Humans Have a Success Instinct

Humans have a success instinct. This is what makes humans different from all other living things. They want success, and they strive for their success potential. You can accomplish anything with students if you set high expectations for behavior and performance by which yourself abide.

Positive and Negative Expectations

Knowing what you can or cannot achieve is called EXPECTATION. An expectation is what you believe will or will not happen. Your expectations of your students will greatly influence their achievement in your class and in your lives. There are two kinds of expectations that include positive or high expectations and negative or low expectations. It takes as much energy to achieve positive results as it does to achieve negative results. So why waste your energy on failing when that same energy can help you and your students succeed.

A positive expectation is an optimistic belief that whoever you teach or whatever you do will result in success or achievement. If you expect to be successful, you are constantly alert and aware of opportunities to help you be successful. The odds are greater that what you want to happen will happen because you will be expending energy to see that this will be so. You predispose yourself to realize success both personally and with the people you deal with, such as your students.

A negative expectation is a belief that whoever you teach or whatever you do will not work out or fail. For that matter, why bother to do anything or teach anyone at all? If you expect to fail, you are constantly looking for justification, proof, and demonstration of why you have failed. The odds are that what you expect to happen will not happen because you will be expending energy to see that nothing happens. You predispose yourself to realize failure both personally and with the people you deal with, such as your students.

Expectations Are Different from Standards

Expectations should not be confused with standards. Standards are levels of achievement. Teachers who practice positive expectations will help their students reach
high standards. Teachers who practice negative expectations will prevent students from reaching high standards. Student success is limited only by adult expectations. People are molded more by the depth of your convictions or expectations than by the height of your intelligence. Success involves converting people, not to your way of knowing, but to your way of feeling. People can refuse words, but they cannot refuse an attitude or expectation. Give your students more than they expect, and you will get back more than you ever expected.

The Classic Research on Expectations

The classic research on expectations was done in the 1960s by Robert Rosenthal of Harvard University and Lenore Jacobson of the South San Francisco schools. They fed erroneous information to a group of South San Francisco elementary school teachers and watched teachers make the results come true.

In the spring of the preceding school year, the students at Oak School were pretested. When school began that fall, the researchers and the administrators told the teachers that they were special teachers who were to be a part of a special experiment.

They were told, “Based on a pretest, we have identified 20 percent of your students who are special. They will be ‘spurters’ or ‘bloomers’ and are a designated group of students of whom greater intellectual growth is expected.

The names were really selected at random, but the teachers were led to believe that the status of being special children was based on scores on the pretest, the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition.

“As a special reward for your teaching excellence,” they were told. “we are going to give you this information, but on two conditions:

1. You must not tell the students that you know they are special.
2. You must not tell the parents that their children are special.

Thus we expect and know that you will do extremely well with these special students.

Eight months later, all the students were tested again, and a comparison was made of the designated special students and the undesignated students, as measured by IQ scores. The results showed a significant gain in intellectual growth for the 20 percent who were designated special in the primary grades but no significant gains in the intermediate grades.

The administrators brought the teachers in, showed them the growth results of their students, and congratulated them on their spectacular success with their students. The teachers said, “Of course, we had special students to work with. It was easy, and they
learned so fast.” The administrators and researcher said, “We’d like to tell you the truth. The so-called special children were picked at random. We made no selections based on IQ or aptitude.” “Then it must have been us,” said the teachers, “because you said we were special teachers selected to be a part of a special experiment.” “We need to tell you something else, too,” replied the researcher. “All the teachers were involved in this experiment. None of you were designated special over any other teacher.”

This was a perfectly designed experiment. There was only one experimental variable – **EXPECATIONS**.

1. The expectations of the administrators toward the teachers were stated explicitly. “You are special teachers, and these 20 percent of your students are special students who show potential for intellectual growth. Thus we expect and know that you will do extremely well with these special students.”

2. The expectations of the teachers toward the students were conveyed implicitly and were unspoken. Because the teachers believed that they had some very special students in the school, their body language, personality, and attitude influenced their teaching, and expectations of their students.

As the researchers stated, “The results suggest rather strongly that children who are expected by their teachers to gain intellectually in fact do show greater intellectual gains after one year than do children of whom such gains are not expected.

Since the original study, a great many additional studies have been undertaken. Some have been able to replicate the findings, others have not. Regardless, educators and parents are very keen in the power of expectations to affect student outcomes.

**Summary**

Students tend to learn as little or as much as their teacher expect. Teachers who set and communicate high expectations to all their students obtain greater academic performance from these students than teachers who set low expectations.

**Reference**