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TEACHER EXPECTATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

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One variable that has often been cited for high achievement in school is that of high expectations for learning. While most teachers would agree that some type of expectation, positive or negative, is placed upon every student in every classroom, how one arrives at these expectations varies as much as the effect it has upon the student. The idea that we as classroom teachers may have different expectations for students in our classrooms could be related to the different types of interactions that are a daily part of the classroom.

What, then, are the characteristics of the classroom teacher who has placed expectations on the students in their classrooms and what are the effects of teacher expectation in improving reading achievement?

Reading teachers must guard against transmitting to children a sense of failure when they are not progressing as the teacher had hoped. There are numerous studies which show that teacher expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies over time (Brophy and Good, 1974; Cooper, 1979; Dunkin and Biddle, 1974).

Elijah (1980) stated that the phenomenon of teacher expectation does exist and is an influential factor in determining how much is learned in the primary school classroom. Quite often we hear that boys do not achieve as well as girls in reading at the primary level or that Chapter I students are not expected to achieve as well as non-Chapter I students. These expectations for learning could be directly related to the reading achievement or underachievement of these students. Sheridan (1978) believes that the sex of the child may determine teacher expectancy while Bank (1980) has stated that teachers were more likely to overrate the abilities of girls than boys because the role behaviors of sitting quietly, listening well, reading and writing well, and not challenging the teacher appear to be role characteristics associated with girls. The student's classroom behavior has been associated with teacher expectancy in terms of

acting out behaviors. The student who acts out as contrasted to the student who is withdrawn will usually influence teacher expectation, and Brophy (1974) stated that when teachers have low expectations for certain students they may skip over them during classroom discussions. Thus, low achieving students may receive less encouragement and attention from the teacher.

Prior to 1968 there was little research to explain how teachers' expectations influenced the students' academic performance, especially in the area of reading. It is now commonly accepted that a teacher's behavior can result in an expectancy effect when student performance confirms a teacher's original predictions about a student. This performance is understood to have been determined by the teacher's behavior.

With the first major study on teacher expectancy (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968), a shift occurred in the understanding of what happens in classrooms. The results indicated that teachers generated expectations that were related to the ability levels of students and acted in ways to fulfill them. The results also implied that teachers may not have been as responsive to student performance as they should have been prior to their students being labeled.

There is still much discussion concerning teacher expectations and the student's academic performance. Is it myth? Aaron (1975) states that it is not a myth but indeed a reality that is far more complex than originally expected.

Teachers need to view students in essentially positive ways and hold favorable expectations. This is particularly important at the elementary level. The almost unavoidable conclusion is that the teacher's attitude and opinions regarding students do have a significant influence on success in school (Purkey, 1970).

Probably the most important element in the education process is the teacher (Artley, 1969; Haffner and Slobodian, 1969; Gentile and McMillan, 1976). A teacher who is knowledgeable, understanding, and adaptable will tend to create a comfortable learning environment. Thus, it is essential that a teacher have these qualities in order to accommodate the largest percentage of student variation

and needs (Lipton, 1969). Conversely, rigid and inflexible teachers were found by Lipton to have less success with readers, especially the remedial ones.

Teachers must also have positive attitudes toward reading. The teacher must be perceived by students as a reader. It is important that this characteristic be revealed to the students so that they can emulate it.

Perhaps one of the best ways to describe a good teacher is to consult the students. Hart (1934) found that the following were reasons why students liked or disliked teachers:

Reasons for Liking Teachers (Ranked in importance)

1. Is helpful with school work, explains lessons and assignments clearly and thoroughly, and uses examples in teaching.

2. Cheerful, happy, good-natured, jolly, has a sense of humor and can take a joke.

3. Human, friendly, companionable, "one of us."

4. Interested in and understands pupils.

5. Makes work interesting, creates a desire to work, makes classwork a pleasure.

Reasons for Disliking Teachers

1. Too cross, crabby, grouchy, never smiles, nagging, sarcastic, loses temper, "flies off the handle."

2. Not helpful with school work, does not explain lessons and assignments, not clear, work not planned.

3. Partial, has "pets" or favored students, and "picks on certain students."

4. Superior, aloof, haughty, "snooty", overbearing, does not know you out of class.

5. Mean, unreasonable, "hard-boiled", intolerant, ill-mannered, too strict, makes life miserable.

From the Hart study one could note that the characteristic exhibited by the teacher does have an influence on student attitude, behavior, and perhaps academic achievement. Student expectations of their teachers appear to be as related to academic achievement as the teacher expectations. It is important that the reading

teacher not exhibit "give up" attitudes as these feelings can be sensed by students. Harris (1977) has stated that one of the main objectives of the remedial reading teacher should be to develop a relationship with students in which they are not afraid they will be scolded, ridiculed, or punished. Teachers who are sarcastic, tense, bothered by interruptions, too serious, and who always want to be in control will not be successful in remedial reading classes.

Larkin (1980) has done extensive work with the Milwaukee Teacher Expectation Project and the Milwaukee School Improvement Program Rise. Both projects base work upon the school deficit theory which essentially says that teachers in schools with lower expectations for black students and disadvantaged students convey these expectations to students in a variety of ways. Larkin believes that teacher expectation inservice should be promoted, developed, and offered to all classroom teachers. If teachers are more aware of the vital role that teacher expectations play in the academic achievement of students, then much can be done to insure that expectations are positive and of a high nature.

There is now research to show that what teachers expect of their students is usually what they get (Good, 1982). Some teachers treat students believed to be less capable in ways that differ substantially from the ways that they interact with high achievers. Also, there is a definite link between the teacher's verbal statements and student learning. Weinstein (1982) states that there is increasing evidence to indicate that students are aware of differential teacher behavior and that certain practices have negative effects on students' beliefs and achievement. To promote more thoughtful and successful teaching behavior, teachers need to understand much more thoroughly the consequences of placing students into certain reading groups.

Another implication in the level of reading achievement of students is the matter of labeling. Children who have been labeled slow learners, emotionally handicapped, dyslexic, culturally disadvantaged, or as having minimal brain dysfunction may not achieve due to the fact of the labeling. It appears that we may be more directly responsible for the success or failure of students under our guidance than we care to admit.

The challenge is evident. Those who have the responsibility for teaching anyone should be very much aware of their behavior. Inservice needs to carry this message to all classroom teachers. Certain "mind-sets", regardless of the academic training of the teacher, will only lead to further problems in the classroom and impede learning. One must be aware of generalizing or carrying preconceived notions into the classroom.

Reading teachers are and should be unique. They are delegated the responsibility for teaching students who have often been labeled as having poor self-concepts. Perhaps, these poor self-concepts are the results of being labeled as remedial students. It is to the teacher who has this responsibility to be open to change and to change as needs arise. Regardless of the approach, method, or material, students will make little, if any, progress in reading without the assistance of a teacher who is able to motivate and who is, also, motivated.

Expectation research might best be summarized as a set of propositions (Dworkin and Dworkin, 1979). These propositions are:

1. Negative expectation is alive and well and living in the classroom;
2. When we, as teachers, are aware of the implications our behavior has toward students, we may change accordingly;
3. If we establish positive expectation as a form of intentional intervention, the impact may be seen in the performance and behavior of students;
4. Where negative expectation already exists, neither awareness nor positive labeling is a sufficient safeguard against differential teaching behavior;
5. It is frequently difficult to deal with negative expectation because adults are committed to the notion that regardless of their own feelings, they can and do deal fairly with all children, and
6. We can begin the reversal of negative to positive expectation if we can point to prior positive statements or observations about the student and link the new information to those statements.

As reading educators, we need to think seriously about our roles with students, especially the role with the student who is having difficulty in reading. How do our expectancies affect this achievement?

The major goal of any educational program is the academic achievement of its students. It seems we need to use every means possible to achieve this goal. These means may be quite simple--high and positive expectancies for all students regardless of any irrelevant factor. If the self-fulfilling prophecy is at work within our classrooms, let us be sure that it is working in a positive manner for all students.

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