

Running Head: Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Student Performance:

The Impact of Teacher Expectations and Student–Teacher Relationships

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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Every year, students enter and exit the education system; many with very positive experiences, while numerous others, generally those with common attributes and personal situations, endure a very negative educational process. This brings to question what factors influence or contribute to these experiences and the successes or failures of certain students.

An overwhelming number of minority students and students from low socio-economic status (SES) homes respond negatively to the educational process, typically resulting in low achievement and high drop out rates. These low scores and lack of achievement are perpetuated by the self-fulfilling prophecy of low teacher expectations for these minority and low SES students. It is an unfortunate reality to face to realize that the current education system closely resembles Paulo Freire's depiction of the "educational banking" format. Many teachers, often unknowingly, stereotype or judge students by appearance, family dynamics, and personal experience; this judgment then creates an opinion of that student and an expectation of the student's capabilities to sufficiently fit into the societal mold of success (Freire 1993).

These low expectations create a self-fulfilling prophecy for these students due to the teacher's according treatment. Previously completed studies and discussions (Kohn, 2005, Smith & Smith, 2009, Ferguson, 2003, and Rist, 2000) reflect the idea that teachers often create a caring and welcoming environment for the students whom they believe will fit the criteria for education, where as they tend to create a relationship barrier between themselves and the minority or low SES students. The concept of a relationships barrier

is evident in the teacher's interactions with students in the classroom and the ability of the teacher to relate to the experiences of their students. Extensive research focuses on this concept, with many centering research on minorities in urban school systems. The correlation between social class and low educational achievement is undeniable. It is the responsibility of the educators to understand this issue and ensure that as educators they are not perpetuating the problem.

Do teachers form perceptions or opinions of students based on the knowledge gained from previous teachers, appearance, family background, socio-economic status, or minority group membership? Once these perceptions are formed, does it affect the teacher's treatment of these particular students, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which students live up to the low expectations the teacher has formed? Finally is this self-fulfilling prophecy counteracted by a teacher's ability to create a motivational and educational environment through the formation of a caring relationship with students?

This research will focus on how teacher expectations are expressed within the classroom setting and if these expectations are based, in any form, on the students' appearances or personal situations. The self-fulfilling prophecy is reflected not only in teacher expectations, but also through student and teacher relationships and interactions, which will also be a focus of this study. Low expectations and the lack of student-teacher relationships within the classroom can cause students to perform at a lower level, or cause the teacher to give the student a lower grade due to the assumption that the student has not learned the material. The hope is to bring awareness to this unfortunate circumstance, and through awareness and understanding of the problem, ultimately change the negative outcomes for many minority and low SES students.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

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As students file into the classroom on the first day of school they are assigned desks, lockers, and notebooks, and too often they are also assigned a stereotype. A great deal of research has covered the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy, or as defined by Gollnick and Chinn, “A teacher’s projection of a student’s academic achievement based on socioeconomic, social, and cultural factors that do not indicate a student’s academic potential” (2009 p.411). Teacher expectations, and in many cases the following relationship that the teacher develops with each student, has significant influence on the student performance within the classroom. Paulo Freire (1993), first shed light on the idea in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as he discussed the insufficient education of those students with the greatest need. Freire (1993), suggests that the view a teacher holds of a student too often “turns them into “containers,” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher” (p.72). With this concept that the student should simply adjust to the teachers proposal of education and the idea that a student is simply a receptacle for knowledge, the final result leaves students feeling distant from the whole purpose of education and reflecting negatively upon themselves for their appeared lack of ability. Freire continues that teachers prefer un-contesting students and feel that “The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (1993, p.72); suggesting that if a student does not respond or understand the societal or cultural cues set forth by the teacher, then they fail to present themselves as a desirable student, in turn they receive a lesser education. This lesser education becomes a reality as the teacher fails to see the potential of the students, due to a difference in perspective and experience.

A theory presented by Freire, which decades later will be reiterated by many researchers, poses that the “solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform the structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves.’” (1993, p.74). The concept is reiterated as researchers find that the current educational practices perpetuate the injustices for students who suffer from poverty or are simply of a different cultural background than that of their teacher (Smith & Smith, 2009). One of the first authors and research articles based on this theory, originated with Rist (2000), who found vast differences in the dynamics of interaction between students and teachers, which then affected the uniformity of the teacher student relationships within the classroom furthering the impact of oppression and unfair education for students of diverse backgrounds. The position as educator requires providing a safe, nurturing, and educational environment in which students can take charge of their own learning and skills. The educational environment has come under much scrutiny over the past few years as the importance of standards and accountability grows in the eyes of the teachers. A student’s value is placed not on their individual characteristics, but rather on their ability to perform and receive high scores on their state tests (Kohn, 2005). Noguera (2002), discusses the elements of school reform used to provide greater equality of learning that have been tried in the past, but the typical reform is for smaller schools rather than more caring while also more demanding educational experiences. The strongest and most effective school systems display “strong administrative leadership; high expectations for achievement; careful monitoring of student progress; consistent discipline and order; an emphasis on skill development, homework, and teamwork; and high levels of parental involvement” (Fenzel & Domingues, p.31). Research continues to

find that students living in communities comprised of poor and nonwhite families are not receiving the educational opportunities that they deserve and that are afforded to families living in suburban white neighborhoods (Noguera, 2002). Students who do not receive adequate opportunities subsequently do not perform well on tests and the cycle continues, as they are further removed from the educational process. When students fail to perform at standard, teachers typically provide a very conditional acceptance of them, as only the high scoring students are congratulated and respected (Kohn, 2005).

This difference in educational practice may stem from the teacher's inability to relate to or understand the cultures or backgrounds of the students. Numerous teachers claim that the most difficult aspect of the position as educator comes from the students' cultures, attitudes, street influences, and behaviors, acting as a wedge between student and teacher (Smith & Smith, 2009), because it influences the classroom behavior and interactions with students. Variances in teacher interaction may be as simple as the regularity with which a teacher calls on a particular student. As a teacher calls on a white student, this act reinforces the opportunities for the white student to speak more often, causing minority students to assume that the teacher thinks white students are smarter or that they simply like them better (Ferguson, 2003). Opportunities for students to speak in class allows the teacher to see the breadth of knowledge gained, and when a student does not have the opportunity to speak or lacks the confidence to raise their hand, the teacher must then assume that the student has not learned the material. The teacher's low expectations of the student are then fulfilled, despite the fact that the low-status child had in fact gained knowledge, they did not have the opportunity to verbalize it and consequently the teacher assumes they are behind (Rist, 2000). Educators may be

unaware of the stereotypes or biases that have been created within their classroom, but many students are overly sensitive or continuously aware of the implications of these biases and stereotypes.

As teachers emphasize the idea of conformity within the classroom and school, students tend to act out in a disruptive manner. Teachers view this behavior as a psychological trait of the student rather than refocusing their attention to the ideologies that guide the social and educational structures within which the students are placed (Payne, Starks, & Gibson, 2009). Students who fail to conform to the suggested structure are often placed on a lower learning track or put into a special education program simply furthering the educational oppression, when this was instead an opportunity for the teacher to reach out to the student for one on one tutoring time, or even provide a social support system. As teachers place emphasis on the deficiencies of certain students, the educational process begins to break down and students are not given equal opportunities. Rist (2000), reiterated this point with the findings of his study as the “teacher possessed a roughly constructed “ideal type” as to what characteristics were necessary for any given student to achieve “success” both in the public school and in the larger society” (p.259). With this constructed image in mind, teachers form opinions of students who do not fit within that mold and treat them as failures before they are given the chance to prove themselves. Students in urban areas often speak using a variance of the English language, such as African American Vernacular English, which teachers then attempt to correct to what they deem as proper English. Eliminating this aspect of a student’s culture by simply correcting it or disregarding its cultural impact may alienate the student and further the classroom issues (Hill, 2009). This elimination of a student’s learned language

not only disregards their heritage and lessens their self confidence as a person, but also speaks to the educational setting. The disregard for this English variant suggests to the student that they will not only fail to conform to the classroom and society on greater levels, but that they are also incapable of even speaking the language used within this setting. Shaunessey and McHatton (2009), found through interviews and observation, that “students felt teachers stereotyped them for their appearance and withheld opportunities from students because of these preconceived notions, which were largely, students felt, based on their clothing and gait” (p.493).

While many studies (Rist, 2000, Rodriguez, 2008, Ferguson, 2003, Shaunessey and McHatton, 2009, and Smith & Smith, 2009) show that students are judged based on appearance, the judgment is often made through the eyes of a teacher who has simply given up. Many teachers claim to have begun their careers with high expectations, but as students continued to fail and repeatedly did not meet these expectations, the teachers felt forced to adjust their standards for students in low income urban schools (Smith & Smith, 2009). Students are not faced with these low expectations or stereotypes for a year and then given a fresh opportunity with the next teacher. In many schools, teachers recommend or warn the teachers who teach the next grade about each student which begins the cycle of the self-fulfilling prophecy. The cycle commonly begins as the teachers believe the information given to them, whether true or false. The teacher then acts on this information in ways that are noticeable to students, and therefore students respond or react to these perceptions in ways that tend to confirm that expectation (Ferguson, 2003). If a teacher gains information regarding a student’s behavior in the classroom and their ability to complete tasks in a timely fashion, and then approaches this

student with strict rules and deadlines while giving other students greater freedoms, this student will react to this distinct treatment and feel alienated from the rest of the class. Often this reaction to the strict rules and guidelines will cause the student to act out toward the teacher or refuse to complete the tasks assigned in protest. In Rist's (2000), research findings the students who were thought to be low achievers and slow learners, in fact became just that, and these students will continue on through their schooling, always being placed at the slow learner's table due to the recommendation of the teacher from previous years. This begs the question of how expectations can be raised, and maintained for students of various cultures and backgrounds, especially when these factors differ from that of the teacher's historical norm. Ferguson (2003), argues that, "if instruction is appropriately stimulating and responsive to children's progress, teachers' expectations may not be either self-fulfilling or sustaining" (p.483), but that these low expectations can be changed if the students are provided with an education that promotes interest and learning. The problem then becomes a question of how to promote this interest. If a teacher creates an inviting area for learning where the instruction is responsive to the needs of the students and their efforts to improve, then the low expectations and initial perceptions will deteriorate, only leaving room for success (Ferguson, 2003).

Expectations can not simply be stated and maintained within a classroom without the addition of a respectful relationship between student and teacher. A teacher can not walk into a classroom with high expectations and assume that the students will achieve those expectations unless the teacher is willing to approach that student with the respect and care that each and every student deserves with equal distribution. "The nature of student-adult relationships is disentangled by exploring how students experience

personalized, respectful, and encouraging interactions with school adults”(Rodriguez 2008, p.758). There are various ways to ensure the success of each and every student who enters the school building, but a sure way to reach each student on a different level and express that a teacher has their best interests in mind, is to build a relationship between student and teacher. If the difficulties for the teacher arise from the student’s families, neighborhoods, and culture, then the only option, in order to provide the optimal educational opportunities for each student, would be for the teacher to gain an understanding of these very aspects of the students’ lives (Smith & Smith, 2009). Although many external factors can and will influence a student’s daily learning; the position of teacher comes with the responsibility of creating a welcoming and uninhibited learning environment. The feeling of satisfaction or even affection for the schooling process comes not only from the physical environment, but also through the social interactions with peers and the interpersonal relationships with teachers (Baker, 1999). These relationships develop through the educator’s use of critical hope, a combination of the ability to relate the academic content to the lives of the students, discipline when necessary in order to maintain the educational environment, and allow students to struggle in their quest to learn new material (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Payne, Starks, and Gibson discovered in their research study that students felt that teachers and administrators did not have a real interest in their academic development which then created a poor educational experience through high school, but also left students “feeling unprepared to pursue quality educational opportunities after high school” (2009, p.45). Students know the requirements for teachers, and they understand that teachers are there to educate them, but when a teacher lacks an element of care for their job, students notice

this as well. Caring is not limited to patting a student on the back or telling them that you want to help them, but includes creating an environment that is conducive for learning and welcomes the experiences and opinions of all students (Ferreira and Bosworth, 2001). The study concluded that, teachers “have an enormous impact on how the philosophy of the school is translated and communicated to their students” (Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001), and when they provide this caring learning environment free of judgment, the students understand that they are welcomed into the school culture. When a teacher expresses a genuine interest in a student’s success, it conveys the message that this is an expectation, but also knowledge that success is possible for this student and many others. Rodriguez (2008), states that “A teacher’s genuine investment in a student’s future fosters the personalized relationship and larger culture needed to encourage the student’s success” ( p.774). At times even simple kindness from a teacher can make them an equal person and participant in the educational process in the eyes of their students. The simple acts of common greetings in the hallways, respect in and out of the classroom, and an interest in the students as individuals, makes an effective and caring educator (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). A student needs more than simply the knowledge a teacher provides, but also the ability to see that someone cares, and wants them to succeed. So many students walk in and out of school feeling judged, mistreated, and under appreciated, but this does not have to be the future of the educational system or the student-teacher relationship, and instead can be the starting point for change and understanding.

The goal of an educator is to provide students with knowledge and life experiences. This position does not end with the conveyance of that information, but

continues through the offering of role model, support system, and advisor. Students should know that all teachers and faculty have a genuine interest in them as individuals and in their future in society. Personal appearance, characteristics, culture, or family should not alter the opinions of teachers, nor should it dictate the treatment the students receive. Further research needs to address the differences in student – teacher relationships within the classroom and how these variances affect student proficiency. Education is not simply the ability to provide students with information and expect them to recall these facts later. Researchers should focus on the student development of self-confidence and proficiency due to the interactions and relationships with their teachers. This study reflects the basic discrepancies within our educational system and the influences that student – teacher relationships have on student proficiency. The referenced studies are a collaboration of these concepts spread over several research teams.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

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This study focuses on teacher perceptions of and interactions with students of all backgrounds, with a critical analysis of the variances in expectations between students of white financially stable families, minority students, and those of low socio-economic status. This is a qualitative study, designed to observe students and teachers in their day to day environment with the intention of gaining insight and interpretation of the varying levels of expectations within the classroom setting and the resulting student success.

Information regarding the student-teacher relationships and the resulting student proficiency was gathered through a ten-week observation period of the classroom environment, followed by an opinion survey of teachers created for this study with the goal of determining the extent to which teachers form opinions of students upon immediate interaction and how these opinions influence their classroom interactions and grading of the students.. The use of observation provided insight into the classroom dynamic and student teacher interaction. During the observation of the classroom, a 5 column chart consisting of a student description of demeanor, the number of times the student was called upon, the positive or negative teacher interaction received, and the rewards and punishments given to the student was developed for this study. The chart was completed depicting the students' interaction with the teacher based on how often the student is called upon, and the positive or negative feedback received from the teacher. The six question survey provided teachers with the opportunity to express their thoughts and perceptions individually and privately. The teacher survey focused on the teachers first perceptions of the students and if their initial reaction to the students' appearances

proved to be correct in the students general academic outcome. The observation and survey results were compared to the students' socio-economic status, minority group membership, the cultural differences from that of the teacher, and the students' perceptions of how well they performed in the class in addition to any available documents reflecting the student's performance level such as project grades, student commentary regarding their success in the classroom, and assignment grades. The comparative analysis of the observation and the teacher surveys provide parallels between teacher perceptions or biases, the resulting treatment of students, and the eventual educational gain for these students.

The collection of information took place in an Appalachian school. This study was conducted over a ten week observation period, of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. The classes consisted of approximately fifty students spread throughout the three levels, traditional, accelerated, and honor level students, allowing for a diversity of learning levels and student – teacher interactions. The observation sought to find a correlation between the educational class setting and the student's socio-economic status. Insight was also sought for a connection between the teacher's treatment of these low socio-economic status students, positive or negative relationships, and the student's educational proficiency and effort within the classroom.

Information was gathered through the use of six question surveys, received from twelve teachers within the high school building, designed to create the opportunity for teachers to reflect on the students within their classroom and the abilities or inabilities of each student. The goal was to provide teachers with a form for expression and reflection on the students without the requirement of disclosing the specific student identification in

hopes that the teacher would be more likely to provide the information typically not discussed within the educational system. In addition to the survey information, data collection occurred through observation and interpretation of the classroom dynamic, as well as an analysis of the students' perceptions of their success level in the class gained through the use of observation and discussion. This comparative analysis reflects the idea that the self-fulfilling prophecy can occur for varying levels of learners and that students of all backgrounds and cultures can suffer from the self-fulfilling prophecy if the student-teacher relationship lacks substance.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

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It is my belief that society tends to group people according to socio-economic status and intellectual abilities for the simple convenience of mentally organizing societal members. The educational system proves to consist of the same need or desire of organization as the students are clustered according to prior knowledge and perceived intellectual abilities. During the ten week observation of this rural Appalachian school district, the first and most striking realization upon initial exposure to the classroom was the vast difference in outward appearance of the students in traditional, or lower performing classes, versus the students in accelerated and honors level classes. The classroom under observation was an eleventh grade English class, consisting of students who are nearing the end of their educational career and well past the initial phases of the self-fulfilling prophecy cycle. These students seemed to have found their place in the social and educational hierarchy and know that they are in the classes that cater to the lower class and lesser ability. Often throughout the course of the school year, students comment that they are in the “dumb class” or that they are not as smart as the students in the higher performing classes. The traditional level class consisted of students from families of low socio-economic status, generally a lesser interest in their outward appearance, and the general opinion that school was boring and an insufficient use of their time. The accelerated classes were much larger and consisted of students who were intelligent, socially popular within the school system, well liked by teachers, and generally preferred higher grades over intellectual challenge. These students often commented that they wanted to do the tasks assigned to the honors class and read the

same books, but they did not want to do school work over the summer, which was a requirement of the honors students. Students discussed with me during class the idea of moving up to the higher level English class for the following year, but while they felt it was possible to complete the course, they knew it was easier in the lower level class and they did not want to have to work harder for the same grade. The final class was the honors level class, consisting of students who came from upper middle class families, and through discussion with students I came to find that they typically had parents who were professors at Ohio University or held other professional positions, were well dressed and well liked among their classmates and teachers, and enjoyed the intrinsic motivation that came from accomplishment and high scores or recognition. In general, the variances between the three class levels could be predicted due to the student's outward appearances and their overall interaction with the teachers outside of the classroom.

Findings from the ten-week long classroom observation suggest that within each class level was some variation among students and these differences were not directly acknowledged by the teacher, but were indirectly related to the ensuing student-teacher interactions. The teacher tended to relate to outspoken, athletic, and clean cut students. In the first period accelerated classroom the girls in this class, of which there were four, were not the high achieving, athletic, or outgoing students, and of the six boys in the class, four of them are popular, clean cut, and athletic. The teacher addressed the class as a whole and provided all students with the same information, but the welcomed comments, side conversations, and jokes were all exchanged with the more popular outspoken students. Although these side conversations are typically initiated by the students, the teacher does not make an attempt to talk to the more withdrawn students. During the

class discussion or lecture, the only students who answered questions or participated in this discussion were the students who had this greater feeling of comfort with the teacher. This became evident as the same students who participated in the class activities and discussions were also the same students who were invited into side conversations with the teacher and also came into the classroom to see the teacher outside of their designated class period. One student in this first period accelerated class stood out among the rest, and had a somewhat abrasive personality. She was heard to voice that an activity or book was dumb, or that the assignments were pointless. This attitude continued for the majority of the observation period, and became progressively worse toward the end of the school year. This student seemed to feel as if she was not appreciated within the class and that she was not similar to the students around her. She often commented that no one liked her, or that she didn't fit in with the school. While the other students discussed the material and voiced their opinions regarding the novel under analysis, this student typically remained silent. When the class was assigned work outside of the class period she often did not turn it in and disregarded the teacher's comments to bring it to her the following day. Toward the last weeks of school the student began to dispute a point with the teacher during a review game in which the student answered a question wrong, but felt that the information had been provided by the teacher in previous class discussion. The conversation became argumentative and the student stormed out at the end of the class period. Later during another class, the student came back into the classroom with what she interpreted as proof of her argument and proceeded to argue with the teacher in front of the class. When the teacher explained that the student was not proving the point, but asked what the student's goal was in this argument, the student stated that she wanted

the teacher to tell her she was right. The argument ended at the point when the teacher asked her to leave because she was interrupting the current class period, but the student continued to hold a grudge toward the teacher and declined to put forth any effort during the class period. The student neglected to turn in any of the assignments that she was missing, and refused to make eye contact with the teacher for the remaining week of school.

The second period accelerated class was much larger and had a less noticeable student-teacher interaction, but several students were withdrawn from the classroom experience. The same outspoken, confident, and socially popular students were engaged in the class discussion and the more withdrawn students remained silent and had minimal teacher interaction. On one occasion, a student who would be considered a more alternative personality, and not the typical student with whom the teacher would interact on a personal level, came into the classroom and put her books on the desk. She walked to get her daily starter, which is a worksheet provided to students at the beginning of every class period that focuses on questions found on college entrance exams, and begin her work, but during this process she attempted to tell the teacher a story about her pet turtle and how he was crawling around and it made her happy to watch him. She started to tell the rest of her experience, but she soon realized the teacher's lack of interest by the teacher's failure to respond to her initial attempt to share. The teacher had simply continued to complete her tasks at her desk, and said "uh huh" without looking up when the student was talking. This event would not have been so striking had the teacher not typically engaged in conversation with other students prior to the start of class. The typical interaction consists of the students sharing an experience and the teacher walking

toward them to hear more, commenting on their story, and then sharing something of her own that was similar. In this case the teacher said nothing to the student after her initial murmur of acknowledgement.

The general consensus of opinion regarding this particular teacher was positive, and students felt that she was a good teacher, but there were times when the student-teacher interaction seemed biased and a great influence on the students' educational progress. Observation of student interactions with the teacher provided insight regarding their personal comfort with the teacher on an individual level, and as students felt more comfortable and accepted in side conversations, their feelings of self-worth increased along with their classroom performance. Through this observation, it became apparent that the students participated in class discussions and activities more readily when their relationship with the teacher was more comfortable. Future research could benefit from the use of statistical analysis of student participation in relation to the environmental and educational comfort individually felt within the classroom.

Results from observations and surveys show that the traditional classes reflected much more personal discomfort for the teacher and a lack of personal conversation. In the majority of the classes the teacher would discuss the students' interests or their out of school activities in order to create an inviting and nurturing environment. However, in the traditional classes the teacher simply began the lecture or lesson for the day with very little personal interactions with the students. There were some exceptions to this generalization for students with whom the teacher had more interest, for example there was a young man who played football, and knew all of the other students who spoke with the teacher often, and he was more comfortable approaching her or speaking to her about

his activities. In general, the students in the traditional class felt as if they were required to follow more strict rules and complete their work silently, with little to no communication with the teacher other than questioning regarding the tasks. Some students commented that the other classes were engaged in other activities and were allowed to have free days, but they were never allowed those privileges. The activities for the different class levels did vary dependent upon the teacher's assumptions of how well the students would stay on task. Prior to completing a writing assignment for the student teacher, one student commented that maybe this teacher would like his writing style more than the actual teacher. He continued with comments that he often failed assignments and was not given full credit because the teacher did not like him and she has always disliked his older siblings as well. He felt that she just didn't like his writing style and that her personal opinion of his abilities was clouding her judgment when grading his assignments. These comments were made during the class period as the students were given their writing assignment. This student seemed to want to take the pressure off of himself by simply stating up front that there is a reason for his past failures. Although this generalization proved to be false upon viewing his writing assignment and gaining an understanding of his past writing performance, this opinion was formed over time and reflected the idea that if a student approaches a task with the idea that he will not succeed, and continuously does not meet expectations, then his efforts will diminish over time. While failure seems in excess within the lower level classes, the opposite is true in the honors level.

Observations reveal that an honors level student can neglect responsibilities, forget homework, and fail assignments, and the teacher laughs at their negligence and allows

them to redo the assignment or bring it in late. If a student in the traditional class does the same thing, the teacher becomes irate and belittles the student in front of others. In one instance, when the teacher announced that the students needed to clear their desks for the quiz over the first section of the novel, a male student commented that he had not finished reading that section and had only read the first few pages of the book. The teacher laughed and made the comment that he will still receive a good grade on the test because she knows all of his friends gave him the summary of the book and discussed with him the general assumptions that could be made regarding the chapters on the quiz. The acknowledgment of a student's failure to complete an assignment and receiving answers from fellow students in the honors class was astounding. Later in the quarter the teacher assigned a project for each student to complete regarding a novel they read on their own. Prior to the due date of the assignment she received an email from the student's mother regarding his assignments and the requirements. On the due date this student displayed the most interactive and well developed project for display in the classroom. The other students commented that his mother had completed the project for him and that they would get a good grade too if they had their parents do their work. The teacher heard these comments and joked along with the students, but proceeded to give him a high score on the project.

Following general observation of the classroom dynamic, an observation chart was completed to depict the regularity of student interaction and classroom responses. The chart reflects a week long observation of student responses during one period of the accelerated English class. Students with whom the teacher often held discussion unrelated to classroom materials most readily responded to questions regarding the material.

Although the number of student – teacher conversations was not officially recorded, it became apparent through observation that the teacher’s reaction to the student responses was also reflective of her level of comfort with them and their associations outside of the classroom. If the teacher held some interest in the outside activities or felt some connection to the student, this was reflected in her reactions to their classroom discussion. Students with whom the teacher rarely associated were less likely to respond to whole class discussion or questioning and were often disregarded when their response was incorrect, while students who had a positive student-teacher relationship were joked with or received positive comments even when their responses were incorrect. The teacher rarely called upon the students who were reserved or with whom she did not have a positive student-teacher relationship. This interaction is reflected in the observation chart listed in the appendix section.

On a broader scale, the twelve teachers who completed surveys, reflected positively of their students on the teacher surveys. The overwhelming majority of teachers, approximately 75% of those questioned, described the typical student in the school as hard working or had a strong work ethic, well behaved, and from families of middle to low socio economic status. Many of these same teachers also commented that the students were from a rural area, therefore lacking exposure to many aspects of society. Two teachers commented that the students were selfish and lazy, constantly looking for a way to get out of doing their work and displaying a disregard for the successes of others. When asked if a teacher can tell within the first few meetings with a student how well they will perform in the class the majority of the teachers stated that often it is possible to see a student’s interest level in the topic or in the subject based on

the first few weeks of class. Teachers reflected that students frequently enter a new year with trepidation as they get used to a new teacher and determine what they will learn in this new setting. Approximately 17% of the teachers surveyed felt that documentation on the students' prior behavior, skill level and proficiency testing, and regularity of attendance good indicators of their future success. While 83% of the teachers determined that often the initial assumptions made regarding a student's ability or interest may change over the course of the year as students get used to the new teaching style and the classroom dynamics, furthering their success and appreciation for the material.

The question of student motivation continues to perplex teachers and when questioned regarding the motivators for students in this school district every single teacher commented that grades and parents are the most influential motivators. Students view grades as the most important factor in their high school careers and determine their educational worth based on these grades. Only 10% of the teachers added to these factors, the incentive to play sports since there is an eligibility grade requirement, the intrinsic motivation of success and learning, and the relationship with the teacher. Surprisingly, 100% of the surveyed teachers rephrased these motivators to state that students wanted to please teachers, parents, and coaches by attaining high grades.

As students attempt to please their teachers and coaches, teachers also want to provide students with an environment in which they feel comfortable and accepted. When asked how a teacher expresses to their students that they are a caring teacher, every teacher reflected that showing an interest in the students' lives is the best way to express concern or care for them. In many ways this is seen as a way to share experiences and allow the student to feel as if they are equals and not necessarily just a teacher and a

student, but two people who care for the well being of the other. One teacher stated that the only topic in which he felt it necessary to care was in the students' ability to accomplish tasks on time and correctly. The greater part of the faculty felt that the common greetings and a pleasant smile can also express that they are a caring teacher.

There is a difference in the idea that a teacher cares, and the concept of developing a student – teacher relationship. Teachers were questioned regarding the steps taken to develop relationships with the students and there was a general consensus that the process is the same as the steps to show that one cares. A few of the teachers did expand upon the concept and stated that it helps to ask students about their activities regularly, attend their sporting events or extra curricular activities, and reiterate their strengths. Following these conversations, teachers found it useful to use activities in class that reflected the students' interests and skills in order to incorporate these discussions into the class. All teachers determined that a positive student – teacher relationships are essential to the students' performance in the educational process. Students are more likely to complete activities and perform well in the classes in which they have a genuinely positive relationship with the teacher.

On another level, there are some students who are simply reluctant to engage in the educational process at all, and refrain from developing relationships with the teachers. When questioned regarding these more difficult to reach students, teachers responded that while the process required to attain a relationship with these students takes more time and energy, there is often a greater improvement in their abilities and class discussion than with other students. Once these more difficult to reach students feel comfortable with the teacher, the majority increase their level of classroom participation. One teacher

responded that once a positive rapport is built with the more timid or reserved students it improves their educational performance because they do not want to disappoint the teacher. The same concept is true in opposition, as one teacher replied, there are students who will perform well in one class because they enjoy that particular teacher, but they refuse to complete assignments in other classes where they dislike the teacher.

In general, teachers affirmed that there were distinctive ties between student performance and the development of student teacher relationships. Through observation of student actions and attitudes, it becomes apparent that students desire recognition and appreciation for their successes and if one teacher refuses to acknowledge their abilities, they are more likely to disregard the class.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

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This research study originated with the question: do teachers form perceptions or opinions of students based on the knowledge gained from previous teachers, student appearance, family background, socio-economic status, or minority group membership? As discussed in the results section, an obvious difference is apparent in the outward appearance and confidence of students in the traditional classes versus the students in the more advanced areas of the class. Due to the fact that this is an 11<sup>th</sup> grade classroom, one can assume that the students were placed at this educational level years before entering this particular classroom, but this does not exempt this particular teacher from the obligation to each student's success and drive to exceed expectations and surroundings.

Another research question that prompted the study was the idea that once these perceptions are formed, does it affect the teacher's treatment of these particular students, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which students live up to the low expectations the teacher has formed? Many of the students under observation during this study exceeded the expectations of the teacher and were simply rewarded with a look of surprise rather than a discussion of their success and the possibility that they could move up in the following year to the more advanced classes.

The final question for research was if the self-fulfilling prophecy could be counteracted by a teacher's ability to create a motivational and educational environment through the formation of a caring relationship with students? This question is more difficult to answer due to the varying characteristics of each and every student in the classroom. While many students viewed the teachers expression of care and expectations

as a challenge and a motivation for completing work and learning the material, many others did not seem affected by this relationship. The vast majority of the students felt that when they had a relationship with a teacher and the ability to speak freely with the teacher on subjects other than classroom materials, they were more inclined to complete their homework assignments and read the required materials in order to impress and perform well for the teacher. The students' persistence in and out of the classroom would then perpetuate the beneficial and positive relationship they had developed with the teacher.

The research focused on how teacher expectations are expressed within the classroom setting and if these expectations are based, in any form, on the students' appearances or personal situations. The self-fulfilling prophecy is reflected not only in teacher expectations, but also through student and teacher relationships and interactions, which was also a focus of this study. Low expectations and the lack of student-teacher relationships within the classroom can cause students to perform at a lower level, or cause the teacher to give the student a lower grade due to the assumption that the student has not learned the material. This concept was proved in many ways through the observation of the teacher's interactions with students and her approach toward the varying class levels. The teacher facilitated much more open and off topic discussion with the higher achieving classes, allowing them the freedom to complete their assignments on their own time and simply discuss the issues or concepts in class. Many of the students did not complete the assignments during the allotted time and were asked to complete them for credit later in the day or week, but there was never an expression of anger or disappointment from the teacher. The classroom dynamic was much different for

this honors level class as the teacher assumed that they were more mature and responsible than the students in the other classes. As discussed in the results section, some of these students joked about not reading the materials, or having their mother complete the final project for them, and the teacher simply laughed along with them, while her reaction to the same situation in the lower level classes would have been much different.

Simply watching the teacher's demeanor and facial expressions as each class enters the room can tell an observer much about the expectations and perceptions of each student. The teacher often looks at ease during the period in which she teaches honors level students. Her facial expressions and demeanor seem to tense somewhat as she begins the lessons with her accelerated students because there are many more of them, and a few of these students are more difficult to motivate during the classes. The final change comes with the observation of her demeanor during the traditional level classes, during which her entire attitude becomes one of stern rules and personal defense. She approaches the students with mediocre expectations, and the assumption that they have not fulfilled even these requirements. When a typically "lazy" or "unorganized" student turns in an assignment on time, she simply states, "oh that was surprising," in reference to their accomplishments. This is the same student who stated that his regular teacher just didn't like his style of writing. Despite the teacher's efforts to remain neutral and open with her students, many of them are capable of reading her expressions and behavior, and interpreting for themselves how she feels toward each of them.

The outward expressions, comments, and general demeanor of the teacher toward students in the classroom contribute significantly to the students' academic success. This concept was proved in previous studies and the results assert that, "a youth's perception

of academic support from the opposite-sex parent contributed significantly to a positive change in each of the academic indicators measured while a teacher's academic support was dominant in explaining a student's academic satisfaction and grades" (Lessard et al., 2009, p.21). Students are often strongly influenced by the amount of support and encouragement provided by their parents in regard to their academic achievements, but the teacher's expectations of, and satisfaction with each student is a direct influence on the student performance everyday within the classroom. Docan-Morgan, Manusov, (2009) reference Tevan who explains that "in order to maximize learning, it is essential for teachers to develop a good relationship with their students, because the rapport established between teachers and students, in part, determines the interest and performance level" (p.156). The study of student teacher relationships and the ensuing power on student proficiency helps to explain the classroom dynamic in various ways. "Recognizing the systemic nature of relationships helps explain not only that instructional variables and processes are linked by the relationship, but that the systemic functioning of the relationship works to affect outcomes as well" (Docan-Morgan, Manusov, 2009, p. 183). The behavior of both students and teachers, such as the ability to confide in one another, use humor in appropriate settings and feel a general connection with each other, has the ability to determine the outcomes of the classroom and affect the perceptions of both students and teachers, encourage or discourage learning, motivation, and confidence of everyone involved.

A strong and positive student teacher relationship affects student drop out rates and promotes student enthusiasm for the course. Docan-Morgan and Manusov (2009) concluded in a study focusing on the relational turning points between students and

teachers, that when a strong and positive student – teacher relationship develops, the student is more comfortable approaching the teacher or seeking help. The first step in the creation of student – teacher relationships stems from the development of an atmosphere based on the principles of equality. When students feel that they are an important part of the greater whole, there is an understanding of dignity, equality, and respect.

Unfortunately, as Goodman explains, “For the most part schools have adopted a thinner version or respect, emphasizing dignity and some aspects of equality, while seeing autonomy as a desired outcome rather than a process of the educational experience” (Goodman, 2009, p.7). The concept of educational equality and dignity requires that teachers not only view students as equal to one another, but also equivalent to the teacher. Goodman (2009) reflects that the attention to multiculturalism emphasizes the concept of mutual tolerance, but teachers must provide each student with not only identical opportunity, but individual autonomy and respect. Goodman (2009) elaborates that “A good educator offers progressively elaborated experiences that move the child in a socially desirable direction” (p.9). The development of student – teacher relationships between all students and teachers will provide students with an eagerness to learn, a feeling of acceptance within the classroom, and an interest in the course.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

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## Implications of the study:

An overwhelming number of minority students and students from low socio-economic status homes respond negatively to the educational process, typically resulting in low achievement and high drop out rates. Low teacher expectations and a lack of positive student – teacher relationships within the classroom setting perpetuates the self-fulfilling prophecy and low student achievement. The future goal for the system of education should revolve around the creation of a caring and welcoming classroom environment, free from bias or relationship barriers between student and teacher. It is the responsibility of the educators to understand the issues and ensure that as educators they are not perpetuating the problems. Variances in teacher to student interaction often occur due to the inability of students and teachers to relate to one another on certain aspects or interests. Common characteristics and experiences are often nonexistent between teacher and student due to the lack of similarity in cultural background.

The student - teacher relationship fails in many circumstances simply because the teacher does not share the same interests or level of appreciation for activities in which the student participates. As shown in the study completed at the high school level, the teachers often could not communicate or develop relationships with the students due to the cultural barrier between themselves and their surroundings. Many of the teachers commented that the students were from a low income or poverty level area because many of these same teachers were not previously exposed to this level of income or rural

culture. The teachers were incapable of developing a true relationship or interest level with the students because the cultural background varied. These students then suffer academically because of the lack of attention. As shown in this study, students who felt that their teachers cared for them both personally and academically, were more likely to succeed than the students who felt as if they did not fit in, or that their teacher simply did not care if they became educationally proficient.

Although the findings of this study support the idea that student – teacher relationships are strongly tied to the student performance level, there are some limitations within this study. Many students and teachers confirmed that student – teacher relationships heighten student interest, motivation, and inspiration, but the study focused only on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade class in one school system, with observations done with a single teacher classroom. On a broader scale, with a greater number of participants and a longer observation period, the results may vary. In addition, this study was completed using a small rural school district which may limit the variation in results. Stronger correlations may become apparent in other school settings. Future research on this concept would benefit from an inner-city or more diverse setting, allowing for greater diversity in student background.

In order for the educational process to facilitate learning for all students, educators must first understand that students within the classroom reflect a variety of cultural influences. No two students are exactly alike, nor is there a particular mold into which students must fit. Every person provides another with the opportunity to teach and learn from each other. The variances in culture, appearance, experience, and knowledge simply allow for the expansion of knowledge for all people involved in the educational

environment. The creation of student – teacher relationships needs to reach all students in order to allow each student to develop confidence, comfort, and pride in their academic experience. As students understand themselves and their teacher, while developing confidence in their education, the student will grow from this process and succeed within the classroom. These relationships promote the students' abilities to come to school without feeling judged, mistreated, or under appreciated, and will instead allow the student to feel that they are a part of the growth, change, and process of education.

The position of educator is not to dispense knowledge or information, but to create the welcoming learning environment necessary to provide students with life experience, a support system, advisor, and role model. In order for this to occur, teachers must develop a genuine interest in students as individuals rather than empty receptacles to fill. Personal appearance, characteristics, culture, and family can not alter teacher opinions, the development of student – teacher relationships, or dictate the treatment students receive. As evidenced in this study, students exhibit incredible growth and ability when they experience an educational environment comprised of warm, welcoming, stimulating, and kind treatment, facilitated by a teacher who is genuinely interested in the future well-being of all students, and who focuses on bringing interesting and challenging educational materials to the students.

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**APPENDIX A:**

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**Teacher Survey:**

**1. Describe the typical student at this High School.**

**2. Do you typically know or can you tell within the first few meetings with a student how well they will perform in your class? Please provide examples or an explanation.**

**3. What do you think motivates your students to learn?**

**4. How do you express to your students that you are a caring teacher?**

**5. What steps do you take to develop relationships with your students? Do you find that these relationships are helpful for student performance?**

**6. Some students are more difficult to reach than others, do you notice reflections on performance due to this fact?**

Observation Table:

<b>Student</b>	<b>Times called on in class</b>	<b>Positive/Negative Teacher interaction</b>	<b>Punishments Received</b>	<b>Rewards Received</b>
Student 1 (male, quiet student, little to no interaction, shy)	4	Coaxing, neither positive or negative	No punishments	Minimal rewards, mostly coaxing for answers, teacher smiles when student responds
Student 2 (male, outgoing, athletic, enjoys education)	12	Positive responses, laughs when student answers incorrectly, or teases him for being silly	One statement to calm down or refrain from talking during an assignment	Always laughs at his jokes, and comments that he is sort of correct even when his answer is wrong.
Student 3 (female, quiet, intelligent, good relationship with the teacher)	10	Positive responses, always confirms what the student says, tells other students to ask student 3 if they have questions	No punishments, but student did not ever act inappropriately	Constant verbal rewards and smiles when student responds correctly
Student 4 (male, athletic, lack of care for education)	6	Student often speaks without being called on, answers are not always correct but the teacher jokes with him or rolls her eyes sarcastically	Some punishments when student declines to do work, but rarely speaks negatively toward him	Some rewards, but not many opportunities to reward him
Student 5 (shy, quiet, timid, intelligent)	3	Student rarely speaks in class, teacher coaxes her to answer, encourages her responses	No punishments	Minimal rewards, student rarely speaks in class but often receives high grades on assignments
Student 6 (male, outspoken)	5	Student is encouraged to speak, and engages in personal conversation but rarely answers class questions.	Minimal punishments, some reprimand for speaking out of turn.	Occasional rewards for correct answers or laughter regarding a joke the student told.

Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Student 7 (female, withdrawn, artistic)	0	Student is neither rewarded or punished, teacher lacks interest in the student	No punishments	Occasional reward for the effort or product of the students completed assignments
Student 8 (male, athletic, kind, generous)	10	Student is rewarded regularly for athletic accomplishments, classroom engagement, and assignments	No punishments	Teacher allows the student to talk out of turn and rewards him by discussing his topics of choice, typically baseball
Student 9 (female, abrasive personality, negative outlook on education)	2	Student seems to be called upon as a way for the teacher to find out if she is completing her assignments and readings	Regular reprimands for speaking out of turn or speaking with an attitude toward the teacher	Teacher rarely rewards the student, and student rarely does anything to be rewarded.
Student 10 (male, excessive talking, somewhat knowledgeable of the material)	15	The majority of the times the student spoke in class the teacher had not actually called on him, he just started talking. The teacher acknowledged his answer when it was correct, but told him to stop talking out of turn when his answer was wrong.	Teacher reprimands him regularly for speaking out of turn and answering questions when he did not actually know the answer.	Occasional verbal rewards for the efforts put forth in class but there is usually a condescending undertone to her reward.

APPENDIX B:

Institutional Review Board Approval:



OHIO UNIVERSITY  
Office of the Vice President for Research

10X062

Office of Research Compliance  
RTEC 117  
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The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

**Project Title:** The Impact of Teacher Expectations and Student-Teacher Relationships on Student Performance

**Primary Investigator:** Kelsey Green  
**Co-Investigator(s):**

**Faculty Advisor:** Guofang Wan  
(if applicable)

**Department:** Education

*Rebecca Cale*

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP  
Office of Research Compliance

*05/20/10*

**Approval Date**

*05/19/11*

**Expiration Date**

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.