

Education Matters

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What teachers expect from students, they generally get!

By Robert T. Tauber, Ph.D.

Most teachers know a little bit about the Pygmalion effect, or the idea that one's expectations about a person can eventually lead that person to behave and achieve in ways that confirm those expectations. Everyone who has seen George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* or viewed the movie *My Fair Lady* remembers Eliza Doolittle's remarkable transformation, due to Professor Higgins' expectations of her. Although first widely presented to educators in Rosenthal and Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, few educators understand exactly how to use the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP) as a purposeful pedagogical tool to convey positive expectations and, maybe even more importantly, to avoid conveying negative expectations.

How many of us think we are reasonably good judges of character? With years of teaching experience under our belts, are we more often than not able to size up students correctly? Occasionally we are wrong, but most often we are correct. Many teachers believe that they can judge ahead of time, sometimes by just a glance the first day of school, how certain students are likely, over time, to achieve and behave.

Try the following exercise. Pretend that you are not reading an article designed to make you more sensitive to the power of teacher expectations. Jot down the first descriptive thoughts that come to your mind when you think about the following kinds of

people. Be honest. No one but you will see what you write.

Generally, what descriptors might you use to characterize the following?

1. A teenager from a family that has strong and vocal Democratic (or Republican) Party ties;
2. A significantly overweight teenage girl;
3. A primary school student from an affluent family who is an only child;
4. A middle school student whose two older siblings you had in class several years ago—each of whom was often a troublemaker;
5. An Asian boy who is the son of a respected university math professor;
6. A teenage boy who is thin, almost frail, and very uncoordinated for his age.

First Impressions are Lasting

In spite of your best efforts to resist predictions regarding these students and their academic and/or behavioral future, did you catch yourself forming expectations—even fleetingly? If your answer is “yes,” then the self-fulfilling prophecy probably is set in motion.



The basis of the SFP is that once a student has been pegged ahead of time as, a “troublemaker,” “nonscholar,” or “likely to be self-centered,” the chances are increased that our treatment of this student will, in effect, help our negative prophecies or expectations come true. Here the SFP would work to the detriment of the student. On the other hand, we could peg a student as “cooperative,” “a scholar,” or “likely to be a self-starter,” thus increasing the chances that our treatment of him will convey these expectations and, in turn, contribute to the student living up to our original positive prophecy. In this case, the SFP would work to the student’s benefit. Teachers, more often than not, get from students what they expect from them!

As a case in point, if you were a teacher and you had a student perform significantly better on a test than you would have predicted, would you look first at alternative reasons why this happened before admitting that you may have misjudged the child’s capabilities? Would you be tempted to rescore the student’s exam, believing that you must have made an error? Would you try to recall who was sitting next to this student when the test was administered and then check his or her exam for any all-too-obvious similarities in answers?

If, as one researcher claims, “The ultimate function of a prophecy is not to tell the future, but to make it,” then each time teachers size up or size down a student they are, in effect, influencing this student’s future behavior and achievement. This is an awesome burden for educators to carry. The burden can be lessened if educators better understand the SFP and then remain diligent in trying to control it.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

The term “self-fulfilling prophecy” was first coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1948. As part of his explanation of the SFP, Merton drew from the theorem “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

The following five-step model explains how the SFP 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 (loud and clear) what behavior and what achievement the teacher expects.
4. If this 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.

Because steps 3 through 5 are a continuation of steps 1 and 2, I will only elaborate on the first two steps.

Teachers Form Expectations

Teachers form expectations—often during the very first day of school. If first impressions are lasting impressions, then some students are at a definite advantage, while others are at a definite disadvantage.

What characteristics influence expectations? SFP research shows that teachers form expectations of, and assign labels to, people based on characteristics such as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, attractiveness, dialect, and socioeconomic level, among others. Once we label a person, it affects how we act and react toward that person. “With labels, we don’t have to get to know the person. We can just assume what the person is like” (Oakes, 1996).

For instance, research is clear that when it comes to a person’s body build, mesomorphs, those with square, rugged shoulders, small buttocks, and muscular bodies, are “better” than both ectomorphs, those with thin, frail-looking bodies, and endomorphs, those with chubby, stout bodies with a central concentration of mass. Among other expectations, mesomorphs are predicted to be better fathers, more likely to assume leadership positions, be more competent doctors, and most likely to put the needs of others before their own.

With respect to attractiveness, the adage “beauty is good” prevails whether in storybooks or in real life. All things being equal, beautiful people are expected to be better employees—most likely to be hired, given a higher salary, and to advance more rapidly than their ugly-duckling counterparts. Beautiful people are perceived (expected) to make better parents, be better public servants, and be more deserving of having benefits bestowed upon them. The overall pattern of ascribing positive attributes to attractive people, including students, is the norm.

Finally, one’s given name, often the first thing that we know about someone, can trigger expectations. Johnny Cash, in his song, “A Boy Named Sue,” knew the power of expectations, and research confirms it. Certain social handicaps are thrust upon the child who carries a socially undesirable name. In the United States, primarily white, middle-class females continue to teach diverse student bodies that less and less resemble the teachers themselves. When minority students, who by far possess the

more unusual names (at least in the eyes of teachers), come to class, teachers cannot help but be influenced.

The self-fulfilling prophecy works two ways. Not only do teachers form expectations of students, but also students form expectations of teachers—using the same characteristics described above.

Teachers Act on Expectations

Different expectations usually lead to different treatments. How does one person convey his expectations to another person? Rosenthal's Four-Factor theory, described in the often-recommended training video, *Productivity and the Self-fulfilling Prophecy: The Pygmalion Effect* (CRM Films, 1987), identifies climate, feedback, input, and output as the factors teachers use to convey expectations.

CLIMATE: the socioemotional mood or spirit created by the person holding the expectation, often communicated nonverbally (e.g., smiling and nodding more often, providing greater eye contact, leaning closer to the student).

FEEDBACK: providing both affective information (e.g., more praise and less criticism of high-expectation students) and cognitive information (e.g., more detailed, as well as higher quality, feedback as to the correctness of higher expectation students' responses).

INPUT: teachers tend to teach more to students of whom they expect more.

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, each critical to conveying a teacher's expectations, can better be controlled only if teachers are more aware that the factors are operating in the first place. Even if a teacher does not truly feel that a particular student is capable of greater achievement or significantly improved behavior, that teacher can at least act as if he holds such heightened positive expectations. Who knows, the teacher very well may be convincing to the student and, later, to himself.

Conclusion

Longitudinal studies support the SFP hypothesis that teacher expectations can predict changes in student achievement and behavior beyond effects accounted for by previous achievement and motivation (Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Teachers who effectively use the self-fulfilling prophecy can, and should, help students become their own Pygmalions. ■



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Student Expectations

What do students have to say about what teachers expect of them?

From the files of Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Digest, Linda Lumsden of the University of Oregon offers these insights into what students would like to see from their teachers.

Although students may appear to accept or even relish lax teachers with low standards, they ultimately come away with more respect for teachers who believe in them enough to demand more, both academically and behaviorally.

In a national survey of over 1,300 high school students, teens were asked on questionnaires and in focus group discussions what they think of and want from their schools.

Teens' responses concerning what they want were clustered in three main areas:

- ▶ **A Yearning for Order.** They complained about lax instructors and unenforced rules. "Many feel insulted at the minimal demands placed upon them. They state unequivocally that they would work harder if more were expected of them."
- ▶ **A Yearning for Structure.** They expressed a desire for "closer monitoring and watchfulness from teachers." In addition, "very significant numbers of respondents wanted after-school classes for youngsters who are failing."
- ▶ **A Yearning for Moral Authority.** Although teens acknowledged cheating was commonplace, they indicated they wanted schools to teach "ethical values such as honesty and hard work."

Similarly, when 200 middle school students in Englewood, Colorado, were surveyed about their most memorable work in school, they repeatedly "equated hard work with success and satisfaction. Moreover, they suggested that challenge is the essence of engagement" (Wasserstein 1995). ■

Linda Lumsden is associate editor and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon. This article is excerpted from "Expectations for Students," ERIC Digest, Number 116; ED409609 July 1997.

Cotton Incorporated Launches CottonCampus.org

Web Site Provides an Educational Resource for Teachers and Students

Cotton Incorporated recently announced that it has launched www.CottonCampus.org, a website that caters to elementary and middle school students, and their educators and parents. With slideshows, games, a video on cotton's sustainability, and classroom activities, the website is a valuable educational tool about the U.S. cotton industry.

CottonCampus.org is geared toward students in grades K-8. Teachers and parents can easily download the lesson plans, intended for middle school students, or *The Wonderful World of Cotton*, a coloring book designed and written for children.

CottonCampus.org also includes a timeline about the U.S. cotton industry, highlighting its role in the evolution of

fashion. Students can test their knowledge of cotton with a trivia quiz, and find answers to frequently asked questions about cotton's long-term sustainability. While the content is applicable to students in any part of the country, it may be particularly relevant to students in the Cotton Belt, given the economic relevance of cotton in those states. ■



The Wonderful World of Cotton downloadable coloring book

School District Uses New Software for ELL Students

The recent Quality Counts report showed that nationwide enrollments of English-language learners (ELL) increased by 57 percent from 1995 to 2005. Public K-12 schools educated a total of 5.1 million ELL students in the 2005-06 school year. Washington Elementary School District (WESD) based in Phoenix, AZ, is an example of one school district that has taken measures to help these students succeed academically.

Understanding that immersion is the key to language acquisition, WESD installed Rosetta Stone Classroom into all of their computer systems as a way to keep up with the ever-expanding globalization of education.

For more information, contact Kimberly Dresdale at kdresdale@golinharris.com.

MISSION TO PLANET 429

New Mixed Media Sci-Fi Comedy Adventure Series for Kids Ages 6-9

WTTW National Productions has launched *Mission to Planet 429*, a new mixed-media comedy adventure series for children ages 6-9. The program is planned to premiere with fifty-two half-hour shows on public television.

The retro sci-fi *Mission to Planet 429* focuses on the twists and turns of two rookie intergalactic "earthsploers" attempting to succeed on their various missions in order to save their planet from peril.

Because they have no previous knowledge of Earth, every adventure opens their eyes to something entirely new.

As the pair stumble through their assignments, they often misunderstand even the basic realities of daily life on planet Earth—which leads to ridiculous and hilarious moments in every episode.

Mission to Planet 429 is a multiplatform immersive experience. A robust interactive website, as well as gaming and other traditional and new media content, will bring the property to life well beyond the



television screen. *Mission to Planet 429* will also be supported by an extensive licensing and merchandising campaign.

Mission to Planet 429 will encourage children to develop their reading and comprehension skills as they tackle informational text. The project is partially funded through a Ready to Learn grant from the US Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement. ■

Some TV Not So Bad—says a New Report Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education

The study examines the impact of educational television programs on children's literacy skills—with the aim of informing the debate over if, or when, kids should be exposed to certain types of media.

Many states ban or strictly limit the showing of multimedia to children under six in schools. The idea behind this study is for the findings to shape the national education policy and give states clear guidelines on these issues.

The initial findings seem to demonstrate that educational media improves preliteracy skills. Students benefited significantly from watching an educational program in a randomized control study—regardless of demographics and income.

For more information, visit www.mcgrc.com.



California Teachers Supported Marriage Amendment

The California teachers union spent \$1.25 million to fight the state's marriage-protection amendment (Proposition 8), which voters approved in November. But at the same time, individual public school teachers, aides, and counselors in the state gave twice as much to support the amendment (\$450,000) than to defeat it (\$210,000), according to an NPR analysis of contribution data.

Proposition 8 amended California's Constitution to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Gay activists are legally challenging the measure, and the state's highest court will render a decision soon.

Marriage supporters have criticized the California Teachers Association for using member funds to fight the amendment.

Yet, union spokeswoman Sandra Jackson claimed her group represents the majority of its members.

"I don't believe the overall membership is more conservative than the leadership," she told NPR. "If so, I think we would hear about it."

Candi Cushman, education analyst at Focus on the Family Action, said it's time teachers unions heard from their conservative members.

"The union's audacious claim that its members are just as liberal as its leaders — despite evidence to the contrary—should give teachers a clear call to action to make their voices heard," she said. ■

Free Current Events Classroom Resources

Izzit is an organization of television producers who create and distribute programs that spark curiosity and lively classroom discussions to introduce students to the benefits and characteristics of free societies. Resources include compelling educational DVDs, current events lessons, and unique games and contests useful for grades 4-12. See www.izzit.org. Teachers can sign up for:

What
!ZZit?

- A free DVD from izzit.org every school year.
- Free daily Current Events e-mail service that provides a fresh article along with class discussion questions ready to go by 7 a.m. EST.
- Izzit Teacher of the Year Contest: Winning teachers are those who most effectively and creatively use izzit DVDs and/or Current Events programs to introduce students to the benefits and characteristics of free societies.

U.S. Department of Education to Distribute Billions in Stimulus in the Next Six Months

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently announced that \$44 billion in stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) will be available to states by the end of April.

The first round of funding will help avert hundreds of thousands of estimated teacher layoffs in schools and school districts, while driving crucial education improvements, reforms, and results for students.

Guidelines authorize the release of half the Title I, Part A stimulus funds, amounting to \$5 billion, and half the funds for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), \$6 billion, without new applications.

Governors will be able to apply for 67 percent of the State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (SFSF) and discretionary SFSF, totaling \$32.5 billion. These funds will be released within two weeks after approvable applications are received.

Nearly \$700 million more will be available for various programs including vocational rehabilitation state grants and impact aid construction, Duncan said. Another \$17.3 billion for Pell Grants and work-study funds is available for disbursement for the next academic year beginning July 1.

An additional \$35 billion in Title 1, IDEA, and State Fiscal Stabilization Funds, as well as monies for other programs, will be distributed between July 1 and September 30.

To receive the first round of state stabilization funds, states must commit to meet ARRA requirements, including making progress on four key education reforms:

- Raising standards through college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities;
- Increasing transparency by establishing better data systems tracking student progress over time;
- Improving teacher effectiveness and ensuring an equitable supply and distribution of qualified teachers;
- Supporting effective intervention strategies for lowest-performing schools.

"These are one-time funds, and state and school officials need to find the best way to stretch every dollar and spend the money in ways that protect and support children without carrying continuing costs," said Duncan. ■

The Pitfalls of National Standards

7 worries I have about the call for national standards

By Chester Finn, Jr.



My feet aren't frozen, but as the march toward national or "common" academic standards trudges through deepening snow, they're getting chilly. Evidence is mounting that those who take curricular content seriously may not like what we find at the end of this road, and I worry that America could be headed toward another painful bout of curriculum warfare.

Recall that the foremost arguments for national standards are that a big modern country on a shrinking, competitive globe needs a single set of minimum expectations for all its schools and kids, whether in South Dakota or South Carolina; that having fifty different sets fosters confusion, low standards, and noncomparable data; and that the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has made a vexed situation worse.

But that doesn't mean national standards are inevitably superior to what states (and others) have developed, and it's possible they won't turn out to be. So far, I've accumulated seven worries.

Worry #1

Both teacher unions have now joined this quest. It felt okay when Randi Weingarten came out for national standards, considering that the American Federation of Teachers' positions on standards and curriculum (though not assessment and accountability) have been sound—sometimes downright inspiring—since Al Shanker's day. But I cannot be the only person whose heart sank when Dennis

Van Roekel announced that the National Education Association was also joining the "partnership" previously consisting of governors, state school chiefs, Achieve, the Hunt Institute, and a couple of other serious groups. What really formed ici-



"21st Century Skills" should be sidelined. History and science should be included.



cles on my toes was his declaration that this move is perfectly compatible with the NEA's adoration of "21st Century Skills" and "comprehensive" standards that include "accountability for child well-being, facilities and supplies." (Who else remembers the brouhaha over "opportunity to learn standards" in the early '90s?)

Worry #2

Speaking of 21st Century Skills, the more I learn about this woolly notion, the clearer it becomes that this infatuation is bad for liberal learning; a ploy to sidestep results-based accountability; somewhere between disingenuous and naïve regarding its impact on serious academic content; and both psychologically questionable and pedagogically unsound. (For a terrific exposition of these problems, see <http://fordham.citysoft.org>.) Yet I don't think the NEA is the only member of the "common standards" partnership that's smitten.

Worry #3

Some are also overly fond of PISA—that's the Paris-based OECD's international math/science/literacy testing program for fifteen-year-olds—and view it as the surest path to "international benchmarking" and multinational comparisons. Yet Tom Loveless of the Brown Center at Brookings has recently unmasked PISA's ideological bias and misguided notions about what young people should know and be able to do.

Worry #4

As revisions are made in Achieve's respected "American Diploma Project" (ADP) benchmarks—these are at the core of the common standards project—one hears reports of a major tussle over whether English should continue to include literature and list important literary works.

Worry #5

If the common standards enterprise remains confined, like NCLB (and ADP), to English and math, it may further narrow what's seriously taught in school—with a malign effect on states that have a decently rounded curriculum that gives due weight to science, history, even art. (Picture what happens to history education in a state that joins a national project that wants no part of history.)

Worry #6

Suppose that the emerging standards are sound. Yet nobody is talking about common assessments to accompany them, at least not in this lifetime. But without an agreed-upon test and “cut points” for passing it (or, if you prefer, demonstrating “proficiency”), these standards will have no traction in the real world of NCLB and discrepant state accountability systems.

Worry #7

Finally, and maybe most troubling, is institutional instability. The United States of America in 2009 lacks a suitable place to house national standards and tests over the long haul. Who will “own” them? Who will be responsible for revising them? Correcting their errors? Ensuring that assessment results are reported in timely fashion? Nobody wants the Education Department to do this. There's reason to keep it separate from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and its governing board. Yet the awkward ad hoc “partnership” now assembling to pursue this process could fall apart tomorrow if key individuals retire, die, or defect; if election results change the makeup of participating organizations; if the money runs out; or if their working draft runs into political headwinds like the “voluntary national standards” of the early 1990s. This is no way to run something as important as national academic standards for a big modern country.

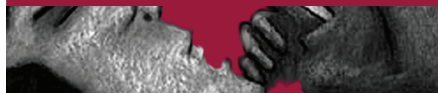
Can this idea be salvaged? I sense that we ought not put all our eggs in one basket. Secretary Duncan and private funders should pay for several projects to develop different versions of “common standards”—and pay others to ponder new and potentially more durable institutional arrangements. This should be done on a fast track, with great transparency, and with the requirement that, once one or

more sets of standards pass the laugh test, assessments must swiftly follow, complete with common “cut scores,” maybe fixed (like NAEP) at several levels.

“21st Century Skills” should be sidelined. History and science should be included. Yes, that makes it harder—there's the evolution issue, slavery, Reagan, Monica, Iraq, and a few other dicey issues to work through—but at least it would point us toward the development of educated people, not just kids with skills. And Uncle Sam should energize this process by signaling that nobody in Washington will move to fix NCLB's many shortcom-



The standards-development process should be transparent and participatory, especially when it comes to specifying “what's most important to know.”



ings until sound common standards and tests—maybe a choice among several—exist and are ready to be used in NCLB 2.0.

The standards-development process should be transparent and participatory, especially when it comes to specifying “what's most important to know.” Engage college professors and book reviewers who care about literature. Ask David McCullough to lead the history team, maybe teamed up with Henry Louis Gates. Place real mathematicians in charge of math

standards and scientists in charge of science—but have their drafts vetted by consumers of every sort: practicing engineers, police chiefs, newspaper editors, and more. What history and civics does Bart Peterson or Tommy Thompson think kids need to know? What math does Warren Buffett recommend? What knowledge does E. D. Hirsch deem truly fundamental?

Use available tools and models to simplify and expedite this process. The U.S. doesn't need to start from scratch. Several states have fine standards. So does the Advanced Placement program. ADP is already in play. What can be borrowed or adapted from the SAT and ACT? Make the most of Lexiles, Quantiles, NAEP, NWEA's computer-adaptive testing program, and more. But don't pretend to prescribe the whole curriculum. What's common across the land, once turned into curriculum and lesson plans, should occupy maybe half the school day. Perhaps two-thirds. Leave it to states, districts, schools and teachers to augment this—and differ from each other. A common standard is the skeleton of learning, not all the flesh. It outlines the core skills and knowledge that young Americans need to acquire, and should be accompanied by a reasonable assessment system to determine, at various grade levels, how well they've learned those things.

That's still worth doing. If we can figure out how. ■



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Task Force on K-12 Education. His primary focus is the reform of primary and secondary schooling.

Teens Don't Argue Education Policy

They Just Make a Difference

By Liza McFadden

If you're sick of stories about how wrong everything in education is, perhaps it's time we took a lesson from our kids. One of the fastest growing in-school programs was launched in Florida eight years ago. It's Teen Trendsetters, a student-led mentoring program designed to help struggling third-graders learn about science and improve their reading.

Teen Leaders

Teens are in control of the entire process, from getting their friends to mentor, to making sure everyone shows up once a week to mentor their third-grade mentees. Advisors to the program rave at the impact. Patty Jack, an advisor to the teens at Mosley High School in Bay County, noted that the mentoring is a positive incentive for high school and elementary students to attend school. She shared that recently "one of the mentees cried because her mentor was absent."

Giving Back

While teens may be initially involved in Teen Trendsetters to earn community service hours, they stick with the program for other reasons. Ciera, a teen mentor at Shell Elementary, says she enjoys helping children at her former elementary school, especially when she remembers her own childhood. "I just love doing it because when I was young, I didn't have anyone coming to read with me," she said. "I consider it a blessing to go back and help out the kids."



Teen Trendsetters began in thirty schools in Florida under Jeb Bush's Governor's Mentoring Initiative six years ago. This past January—which was National Mentoring Month—thirty new programs will open in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

An anticipated 6,000 high school and elementary students will benefit from the Teen Trendsetters programs this school year, setting the stage for thousands more to become involved in the near future. All

books and curriculum are provided at no cost to schools, parents, or students.

If you know a great teen, have him check out www.teentrendsetters.org where he can learn more about our programs. ■

Liza McFadden is founder and president of Volunteer USA Foundation—a nonprofit organization that advocates for mentoring and literacy programs. The Foundation has funded the start-up of over 145 family literacy academies. We partner with caring nonprofits, schools, and volunteers to improve the education and lives of families. To learn more, visit www.volunteerusafoundation.org.



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