Faculty Forum

The Power of Expectations and Implications for DLIFLC Teachers and Students

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This paper explores the crucial role that instructors' explicit and implicit expectations play in students' learning and performance and their transmission from the instructor to students in the classroom. Strategies to prevent or interrupt the damage that low expectations may cause are recommended to foster more inclusive classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

On the final day of every Instructor Certification Course (ICC), Faculty Development (FD) facilitators traditionally provide a "tips from the field" session: Military Language Instructors (MLIs) attending the course are invited to form a panel for the new civilian instructors to offer advice and answer questions based on their experience as former DLI students. I recall one of these sessions when the MLIs urged teachers not to form hasty judgements of their students' language learning abilities: teachers may develop opinions of how students will do in the course early on and may then inadvertently communicate subtle cues and unspoken expectations to students about their performance. These MLIs mentioned from their own experience as DLI students that such expectations are soon internalized by learners on the receiving end, reducing or raising their motivation and self-belief, and affecting their performance. What these MLIs were saying about the power of expectations resonated with me and is the impetus for this article.

How much influence do the expectations of teachers have on a student's learning and performance? Research illustrates the transformative impact of high expectations on student achievement (Robson, 2022). But what happens when expectations are low? And how can we as

DLIFLC educators leverage the power of expectations to maximize student success? This article will cover these points:

1. Research Insights: Explore how teachers' explicit and implicit expectations play a crucial role in students' learning and performance, backed by research.
2. How expectations are transmitted from teacher to student in the classroom.
3. Strategies for how educators can prevent or interrupt the damage that low expectations may cause, fostering more inclusive classrooms.

THE IMPACT OF EXPECTATIONS ON STUDENTS—HIGH OR LOW

How much influence do the expectations of teachers have on a student's learning and performance? The answer may be found in a fascinating study from the 1960s that forever altered our understanding of the power of expectations—and still rings true today.

The researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968 informed a group of elementary school teachers that some of their students had been identified as potential high achievers who would blossom over the academic year. In reality, these students were chosen at random. And yet, by the end of the year, these randomly selected students had made significantly more progress than their peers (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

This phenomenon became known as the Pygmalion Effect, illustrating the transformative impact of high expectations on student achievement. But what happens when expectations are low? And how can we as educators leverage the power of expectations to maximize student success?

The Pygmalion Effect: The Power of High Expectations

The term "Pygmalion Effect" originates from Greek mythology. Pygmalion, a renowned sculptor, fell in love with a beautiful statue he had carved out of ivory. His deep affection for his creation was so profound that the statue transformed into a living being. In an educational context, the Pygmalion Effect refers to the phenomenon where students rise to meet the high standards and expectations set by others (Timmermans et al., 2018).

The Golem Effect: The Negative Impact of Low Expectations

Conversely, the Golem Effect demonstrates the negative consequences of low expectations. Named after the Golem from Jewish myths, a creature made of unfinished and raw clay which eventually became a violent monster, this effect highlights how students may underperform when little is expected of them. According to the study by Timmermans, Rubie-Davies, and Rjosk (2018), when teachers held low expectations for students, they not only reacted more negatively towards those students, but the students themselves also performed worse academically. This study demonstrates a classic example of the "Golem Effect" where low expectations lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

EXPECTATIONS ARE EVERYTHING

The evidence of the impact of teacher expectations on student learning is both broad and deep. John Hattie (2009) analyzed over 800 studies on teacher expectations as part of the Visible Learning database and found that students' achievement tracks closely with teacher expectations. In some cases, race, ethnicity, language proficiency, disability, gender, and even appearance can subconsciously influence the expectations of a student. John Hattie's Visible Learning analysis, which includes a vast number of studies on student achievement, highlights the significant impact of teacher expectations on student learning. His research demonstrates a strong correlation between teacher expectations of student learning and student achievement, suggesting that teachers' beliefs about student ability can influence their performance. The key takeaway is that teachers should have high expectations of all students and avoid labeling them. Hattie emphasizes the importance of teachers believing in the potential of all students, regardless of their past performance or perceived abilities.

HOW EXPECTATIONS ARE TRANSMITTED FROM THE TEACHER TO THEIR STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

David Robson (2022) mentions that the most obvious means would be overt praise or criticism; we all know that encouragement can be helpful and criticism hurtful. But someone's expectations are also evident in the goals they set, which can affect performance. If a teacher continually chooses more ambitious tasks for their favorites, that provides further learning opportunities, while the rest of the group misses out on those opportunities.

Other signals may be subtler. Imagine you are asked a question and make an error while answering. If someone has high expectations of your abilities, they might rephrase their question or talk you through the problem. Someone with lower expectations, however, may simply move on, subtly hinting that they don't think you are going to learn from the mistake (Brophy & Good, 1970).

Perhaps most important are the nonverbal cues. People are less likely to smile, and they make less eye contact, if they have lower expectations of you; for example, small differences in interaction that are nevertheless easily perceived by children and adults. Even silence can be important. If someone leaves a short pause after you have given a quick response to a question, it can give you a further chance to expand on your ideas and refine your thinking.

However the expectations are communicated, the research shows that they are soon internalized by the people on the receiving end, reducing or raising their motivation and self-belief, and affecting their performance (Robson, 2022).

STRATEGIES FOR HOW EDUCATORS CAN PREVENT OR INTERRUPT THE DAMAGE THAT LOW EXPECTATIONS MAY CAUSE, FOSTERING MORE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

So, how might we prevent or interrupt the damage that low expectations cause, thereby fostering more inclusive classrooms? The Australian educator Christine Rubie-Davies (2015) has researched how high-expectations teaching is manifested in daily practice:

- Recent research has found that the **effect of expectations is the most prominent at the beginning of the school year**. This is because students have no preconceived notions and seek support on what is realistically achievable. If you give students affirmation that they can do well before they start doubting themselves, it allows them to internalize this belief, which becomes a huge advantage. While most of the research on the impact of teacher expectations exists at the elementary and secondary school level (K–12), some research has explored the impact of professors' expectations on student motivation and study skills in university settings. In higher education, research has suggested that student variables, such as previous academic achievement, motivation, study skills, and discipline in carrying out academic activities, are relevant and a source of expectations (Li & Rubie-Davies, 2018). The bottom line is that instructor expectations significantly impact student achievement and educational outcomes at all levels. These expectations influence academic performance, students' sense of belonging, motivation, and the overall learning experience.

- As teachers, try to **think about the ways your behavior may be transmitting your expectations to your students**, both verbally and nonverbally. A reflective teaching tool that might be useful for this is a teaching journal, an ongoing account of your teaching experiences with a particular class, recorded in a notebook or electronically. It can include summaries or brief notes of what happened during a lesson, any classroom incidents, accounts of successes or problems pertinent to a lesson. For example, you might focus on class dynamics, what you have noticed about your students in terms of their participation and behavior in interactions, how you interact with different students, questioning techniques that you use and how students respond and how you react, strategies you have tried that seemed to motivate or shut down the various students. Journal keeping clarifies one's own thinking and allows one to become more aware of how you are interacting with your students and explore other ways of working with them that may be more effective.

- You may not be conscious of your body language or tone of voice, so it could be helpful to **ask a trusted colleague to observe your interactions with students**. To set up such an informal peer observation process, meet with your peer observer to discuss the observation goals, in this case, a focus on class dynamics: For example, ask your observer to make objective notes on students' engagement, questioning techniques, your verbal and nonverbal interactions with individual students, how students respond and how you reacted to the various students, quality of small group work, do all students have opportunities to participate, what you did to try and engage quiet students, what did and didn't work, what you might change or do to improve the class dynamics. In the post-observation meeting, the

observer uses the notes collected during the lesson to lead the discussion and to refer to for evidence for the different points being discussed.

- Another option is to **record yourself interacting with your students** using MS Teams.[1] You can later watch yourself and observe your actions, interactions with students, and classroom management strategies. You can analyze how students react to your teaching, both visibly and nonverbally, and identify areas that need further attention.

- **Incorporate questioning techniques to make the class more inclusive**, so everyone has regular opportunities to participate. Asking questions to the whole class and then calling on students who raise their hands can become a problem when the same students routinely answer, and other students are quiet. Another way is to train your students to use the Cold Calling strategy, randomly calling on students to increase student engagement and not letting them sit passively. Cold Calling essentially means *no hands up and no calling out*; the teacher chooses the students who will respond and establishes the routine that this could be anyone for any question. You ask everyone the question, pause, giving them thinking time, and then warmly invite someone to give their answer or share their thoughts. It's a strategy promoted strongly by Doug Lemov (2021) and incorporates a five-step process:

  1) Ask the question: Ok, everyone, what is the main idea in the reading passage?
  2) Giving thinking time: (no hands up, no calling out; scan the room as the students think, keeping the focus).
  3) Select someone to respond: So, John, what were you thinking? (warm, invitational). "I think…"
  4) Respond to the answers. Yes, that's right. Can you add anything? "Yes, …."
  5) Select and call on another student: Great. And Sarah, what do you think?

Using the Cold Call questioning strategy, all students anticipate being asked; they think and engage; it's the norm. Students need to be trained in using it from early in the course so they know what is expected of them. It's safe, friendly, supportive, and inclusive. If students are wrong or not sure, the teacher finds out and can respond, offering appropriate support or instruction. I have observed the Cold Call questioning strategy used by a few DLI teachers, and it seemed to work well. These teachers wrote each student's name on an index card and rotated through them when calling on students to answer questions, so all students had opportunities to respond. You can also use free online tools that allow you to input your students' names and then generate a random selection. Wooclap: offers a visual wheel that students can see when someone is called on. Random Word Generator: Provides a simple name generator. Classroom screen: has a widget that can be used to select students at

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[1] DLIFLC guidance allows a teacher to record class as long as the instructor notifies the students (and anyone else who might be in attendance at that moment) and there are no objections. The instructor must ensure that the recording is stored on Teams/SharePoint with no share privileges so that it can't be downloaded by anyone. Once the need for the recording is ended, the file must be erased.

random. Wheel of Names: A popular website for creating and using a random name picker wheel.

- **Think-Pair-Share** is a collaborative learning strategy where students first individually think about a question, then discuss their ideas with a partner, and finally share their findings with the whole class. This approach encourages active participation and gets all students engaged. Here's how it works:

    1) Think: Students are given a question and are instructed to individually think about their answers.
    2) Pair: Students are then paired up with a classmate and discuss their responses, sharing ideas and clarifying their understanding.
    3) Share: Finally, pairs or selected individuals share their findings and insights with the entire class, fostering a larger discussion facilitated by the teacher.

- **Capitalize on small group work**. A typical DLIFLC class is composed of six students, so small group work would entail students working in pairs or groups of three. To manage small group work more inclusively so all group members are engaged and participating, you can try several strategies: assign roles within groups, actively monitor interactions, use structured discussion techniques, provide opportunities for individual contribution, and explicitly teach collaborative skills. Doing purposeful group composition can help ensure that everyone feels valued and has a chance to participate meaningfully.

    There is no one best way of grouping or pairing students to ensure that all maximally participate. The key is knowing your students well, their personalities, how they interact, their proficiency levels, and so on. Sometimes you may deliberately create groups with a mix of abilities, personalities, and learning preferences to encourage mutual support and diverse perspectives. Or you may find that grouping the dominant students and the quieter students in another group works better. Depending on students' personalities and interactive dynamics, sometimes pairing a stronger student with a less proficient student can work. You might try different options to see what works most effectively with your students.

    - **Explicit Role Assignments.** Designate specific roles within each group, such as facilitator, notetaker, and timekeeper, to ensure everyone has a defined responsibility.

    - **Structured Discussion Protocols.** Utilize techniques like "round robin," where each student shares their thoughts in turn, or "think-pair-share" to give everyone a chance to formulate ideas before sharing.

    - **Active Monitoring.** Regularly circulate the room to observe group dynamics, identify potential issues, and provide timely support to struggling groups.

- **Direct Feedback.** Provide specific feedback on group interactions, highlighting positive collaborative behaviors and addressing instances of dominance.

- **Teach Collaborative Skills.** Devote time to explicitly teaching students how to listen actively, respect different viewpoints, build consensus, and provide constructive feedback.

- **Positive Reinforcement.** Acknowledge and praise students who actively engage others, share their ideas thoughtfully, and demonstrate patient, respectful listening.

- **Other Important Considerations**. Provide clear expectations: ensure students understand the specific goals, assessment criteria, and collaboration expectations for group work activities. Finally, flexibility—be prepared to adapt your approach based on the unique dynamics of each group and individual student needs.

- Set goals with students and assist them in monitoring their progress. Too often, students have vague and distant goals with little sense of the actions and incremental steps needed to get there. When meeting with students one-on-one, work with them to set goals that are measurable, attainable, and progress toward long-term outcomes. For example, we all know it is a challenge getting some DLIFLC students to higher levels in listening. Instead of setting a general goal such as "improve listening comprehension," target specific skills that pose difficulties for students. It's important to break down complex listening skills into smaller, manageable steps and provide frequent, supportive feedback. Make the goal measurable, for example, "summarize three main points from the audio in your own words," and provide explicit instruction that the student can practice, such as teaching students to identify key vocabulary, providing pre-listening questions, guiding students in note-taking, and having them paraphrase the information. Make sure the goal is achievable within a reasonable timeframe, avoiding unrealistic expectations. Be prepared to modify goals and strategies based on student needs and progress.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the power of teacher expectations significantly impacts student outcomes and educational success. Teachers' beliefs and behaviors, shaped by expectations, can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where positive expectations lead to higher achievement, and vice versa. For DLI teachers, understanding this influence is crucial for fostering positive learning environments and providing equitable opportunities for students.

- **Reflect on Beliefs**. Teachers should reflect on their own beliefs and expectations about their students, recognizing that their perceptions can influence their interactions and teaching practices.

- **Challenge Biases**. Teachers need to be aware of potential biases and stereotypes that may shape their expectations. Recall those MLIs mentioned in the Introduction who cautioned new DLIFLC teachers not to form hasty judgements of their students' language learning abilities: teachers may develop opinions of how students will do in the course early on and may then inadvertently communicate subtle cues and unspoken expectations to students about their performance.

- **Cultivate a Growth Mindset**. Fostering a growth mindset in the classroom, where students believe that their abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance, can help mitigate the negative effects of low expectations.

- **Provide Equitable Opportunities**. Teachers should ensure that all students have opportunities to participate, access to challenging learning experiences, and adequate support, regardless of their prior academic performance.

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