions in PK-12 Settings to Enhance Students' Learning* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, 2011).

Teachers reveal their expectations in the learning opportunities they provide

It is human nature to form instant impressions, perceptions, and expectations of those with whom we come into contact. At the beginning of each school year, teachers must quickly gauge academic expectations for a classroom full of students they have only just met, in order to ensure that each child's interests, strengths, and weaknesses are accounted for and effectively addressed throughout the year.

However, teachers run the risk of setting inappropriate expectations of some students, which can negatively influence their attitudes and behavior towards those learners. Without realizing it, teachers reveal expectations in learning opportunities provided. A teacher might set lower standards for historically low-achieving students or he/she might perceive various student's behaviors differently. A delayed response from a non-minority, more affluent student might be perceived as thoughtful consideration, while the same delayed response from a minority, lower-income student might be considered as a lack of understanding. These differences in teacher behavior convey expectations to students, which can significantly affect their own behavior in ways that impede academic achievement. These negative teacher effects are estimated to account for 5-10% of the variance in student achievement.¹

While the percentile is relatively small, the effects on individual students, especially minorities and low-income, can be great and therefore warrant the attention of policymakers and education leaders. Furthermore, with the current implementation of the rigorous Common Core State Standards in 46 states, education leaders should be cognizant that the high expectations reflected in the standards will not be realized if teachers don't believe all students can meet the standards.

In 1968, Rosenthal and Jacobson released an influential study, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, one of the first to provide overwhelming evidence that teacher expectations can significantly affect student achievement. The researchers gave teachers false information about the IQ results of select students and indicated that those students were on the brink of rapid intellectual growth. The findings were startling. Those students whom teachers expected to perform well showed significantly higher gains in intellectual growth than their classmates at the end of the year.² Many subsequent studies have since supported the general findings of the original 1968 study.

Selected Research

Expecting the Best for Students: Teacher Expectations and Academic Outcomes

(Christine Rubie-Davies, John Hattie, and Richard Hamilton, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 76, No. 3, 2006, pp. 429-444.)

Aim: To explore the relationship between varying teacher expectations for students from four ethnic groups (Maori, Pacific Island, Asian, and New Zealand European) and student reading achievement.

Findings:

- ▶ Teacher expectations of Maori students were significantly lower. Maori students are often perceived to be low-performing and to come from families where education is not valued.
- ▶ Teacher expectations were higher than actual student performance for Pacific Island, Asian, and New Zealand European.
- ▶ Although all groups scored similarly on the pre-test taken at the beginning of the year, by the end of the year, Maori students made the smallest gains, and their achievement had fallen significantly below the Asian and New Zealand European students.
- ▶ Because Maori and Pacific Island students are from the same social class and commonly perform at similar levels, these results suggest that teacher expectations had more to do with ethnicity than any other factor.

Are Teachers' Expectations Different for Racial Minority Than for European American Students?: A Meta-Analysis

(Harriet Tenenbaum and Martin Ruck, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 99, No. 2, 2007, pp. 253-273.)

Aims: To examine whether teachers' expectations, referrals, positive and neutral speech, and negative speech differ toward ethnic minority students (African American, Asian American, and Latino/a) as compared with European American students.

Findings:

- ▶ Three of four meta-analyses conducted found "small but significant effects suggesting that teachers held more positive expectations, made more positive referrals and fewer negative referrals, and provided more positive and neutral speech for European American children than for African American and Latino/a children. Furthermore, teachers held higher expectations for Asian American students compared with all other groups of children."
- ▶ Teacher expectations can translate into behaviors that affect student performance and contribute to a classroom climate in which equality can be significantly compromised.

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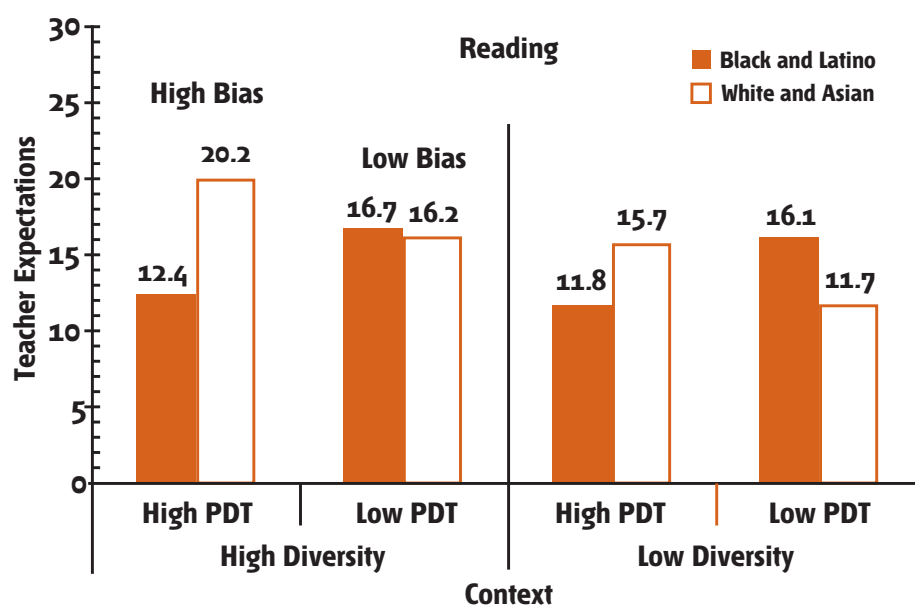
Teacher Expectations, Classroom Context, and the Achievement Gap

(Clark McKown and Rhona Weinstein, *Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2008, pp. 235-261.)

Aim: To examine the role of classroom context in diminishing the relationship between child ethnicity and teacher expectations, and to estimate the contribution of teacher expectations to the year-end ethnic achievement gap in high- and low-bias classrooms.

Findings:

- ▶ There was a statistically significant difference in teacher expectations of ethnically diverse pupils in classrooms where students perceived high differential treatment (PDT) by teachers toward students (i.e., students clearly recognized that they and their classmates were or were not expected to perform well). In a highly diverse classroom, teachers ranked European American and Asian American students seven points higher on a 30-point reading hierarchy and more than eight points higher on a 30-point hierarchy than equally achieving African American and Latino students.
- ▶ Furthermore, in those classrooms, teacher differential treatment of ethnically diverse students with identical prior achievement levels was shown to have a statistically significant effect on the overall year-end achievement gap.



Source: *Teacher Expectations, Classroom Context, and the Achievement Gap*, Clark McKown and Rhona Weinstein

The Implicit Prejudiced Attitudes of Teachers: Relations to Teacher Expectations and the Ethnic Achievement Gap

(Linda van den Bergh, Eddie Denessen, Lisette Hornstra, Mrinus Voeten, and Rob W. Holland, *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2010, pp. 497-527.)

Aim: To examine whether classroom differences are a result of differential teacher expectations, and to identify the prejudiced attitudes that possibly underlie these expectations.

The study found that:

- ▶ In classrooms where teachers held implicit negative attitudes towards certain ethnic groups, students from those groups performed poorly compared to their peers in other classes.
- ▶ Furthermore, in those teachers' classrooms the achievement gaps were significantly larger between minority and nonminority students than achievement gaps in other classes.

Considerations for policymakers and education leaders

These research findings have clear implications for a number of ongoing and emerging reform initiatives. The following section explores areas of policy related to educator effectiveness that could benefit from the consideration of how teacher expectations can affect student achievement.

Teacher Preparation – Ensure the right applicants are entering the teaching profession

Teacher preparation may be the ideal time to identify and weed out those 5–10%³ of teachers whose perceptions of student ability keep them from providing an equitable and highly demanding education for all. To do this, faculty must first be knowledgeable about the potential impact of teacher expectations on student achievement and know how to identify inflexible perceptions among teacher candidates. Research indicates that implicit attitude assessments can successfully identify these prejudiced attitudes.⁴ Second, schools of education can educate teacher candidates about the risks of inequitable expectations, offer training in recognizing and amending negative attitudes based on student backgrounds, and counsel those who are not appropriate teaching candidates to other professions.

Teacher Professional Development – Raise teacher awareness so behavior can be changed

It cannot be overstated—high-quality teacher professional development is essential to great teaching. Too few programs, however, emphasize strengthening student/teacher interactions and/or help raise teacher awareness of their own biases so that they are able to develop higher expectations and change negative behaviors. There are a number of ways to provide teachers with development opportunities, but researchers insist that to be successful, such opportunities must offer adequate time for collaboration and support amongst colleagues.⁵ The following are two examples of well-known programs that ensure time for collaboration and support:

- ▶ **Teacher Expectations Student Achievement (TESA)** – Research-based staff development that focuses on maintaining high expectations for all students.
 - Helps teachers track and understand their interactions with students in order to help them increase the quality of those interactions.
 - Focuses on 15 interactions that improve three critical areas of teaching behaviors: questioning, feedback, and student self-esteem.
- ▶ **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)** – Research-based approach to defining and measuring effective interactions in early childhood and elementary classrooms.
 - Assesses three broad domains of effective interactions—Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support—that are essential to children’s classroom experiences in the pre-K-3 grades.⁶
 - Research on CLASS has shown that establishing teachers’ skills in these areas are associated with higher student achievement.⁷

Teacher Evaluation Systems – Use measures that identify implicit teacher beliefs

New teacher evaluation systems are currently being built, piloted, or are in place in over 30 states around the country. Although each system’s attributes vary, most are moving towards, if not already using, a combination of objective student data and observational rubrics to evaluate teacher effectiveness. The evaluation rubrics consist of teacher qualities that are easily observed in a 15-30 minute period, such as the skills needed to properly plan for a lesson, to quickly discern student signals of misunderstanding, and to maintain an organized and well-managed classroom. However, teacher observation rubrics are not in many cases calibrated to detect or measure teachers’ differentiated expectations and perceptions of students, and will require an alternative component of an evaluation system. Because research has found that student perception of differential teacher treatment is correlated to student achievement, one measure states might consider incorporating into teacher evaluation systems is a carefully crafted survey of student attitudes or perceptions.

Common Core or other state standards – Ensure teachers match expectations to high standards

Setting new higher standards and creating high-quality curricula are insufficient. While standards are intended to promote rigorous common expectations, this aim can be compromised when teacher expectations inhibit students' opportunities to learn. Drawing on teacher interviews and survey data, a 2012 study found that learning opportunities for students in five middle schools—committed to a schoolwide model built on high standards and rigorous expectations—were perpetually stratified due to teacher expectations of their students and standards.⁸ States' diligent efforts to provide teacher training on the new Common Core State Standards will be compromised unless training emphasizes the potentially significant negative impact of teacher expectations on student success, and measures whether teachers are actually implementing the standards for all students.

Conclusion

In order to shrink the achievement gap in our nation's schools and reclaim America's status as the world's leading education system, states need to ensure that every classroom has a high-quality teacher who sets high expectations for all of his/her students. While the impact of reduced teacher expectations is not considered pervasive, it can have a significant impact on the trajectory of some students' learning outcomes. Teachers are often unaware of the differential expectations they have set for their students, not recognizing the minor behavioral cues that can negatively affect their students' achievement levels. Education leaders are strongly encouraged to ensure that teacher preparation and professional development programs help teachers recognize their own biases and learn how to engage in teacher-student interactions that help all students achieve high expectations.

ECS Resources

Teacher Quality: What Preparation and Practices Matter?

From the ECS Research Studies Database, explore what teacher practices negatively and/or positively affect student achievement.

http://www.ecs.org/rs/SearchEngine/SearchResults.aspx?faq_id=a0870000005ledoAAA

Other Resources

Expectations and Student Outcomes

This 'oldie but goodie' provides a useful definition on various effects that teacher expectations can have on student performance. Also included is a lengthy list of relevant research studies and their findings.

educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/562

Teachers' Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform

From the Morning Edition on NPR. Via interviews with Robert Rosenthal and Robert Pianta of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, the broadcaster explores how teacher expectations can affect the performance of the children they teach.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform>



Endnotes

- 1 Jere E. Brophy, "Research on the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy and Teacher Expectations," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (1983): 631-661.
- 2 R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).
- 3 Ibid, Brophy p. 634.
- 4 Linda Van den Bergh, Eddie Denessen, Lisette Hornstra, Marinus Voeten, Rob W. Holland, "The Implicit Prejudiced Attitudes of Teachers: Relations to Teacher Expectations and the Ethnic Achievement Gap," *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2010): 497-527.
- 5 Rhona S. Weinstein, Sybil M. Madison, and Margaret R. Kuklinski, "Raising Expectations in Schooling: Obstacles and Opportunities for Change," *American Education Research Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1995): 121-159.
- 6 Robert C. Pianta, *Effective Teacher-Student Interactions: Measuring and Improving Classroom Practice* (New York, New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2009).
- 7 Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, *Measuring and Improving Teacher-Student Interactions in PK-12 Settings to Enhance Students' Learning*, (Charlottesville, Virginia: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, 2011).
- 6 Donna Harris, "Varying Teacher Expectations and Standards: Curriculum Differentiation in the Age of Standards-Based Reform," *Education and Urban Society*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2012): 128-150.

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