TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Teachers form expectations for student performance and tend to treat students differently depending on these expectations. Research strongly supports this assertion.[8] To establish a student-centered learning culture, teachers must adjust their expectations and instructional practices so that all children can learn to high levels.

Evidence That Expectations Influence Performance

The classic Hawthorne study at Western Electric's plant in Cicero, Illinois (1927–1932), provided data that suggested that teachers' expectations can greatly influence students' performance. Like the workplace, the classroom is a powerful social network, and students' feelings about both their teachers and classmates have important implications for how much they are willing to exert themselves to succeed at learning. As with adult employees, students' aptitudes are less important than their attitudes about schoolwork in predicting their academic achievement.

Likewise, in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*,[9] investigators (a Harvard University professor and an elementary principal) told elementary school teachers that, based on their students' standardized test scores, certain children were "late bloomers" and could be expected to be "growth spurters." In truth, the tests did not exist, and the children designated as "spurters" were chosen randomly. Nonetheless, findings showed that changes in teacher expectations can produce changes in student achievement. When teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, they tend to fail.

Studies by Jeannie Oakes,[10] a University of California at Los Angeles education professor, and James Coleman,[11] a Johns Hopkins sociology professor, also confirmed that teachers' expectations about their students strongly affect how teachers treat these students in ways that create self-fulfilling prophesies. Students treated as if they were high achieving acted

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[8]Studies connecting high teacher expectations and high student performance can be found in the Research section of this chapter.

[9]Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom: Teachers' expectations and pupils' intellectual development.* New York: Rineholt and Winston.

[10]Oakes, J. (1985). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[11]Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. Q., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, F., Mood, A. M., Weinfeld, F. D., et al. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

in high-achieving ways. Students treated as if they were low achieving performed as low achievers.

Expectations can create reality. In a circular fashion, students' and teachers' perceptions and expectations both reflect and determine their achievement goals. They influence the strategies they use to meet these goals; the skills, energy, and other resources they use to apply these strategies; and the rewards they expect from making—or not making—this effort. And as research shows, teachers' behaviors reflecting these expectations are related to measures of student academic achievement.

Developing teachers' instructional capacities pays off because, the more effectively teachers teach, the higher all their students achieve—and the less accurate teachers' initial predictions become about who will or will not achieve well. Each player's positive expectation influences the other in a mutually reinforcing manner. As observed in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, when teachers treat all students as high achievers—providing them with similar rigorous academic content, similar praise, and similar feedback and making similar demands for actual effort and products—students perform and achieve well.

SCHOOL CULTURE RE-BOOT 5.2
Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement

Teachers' expectations for students' achievement influence students' learning and achievement.

1. Review the research findings below, and discuss as a group the extent to which each finding is true to your own experiences. Describe what each finding might look like or sound like in an actual school. What are the benefits—or disadvantages—to students of teachers holding these beliefs?

   • Teachers' perceptions of current students' performance as well as their judgments for students' future performance are generally accurate. Once set, teachers' expectations change little. In school, first impressions matter.
   • Student characteristics such as physical attractiveness, socioeconomic status, race, use of standard English, and history of grade retention are all related to teachers' expectations for academic achievement.
   • Teachers overestimate the achievement of high achievers, underestimate the achievement of low achievers, and predict least accurately low achievers' responses.
   • The better the teachers know their students, the more accurate their expectations for student academic success, especially in the early elementary grades (grades 1 and 2).

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2. Identify ways that teachers in your school can monitor their expectations for students, so they don't underestimate any child's ability to learn to high standards.

Consider conducting this activity with teachers in their grade levels or departments to advance the ideas about how teachers' expectations influence their behaviors toward students and their students' achievement.

Re-Booting Teachers' Expectations

Re-booting—that is, refining and expanding—teachers' expectations for all students' achievement is an essential aspect of establishing a student-centered learning culture. Carol Ann Tomlinson and Edwin Lou Javius, two educators concerned with classroom equity and high standards, identify seven interrelated principles that inform teachers' beliefs when they want to help all children learn to high levels.[12] When enacted in classroom practices schoolwide and over time, these expectations can re-boot the school culture in ways that increase every student's learning.

• **Accept that human differences are not only normal but also desirable**. Each person has something of value to contribute to the group, and the group is lessened without that contribution. As a microcosm of our world, the classroom should be culturally and economically inclusive and support students in making meaning in multiple ways.

• **Develop a growth mind-set**. Teachers must logically challenge the preconception that mainly affluent students have high ability levels. When teachers expect student growth—and provide students with clear learning targets, guidelines, feedback, a safe learning environment, and the message that each student has the capacity to do what is required for success (and teachers will support their labors)—they can create learning experiences in which student effort—rather than background—is the greatest determiner of success. Students who work hard and intelligently can accomplish their goals.

• **Understand students' cultures, interests, needs, and perspectives**. People are shaped by their backgrounds. Respecting students means respecting their backgrounds, races, and cultures. To this end, teachers need to understand how each student approaches learning and craft an environment

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[12]Tomlinson, C. A., & Javius, E. L. (2012, February). Teach up for excellence. All students deserve equitable access to an engaging and rigorous curriculum. *Educational Leadership, 69*(5), 28–33.

that respects and responds to what each student brings to the classroom. Treat others as they want to be treated. Through conversations with students and observations of them at work, teachers develop a learning profile about the way he or she likes to learn, personal interests, and varied ways of reaching the goal. Then, teachers purposefully select instructional approaches that respond to them to ensure high-level success for each student. All learning activities align with essential learning targets and have intellectual rigor: They are both standards friendly and student friendly.

• **Create a base of rigorous learning opportunities**. Teachers begin with clear ideas about what learning should occur as the result of a lesson or unit aligned with assessments and standards. Then, teachers connect students with the curriculum by transforming student-boring topics into student-friendly concepts that have enduring value beyond the classroom, lie at the heart of the discipline, require analysis, have the potential to engage students, and span various cultures. Give students a reason for studying the curriculum.

For instance, instead of teaching about butterflies, teach about life cycles in which all living things share similar development. Instead of studying the Industrial Revolution, teach about the concept of human progress and who wins or loses. Instead of pollution, study interdependence and the relationships between humans and their environment. In these ways, teachers help students form conceptual understandings of the disciplines, connect what they learn to their own lives, and use essential knowledge and skills to address meaningful problems. Exploring these ideas creates occasions for collaborating with peers, examining varied viewpoints, and creating authentic products for relevant audiences. Teachers also incorporate a range of resources that elicit students' interests, help students make sense of what they are learning, and support struggling learners. These classroom cultures value and encourage excellence, and students gain satisfaction from accepting and spending their best efforts on worthwhile challenges.

• **Understand that students have differing points for entering and moving through the curriculum.** For students to take intellectual risks, classrooms need to feel safe to students from a wide range of cultural, racial, and economic backgrounds. Effective teachers seek multiple ways for students to show what they know, and every student needs occasions to shine as intellectual contributors. When students fall behind, misunderstand, or move beyond expectations, teachers are ready to take appropriate instructional actions—scaffolding for students who need extra work with prerequisites and extending depth and scope for students who surge quickly ahead. Formative assessment provides ongoing data for personalizing learning for both struggling and advancing students.

• **Create flexible classroom routines and procedures that attend to learners' needs.** Teachers provide occasions for a range of student needs and differences. Teachers select times when the class works as a whole, when students work independently, and when they work in groups. At key times in the learning cycle, teachers decide when they need to work with part of the class more intensively. They teach students when and how to help one another as well as how to direct their own work effectively. Such flexible approaches can increase each student's achievement.

• **Be an analytical practitioner.** Teachers who create student-centered learning cultures consistently reflect on their practices for evidence that these are working for each student and adjusting when they are not. Keenly attuned to their students, teachers notice when they show positive behaviors and new learning. Then, teachers provide helpful, descriptive feedback so students can successfully recall or repeat the skill, knowledge, or behavior that serves them well. They ask students to help teachers understand what will help make the students most successful, and they shape a classroom atmosphere that maximizes each individual's growth and growth of the group as a whole.

Of course, as much as they may care for each student, teachers cannot personalize every part of the curriculum. Expecting each student to develop high-level skills in literacy, numeracy, communication, and critical thinking is not negotiable. Learning outcomes linked to learning standards and grade-level benchmarks cannot be compromised. Although receptive to students' interests and needs, teachers cannot personalize the desired learning outcomes. And, for students enrolled in courses with high-stakes exit exams, such as international baccalaureate (IB) or advanced placement (AP) tests, teachers cannot jeopardize the students' success on the exam by omitting required content. Effective teachers can, nonetheless, hold to the expected learning outcomes while still permitting many occasions for personalization. Insightful teachers learn where the flexibility exists to customize the curriculum or the instructional approaches to connect with individual students—and then do it.

For example, if the learning outcome is composing a well-organized, coherent, five-paragraph essay, teachers can emphasize different skills and expected levels of complexity for different students in a class according to the present skills levels and interests so that all students progress toward the goal successfully. Certain students will need more time to reach the standard; during this time, those who have already mastered the objectives can extend and deepen their learning to the standards in agreed-upon ways. Similarly, while the form of assessments can occasionally be personalized, the evaluation criteria for quality work should not.

Community expectations also matter. Investigators have found that, when a community pressures its schools to set higher expectations, students' performance improves.[13] Whether the push for high student achievement comes from parents or from teachers and principals, when the community and school share high expectation for student achievement in a clear and focused mission and accompanying behaviors, it has a positive impact on student achievement.

Likewise, high teacher expectations for students' achievement work best when they are shared and reflect a school's cultural norms. Students thrive when they are immersed in an environment defined by shared, growth-enhancing values. When students attend schools where beliefs and expectations differ from classroom to classroom and hallway to hallway, they become confused. At the same time, inconsistent values classroom to classroom demoralize teachers who suspect that their colleagues are undermining them. Without consensus on high academic and behavioral expectations and high supports for all students, students may comply (at least minimally) with each teacher's expectations. But, students do not develop the internalized habits of mind and consistent behaviors unless teachers and administrators reinforce these same principles and expectations all day long and in varied settings. This helps explain why students can behave so poorly outside their own classrooms or when a substitute is in charge. When their teachers—the embodiments of these positive values and expectations—are out of sight, their norms disappear, too. Children are likely to take values seriously when they perceive at least a general consensus on them among the adults whom they respect.

SCHOOL CULTURE RE-BOOT 5.3
Teachers' Expectations in a Student-Centered Learning Culture

1. Divide the large group into three or four smaller groups with at least three or four members in each unit. Each unit will consider and discuss Tomlinson and Javius's seven principles.

   - What does each mean?
   - What does each look and sound like when practiced in a school?
   - To what degree does each member agree with each principle?

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[13]Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. F. (1986). The social context of effective schools. *American Journal of Education, 94*(3), 328–355.

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- What parts can members enthusiastically support—and why?
- Which aspects make any members uncomfortable—and why?

2. After 15 minutes, recombine into a whole group and review and discuss each group's answers to these questions:

- How well does this school already believe and practice these seven principles daily?
- Which principles are practiced daily by most teachers in the school, and which need additional attention? Give examples.

The leadership team may want to conduct this activity within grade level or departments to have teachers discuss how these learning-supportive behaviors might appear in their classrooms and school and to increase their awareness about how they can boost student learning and achievement.

SCHOOL CULTURE RE-BOOT 5.4
High Expectations and School Characteristics

1. Read and discuss the characteristics of a school with high teacher expectations for all students' achievement as identified below. Discuss other examples of what this might look like, and add examples to the list.

2. Separate into pairs and discuss and assess your school's teacher expectations for every student's achievement.

3. After the discussion, honestly assess your own classroom on these dimensions.

Ratings Key: 1−Unsatisfactory   3−Needs Some Improvement   5−Very Good

High Teacher Expectation for Every Student's High Achievement Characteristic	Rating for School			Rating for Own Classroom		
	1	3	5	1	3	5
The school has developed a shared vision of all students achieving at high levels, regardless of family backgrounds.						
The school has standards and practices in place to avoid both grade retention and social promotion by keeping all students learning apace with peers.						

High Teacher Expectation for Every Student's High Achievement Characteristic	Rating for School			Rating for Own Classroom		
	1	3	5	1	3	5
Teachers, administrators, and parents expect all students to learn a full range of skills—from basic mastery of needed skills to higher-level, complex problem solving—and they act on this belief.						
Teachers have confidence in their skills to help all their students master the basic and higher-level skills, regardless of their family background—and teachers act on this belief.						
Teachers clearly inform students and parents of what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of the unit or semester.						
Teachers help students use what they already know to learn new knowledge, develop new skills, and expand their understanding.						
Teachers use a variety of effective instructional approaches to ensure that all students learn.						
Students and teachers work together during class time and before or after school (when needed) to master the expected content and skills.						
The school has ongoing, collegial professional development tied to the classroom curriculum to help every teacher improve his or her instructional effectiveness.						
Students and teachers believe that their efforts are more important than their ability to produce their final achievement.						
Students and parents believe that their teachers have confidence in their ability to master the curriculum and expect them to do well.						
The school has a very low dropout rate and a very high promotion or graduation rate.						
Additional example:						
Additional example:						

4. Pairs report their school assessments and one member tallies points for group as a whole for each characteristic.

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5. Discuss findings as a group:

- How do teachers' individual expectations for every child's achievement compare with the school's overall expectations? What does this mean to you?
- How do you explain the differences between the individual and school ratings?
- Which aspects of teachers' high expectations for every student's high achievement are strong?
- Which three aspects of teachers' expectations need improvement? What can members of this group do to begin improving teachers' expectations for every student's high achievement?

The leadership team might want to conduct this activity with teachers to gain their views about teachers' expectations for student achievement in their school and to deepen their thinking about how their attitudes affect student learning.

The leadership team might also give a version of this brief survey to students—in one of their classes or homerooms or to student leaders—to see how they perceive teachers' expectations for their academic success—and share findings with the leadership team.

Underestimating students' abilities and desires to learn a high-challenge curriculum hurts them. When students enter classrooms with skills and life experiences different from those that teachers expect, many educators mistakenly conclude students cannot—or don't want to—do complex work. When students fall short because they don't understand teachers' vocabulary or the schools' unwritten rules, teachers conclude that they lack motivation. When teachers allow pupils to sit silently during lessons or praise them for earning high grades by performing at a level that requires neither risk, stretch, nor struggle—educators underrate them. It would be better for every child if teachers thought of student potential like an iceberg—most of it hidden from view—and act upon the belief that high trust, high expectations, and high supports will reveal what lies beneath.

ACADEMIC PRESS AND SUPPORTS

Academic press refers to the extent to which students, teachers, and administrators feel a strong emphasis on scholastic success and meeting specific achievement standards. *Academic supports* refer to the actions that teachers and students take to ensure that students succeed scholastically. *Social supports* refers to personal relations that students have with people in and out