



Student Social Background and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to review the literature dealing with the formation and the effects of varying teacher expectations on students. The study focuses on the characteristics of the *self-fulfilling prophecy*, and most importantly the factors - student social background in particular - 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 pupils based on their expectations. The study also shows the different behaviors that teachers must pay attention to while dealing with his/her pupils (learner in general).

Key words: Pupils; Social background; Teachers expectations; The self-fulfilling prophecy

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1. AIM OF SCHOOLING

Among the main aims of schooling are: to *equally* enable all students' personal development according to their abilities and stage of development (by balancing their cognitive, emotional and social development); to convey to them the basic knowledge and skills that will allow an independent, efficient and creative confrontation

with the social and natural environment; to develop their awareness of belonging to a specific cultural tradition. Since the public school is the institution where students are (supposed to be) considered equal, regardless of their social background, it is expected that factors related to social and family background should be less associated to a student's performance. Nearly all schools claim to *hold high expectations for all students*. In reality, however, what is taught is not always practiced. Although some schools and teachers maintain uniformly high expectations for all students, others have "*great expectations*" for *particular segments* of the student population but *minimal expectations* for others.

2. THE DEFINITION OF THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY/ PYGMALION EFFECT

In order to understand the self-fulfilling prophecy and how it develops, one needs to know what the term self-fulfilling policy or Pygmalion effect means. What follows are a series of the widely shared definitions of the SFP.

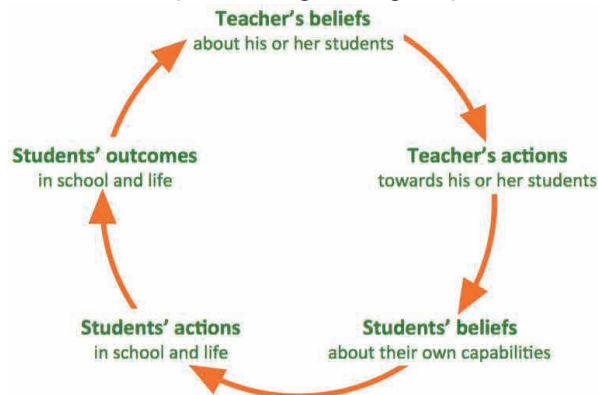
It is known as "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true" (Merton 1968, p. 477).

However, when we talk about it as expectations, it represents "Expectations about behaviors that evoke a situation in which the expectations are confirmed" (Bootzin, Bower, Zajonc, and Hall, 1986, p.628).

It is also "The process by which one's expectations about a person eventually lead that person to behave in ways that confirm those expectations" (Campbell and Simpson, 1996, p.38).

What is common in the definitions mentioned above is that the SFP is more than a wish or an expectation; it is a process composed of a series of steps, wishing something were so and magically, it is so, is not the case

here. Although expectations are important, the actions that comes after it is the main of the SFP,” what a teacher expects matters less for the child’s achievement than what a teacher does”(Goldenberg, 1992, p.522).



3. TEACHER EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The expectations teachers have for their students and the assumptions they make about students’ potential have a tangible effect on student achievement. According to Bamburg (1994, p.153), research “clearly establishes that teacher expectations do play a significant role in determining how well and how much students learn.”

Students tend to internalize the beliefs teachers have about their ability. Generally, they rise or fall to the level of expectation of their teachers, when teachers believe in students, students believe in themselves. When those you respect think you can, you think you can.” (Raffini, 1993).

Conversely, when students are viewed as lacking in ability or motivation and are not expected to make significant progress, they tend to adopt this perception of themselves. Regrettably, some learners, particularly those from certain social, economic, or ethnic groups, discover that their teachers consider them “incapable of handling demanding work (Gonder, 1991). Teachers’ expectations for students—whether high or low—can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, students tend to give to teachers as much or as little as teachers expect of them.

4. HOW INAPPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS ARE FORMED

Some expectations which are held by some teachers are not based on appropriate information (such as cumulative folder data, recent achievement tests, or ability etc.), Brookover, et al. (1982), Cooper (1984), Good (1987), and others have identified numerous factors which can lead teachers to hold lower expectations for some students than others. These include: sex, appearance, race/ ethnicity, type of school, messiness, halo effect, seating position,

negative comments about students, and socio economic status...

- **Sex:** Lower expectations are often held for older girls--particularly in scientific and technical areas--because of sex role stereotyping.

- **Appearance:** The expense or style of students’ clothes and students’ grooming habits can influence teachers’ expectations.

- **Race/Ethnicity:** Students from minority races or ethnic groups are sometimes viewed as less capable than Anglo students.

- **Type Of School :** Students from either inner city schools or rural schools are sometimes presumed to be less capable than students from suburban schools.

- **Messiness/Disorganization:** Students whose work areas or assignments are messy are sometimes perceived as having lower ability.

- **Halo Effect:** Some teachers generalize from one characteristic a student may have, thereby making unfounded assumptions about the student’s overall ability or behavior.

- **Seating Position:** If students seat themselves at the sides or back of the classroom, some teachers perceive this as a sign of lower learning motivation and/or ability and treat students accordingly.

- **Negative Comments about Students:** Teachers’ expectations are sometimes influenced by the negative comments of other staff members.

- **Socioeconomic Status:** Teachers sometimes hold lower expectations of students from lower SES backgrounds.

5. THE STUDENT’S SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND THE TEACHER’S EXPECTATIONS

A student’s socioeconomic (SES) background is one of the most noticeable factors that lead to from an inappropriate expectation. In schools, the socioeconomic background of each and every student can be easily accessed by students and teachers. (Weinstein, 1995) School programs (such as free and reduced lunch) can single out students who belong to a lower social status. The 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 not accepted by peers also runs the risk of experiencing that same rejection from teachers.

6. HOW TEACHERS CONVEY EXPECTATIONS: A FOUR-FACTOR THEORY

The conveying of expectancies factors identified by Rosenthal (cited in Tauber, 1998, p. 3) cites a four-factor theory that explains how teachers convey expectations.

These factors; which are: climate, feedback, input, and output; act as “expectancy-revealing perceiver expressive behaviors: behaviors that suggest to the target how the perceiver feels about him or her “(Neuberg, et al, 1993: 410).

a. **Climate:** This refers to the socio-emotional mood or spirit created by a person holding the expectation, often communicated nonverbally (e.g., smiling and nodding more often, providing greater eye contact, leaning closer to the student).

b. **Feedback:** refers to 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). The feedback can be delivered either in a one to one format or via abundant comments inserted in written assignments.

c. **Input:** It is translated into the fact that teachers tend to teach more to students of whom they hold a great expectations on.

d. **Output:** It is when teachers encourage greater responsiveness from their high-expectations students through their verbal and nonverbal behaviors (i.e., providing students with greater opportunities to seek clarification, give more time to respond...).

7. THE EFFECTS OF VARYING EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS

Varying expectations can influence students in many different and radical ways, such as: Achievement, motivation, and performance.... Research has shown that teachers do interact and behave with students differently as a result of the expectations those teachers hold toward the student. Some of these differential behaviors have direct effects on learning, and consequently widen the gap between relatively low- and high-achieving students. For example, students who are given more opportunities to learn, more clues, and who are called on more frequently should learn more than students who are given fewer such opportunities. Other teacher behaviors, such as those affecting the social-emotional climate or affective feedback, influence learning indirectly by affecting students’ own beliefs about their competencies, their expectations for success, and consequently their effort and other achievement behaviors.

Students who are labeled as low achievers, with poor records of academic performance, may lose their self-esteem as well as motivation, i.e., 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.”

Teachers may also develop closer relationships with children who are high-achievers. A positive, respectful relationship with the teacher gives students the sense of security they need to be active; participating in class, asking questions, and seeking challenges-which in turn promote learning. Teachers are less likely to develop a close relationship with low achievers or a students who they have labeled as ones, even though such a relationship might make a substantial difference in their attachment to school.

The effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy are not only limited to those students with low ability or records. It has also an impact on students with other characteristic (see the factors described earlier in this part, which has explained the ways in which teachers develop lowered or inappropriate expectations.).

Researchers such as Brattesani (1984), Brophy (1983), Cooper and Tom (1984), Cooper, et al. 1982, Good (1987) and Marshall and Weinstein (1984) point out that the negative effects of differential teacher treatment can be either direct or indirect. Giving low-expectation students a limited exposure to new learning material and less learning time inhibit their learning in very direct ways. Many of the kinds of differential treatment listed above, however, are indirect in their effects. That is, they give students messages about their capabilities, and to the extent that students believe and internalize those messages, their performance can come to reflect the teachers’ beliefs about their ability. In this way, teacher expectation effects are said to be mediated by student perceptions.

8. METHODOLOGY

8.1 Sample

This study will take place at Meziani Cherif Primary School, which is located in the new city Ali Menjdeli Constantine, Algeria. The classroom observation is designed for fifth grade pupils, located in the second Floor of the school building. A total of 28 pupils were observed in one class. The pupils in the identified classroom have different socioeconomic background. An elementary teacher in the primary school was observed for 45 minutes each during his lectures. The teacher observed was chosen through blind selection. The selected teacher taught fifth grade pupil.

8.2 Research Questions and Hypothesis

Nowadays, we notice that teachers pay much more attention to learners with a good background rather than the learners with a disadvantage background. Furthermore, learners who are raised by educated and well jobbed parents are having much more opportunities when it comes to educational achievement. Eventually, this paper is to answer the following:

Is there a connection between teachers' expectation and the pupils 'social background?

Does teachers' expectation affect the learner's learning?

How teacher behave differently toward different groups.

Prior to the beginning of the school year, the teacher possessed several different kinds of information regarding the children that she/he would have in her/his class. The first was the pre-registration form. On this form, the teacher is supplied with the name of the child, his age, the name of his parents, his home address, his phone number, and whether he had had any preschool experience. The second source of information is gained mostly during the first days of schools through an interview with the child during the registration period, in this interview a major concern is giving to the child's social class, family background.... not one of these sources is related directly to the academic potential of the incoming children. Rather, they are concerned with various types of social information revealing such facts as the financial status of certain families, medical care of the child, as well as the structure of the family in which the child lived, i.e., number of siblings, whether the child lived with both, one, or neither of his natural parents. We hypothesize that these information which are provided to teachers about their pupils' family background are one of the factors that lead the teacher to form inappropriate expectations towards their pupils.

8.3 Procedures

The observation was analyzed using an instrument consisting of ten behaviors that reflect *Rosenthal's four*

Table 1
Pupils' background information

Pupils social factors	Pupil 1	Pupil 2	Pupil3	Pupil 4	Pupil 5	Pupil 6
Families on welfare						✓
Families with father employed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Families with mother employed	✓		✓		✓	✓
Families with both parents employed	✓		✓		✓	
MOMEDUC	✓	✓				
Educated parents	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
INCOME above 4000000 DZ	✓	✓	✓	✓		
INCOME below 2000000 DZ					Instable income	Instable income
MOMHEAD						✓

After analyzing the data collected in Table 1, we have divided the pupils into two groups; pupils with a good socioeconomic and educational background and pupils with a disadvantage background. Based on the data, we have grouped pupil 1, 2, 3, 4 into pupils with a good socioeconomic and educational background. The two pupils left are grouped into pupils with a disadvantage background.

factors of teacher expectations; climate, input, output, and feedback. The teacher's instructional behaviors were recorded each time the behavior occurred during the 45 minute observation. The data collected were analyzed to determine pupils with high expectation from those of low expectations. The determination of pupils was analyzed to define whether a relationship existed between teachers' expectations and pupils' social background.

To define that the sited relationship exists, and due to the lack of time and the difficulty to observe the differential behaviors of the teacher toward 28 pupils individually, we have decided to observe four to six pupils. These Pupils were selected from referrals made to us during the first session of observation. Referrals are received from the behaviors that can indicate differential teacher treatments of high and low Achievers (see the theoretical part).

In order to determine whether there is a relationship between teacher expectation and pupils' social background, we have checked the pupil's family social background through *SASI*, and have compared the collected data with the differential behaviors observed during the classroom observation.

9. DATA ANALYSIS

According to the information that have been collected through SAIS (School Administration Student Information System) we were able to get some information concerning the socioeconomic state and the family background of the six pupils that we have chosen. We have summarized the essential information needed in our study in the table presented below:

As it has been mentioned in the observational procedure, ten behaviors were chosen to reflect Rosenthal's factors. The ten indicators of teachers' instructional behaviors have been used to determine the differential treatment and teachers' instructional behaviors toward pupils with high/good socioeconomic and educational background and pupils with disadvantage background.

The following table will summarize what have being observed in the classroom observation:

Table 2
Behaviors frequency of pupils of good and disadvantage background

Pupils indicators	Pupils with a good background	Pupils with a disadvantage background
Varying tone and volume of voice.	5	4
Smiling and nodding at the students.	7	6
Maintaining eye contact with students.	18	10
Nodding at students.	7	6
Questioning students with low order questions.	28	15
Questioning students with high order questions.	20	6
Probing students for corrective feedback.	12	5
Prompting students for corrective feedback.	4	9
Giving general praise to students.	29	10
Giving specific praise to students.	17	4

According to what have been observed in the classroom (Table 2), there is less interactions between pupils with disadvantage background and the teacher. The latter pays less attention to pupils with low background or interacting with them less frequently. Moreover, a relationship appears to exist between teachers' expectations of high socioeconomic pupils and disadvantage pupils and teachers' instructional behaviors. There was a greater difference in the frequency of occurrences between those directed to the pupils with a good background and those directed to the disadvantage pupils in the following teachers' instructional behaviors: giving specific and general praise to the students, questioning students with high and low order questions, probing and prompting pupils for corrective feedback, and maintaining eye contact with the pupils. Varying tone and volume of voice, smiling at the pupils, and nodding at the pupils had smaller differences in the frequency of occurrences between those behaviors directed to pupils with good background and those directed to disadvantage pupils. Prompting students for corrective feedback was the only instructional behavior that occurred more frequently with the disadvantage pupils.

Consistent with the review of the literature, this study indicates that a relationship appears to exist between teachers' expectations for pupils with good background and disadvantage pupils and teachers' instructional behaviors.

The teachers' instructional behaviors indicate that teachers interact with the pupils with good background more than the disadvantage pupils in the areas of maintaining eye contact with pupils, questioning pupils with low order and high order questions, probing pupils

for corrective feedback, and giving general and specific praise to the pupils. Prompting pupils for corrective feedback was the only teacher instructional behavior that occurred more frequently with the disadvantage pupils. The differences were not as significant with the teachers' instructional behaviors directed to the pupils with good background and those directed to disadvantage pupils in the areas of varying tone and volume of voice, smiling at the students, and nodding as well.

10. CONCLUSION

Researches in educational stratification have identified the link between teacher educational expectations for student future education attainments and student school outcomes. In examining the mechanisms through which teacher perceptions may influence student outcomes, research points to self-fulfilling prophecy.

Students can identify proximal teacher behaviors (verbal and nonverbal) that provide them with information about teachers' expectations for their achievement. These include nodding, smiling, and praising high-expectation students more than low achievers. But there are distal teacher behaviors that may have greater effects on student learning. These include teacher efficacy, pedagogical beliefs, and opportunity to learn. Arguably, opportunity to learn has most effect on student learning since students will learn what they are given the opportunity to learn. They are likely to learn more in classrooms where learning experiences are challenging and exciting and where higher order thinking skills are fostered.

Some student characteristics appear to influence teacher expectations more than others. Those that have greater effects are ethnicity, social class, gender, and diagnostic labels. But we have decided in this research paper to build our hypothesis on one main factor which is the students' family background (socioeconomic status and the education level).

11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As in any research study, there may be other factors that contribute to the differences other than the teachers' expectations of the different pupils and these factors that must be acknowledged.

The main factors that may affect the results of the research are:

- The unequal number of pupils with a good background and disadvantage pupils in each class.
- The teacher was observed the first two weeks of January, approximately two weeks after the beginning of the second semester. This factor may affect the teachers' expectation toward the pupils' ability.
- It is important to note that the results of the study were obtained from teachers' instructional behaviors in

two sessions and in one subject which was Arabic. The same results may not be found in other subject areas. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to generalize the results of the study to all curriculum areas.

- It is important to note that the sample consisted of only 6 pupils. Two of these pupils were identified as disadvantaged pupils. As this is a small sample, the results of the study are tentative, and it would be inappropriate to make a generalization based upon the results.

- My observation skills as a new observer may be a limitation to the findings of this study, Seidman (1991) wrote, “technique isn’t everything, but it is a lot” (p. 56). Although I have studied the methodology of how to do a classroom observation, experience is still recurred in this kind of research.

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