

# A VITAL FACTOR IN ACHIEVEMENT

We must never give up the belief that all children can learn. If we do, all is lost—for us and students. Yet, those we teach have a wide range of abilities. They come to us from diverse social and economic backgrounds and with varied academic records. These facts can, unfortunately, diminish our expectations. However, it needs to be recognized that when our expectations are lowered, our effectiveness will be altered too. That's why it's vital that we hold to our resolve to teach all students out of our belief that all children can learn.

Certainly, not all children can or will achieve at the highest academic level. But all can achieve to their potential at any point in time. This should be our goal. And make no mistake, it's an attainable goal if we apply what we know about teacher expectation and student achievement.

High expectation is, without reservation, a self-fulfilling prophecy for student and teacher alike. The research, as well as the day-to-day experiences of classroom teaching, points clearly to the importance of our holding high expectations for students. Unfortunately, the research also indicates that negative communications regarding expectation abound in many classrooms and schools.

Studies show, contrary to popular belief, that low-ability students aren't seated in the front of the room next to the teacher's desk where they might get special help. Rather, they're generally grouped and seated farther away from the teacher. Likewise, low-ability students are called on less often than those with high ability. This is probably because we know—or think—that they can't answer our questions. As a result, we may actually pay less attention to those students whom we believe have low ability.

In addition, low-ability students are given fewer clues and less time to answer questions. We probe our bright students—even when they say, "I don't know." But when a poor student doesn't have the answer immediately, we pass quickly to another student. Therefore, our bright students get more time to use their minds. Worse, studies tell us that wrong answers from low-ability students are criticized more often than wrong answers from high achievers. Oddly enough, correct responses from low-ability students draw less praise. Finally, research indicates that the work of low-ability students is interrupted more often and more easily by teachers. Maybe this is because we don't feel they're achieving much even when they are working—so we don't worry about interrupting them.

Make no mistake, teacher attitudes and actions toward the less able often do communicate lower expectations. They may reveal less tolerance—and even less caring. Consequently, some students can and do develop negative feelings and beliefs that lead them to become less confident and less productive.

There are definite steps a teacher can take to help all students meet higher expectations. First, we must accept students for just being. This means we must avoid words and deeds which indicate students must perform before we will accept and help them. Second, we can give low achievers more time to work at a task. We know that time on task aids achievement. Third, we can give low achievers more time to respond in class. They need more time to think. Fourth, we can be long on praise and short on criticism. Fifth, we can begin recording success rather than only failure. Remember, students will not be motivated to keep trying if only their mistakes get attention.



Sixth, we can analyze interaction patterns in our room. In the process, we can analyze negative teaching behaviors—and communicating low expectations in any way is a negative behavior. Seventh, we can examine classroom rules and procedures. We must ask if our rules contain more than six negative statements. Remember, negative rules convey the teacher's assumption that cheating, talking, and fighting will occur. On the other hand, positive rules such as "Walk quietly" and "Keep your work space clean" convey positive expectations.

The Master Teacher knows the research consistently indicates that young people learn about as well as we expect them to learn. However, it's not just teachers' expectations that are important. Parents, friends, classmates, and relatives form these expectations as well.

Yet, the Master Teacher realizes that we hold a dominant position which enables us to change the expectations of others. That's because once a child begins achieving in school, the perceptions others hold can change. If our expectations for athletic ability are high, but our expectations for English proficiency are low, we can count on the obvious. We're quite likely to have winning teams and good athletes, but our English program may be only average. Worse, many students may conclude that proficiency in English isn't important. That's why our expectations in every area must be high. After all, the evidence is in: **Our students' success depends on us.**

## Tips for Parent Relationships

Whenever a parent asks you a question, try to follow one guideline for maximum effectiveness. Make your answer both brief and honest. Above all, be careful not to give a lengthy answer which goes beyond the question. Such action causes two problems. First, parents tend to think you don't really know the answer and are simply talking to hide this fact. Second, parents will think you are trying to discourage further questions. When either is the case, you lose the parents' confidence.

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