

**Teacher Expectations and Students from Low Socioeconomic
Background: A Perspective from Costa Rica**

Michele Regalla, Ph.D.

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This study explores teachers' academic expectations of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) in Costa Rica for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison. A group of 17 teachers from two different elementary schools located in a small town in Costa Rica were questioned about their expectations of low SES students enrolled in their classes. Findings show a mixture of favorable and unfavorable expectations of low SES students among the teachers. Teachers who hold unfavorable expectations describe the families of low SES students as poor role models with a poor work ethic. Findings suggest that teachers' unfavorable academic expectations for low SES students are influenced by student immigrant status. Cross-cultural similarities between the findings of this study and studies regarding teacher attitudes toward English learners of low SES in the U.S. are discussed followed by implications for the field of teacher education.

Introduction

This study builds upon the existing research regarding the influence of teacher expectations on students from low socioeconomic status (low SES) by examining teacher expectations of low SES students in Costa Rica. The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of teacher expectations and their influence on behavior in a cultural context outside of the U.S. Despite the differences that exist between Costa Rican schools and U.S. schools, the following study will show striking similarities in teacher attitudes towards low SES students held by teachers in Costa Rica and in the U.S. by answering the following questions: (a) What are teachers' expectations of low SES students? (b) What reasons do teachers give for unfavorable expectations of low SES students? (c) What influence do teachers' expectations have on their instructional behavior? Although decades of research studies have been conducted in the area of teacher expectations, the following quote given by a teacher who participated in this study

summarizes the need for further research; “The low-class immigrant families do not want to work. The children are not motivated to do well in school or get good jobs because their parents do not think that it is important. They do not learn work ethic at home and do not want to work at school.”

Review of Literature

Over four decades have passed since teacher expectations were first linked to student performance with the publication of *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) where the notion of the “self –fulfilling prophecy” claimed that it was possible to improve student performance by creating higher teacher expectations. Results of this ground-breaking study showed that student performance rose with teachers’ expectations. But is the answer to the question of how to raise the academic performance of low SES students as simple as raising teacher expectations? Of course the relationship between teacher expectations and student performance is very complex and has been the topic of continuous study. Research conducted as recently as 2011 suggest that teachers in low SES contexts underestimate their students’ abilities more often than teachers in higher SES contexts (Ready & Wright, 2011).

Since Rosenthal and Jacobson’s publication, researchers have studied various factors that may influence teacher expectations such as low socioeconomic and cultural minority status (Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1992; Delpit, 1995; Tapia, 2004). Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (low SES) are frequently described as being at-risk for educational failure, (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003). Although extensive research has been

conducted on teacher expectations in English-speaking environments, (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Good, 1981; Cooper & Tom, 1984; Hoge & Coladarci, 1989; Goldberg, 1992; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; de Courcy, 2007) there have been fewer studies conducted on this topic in other linguistic and cultural contexts. The purpose of this study is to examine a group of Costa Rican elementary teachers' academic expectations of low SES students, the reasons behind unfavorable teacher expectations, and the influence of these expectations on the teachers' behavior toward students of low SES in their classrooms.

Educational research in Costa Rica

Educational research in Costa Rica had been mostly quantitative in nature until the early 1980's. In 1981, the Ministry of Education in Costa Rica sought to evaluate the performance of its students in the areas of math, science, social studies and language arts (Brenes, N. Campos, Garcia, Rojas & E. Campos, 1998). The results of achievement tests showed that private school students outperformed public school students in all subject areas (Rojas et al. 1985, as cited in Brenes, N. Campos, Garcia, Rojas & E. Campos, 1998). Furthermore, students in "marginal-urban areas," defined as low socioeconomic areas on the outskirts of major cities such as San Jose, "showed poor academic achievement in contrast to the schools in the central plateau" (Brenes, N. Campos, Garcia, Rojas & E. Campos, p. 182). The results of the Brenes et al. study showed that students of low SES were at a distinct disadvantage, but without qualitative data on the classroom environments, researchers could not begin to account for these differences.

In 1985, the University of Costa Rica funded a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Education and the Institute for the Improvement of Costa Rican Education to complete the country's first major qualitative study of classroom interactions. The purpose for this research was to attempt to understand why students attending schools in middle class areas performed better than students in marginal-urban schools (Brenes, N. Campos, Garcia, Rojas & E. Campos, 1998). An ethnographic study was conducted over a two year period in three different school sites situated in marginal-urban areas of San Jose. The focus of the study was verbal interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. The results showed that 64% of the teachers' verbal interactions with students were oriented towards guidance and control whereas only 31% of teachers' verbalizations were academic in nature (Brenes, N. Campos, Garcia, Rojas & E. Campos, 1998)

These findings show that a significant portion of teachers' instructional behaviors are non-academic in the marginal-urban schools of Costa Rica. But this situation is not unique to the marginal-urban areas of Costa Rica. Studies of urban classrooms in the U.S. show that teacher instructional behavior is frequently control-oriented (Fritzberg, 2001; Espinosa & Laffey, 2003). Having fewer academic interactions with the teacher, children of the marginal-urban areas of Costa Rica are likely to make slower progress in their intellectual development. The students' marginal-urban status, or socioeconomic status, may influence teachers' academic expectations of their students.

Teacher behavior and the deficit perspective

Teachers' expectations of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are often lowered when teachers assume low SES indicates deficits in student abilities and insist

that it is necessary for all students to acquire the norms of the middle class culture in order to succeed in school (Delpit, 1995). This attitude aligns with the deficit perspective which characterizes the culture of low socioeconomic students as deficient because of “weakness in home environment, family structure, child-rearing patterns, values and attitudes, linguistic capability and cognitive development” (Persell-Hodges, 1981, p. 27).

The lowered expectations are formed in the minds of teachers early in their relationship with students and are “determined by a series of subjectively interpreted attributes and characteristics of that student” (Rist, 2000, p. 3). A teacher will often link characteristics unrelated to a student’s cognitive abilities in order to determine the student’s potential for success.

Highly prized middle-class status for the child in the classroom was attained by demonstrating ease of interaction among adults, high degree of verbalization in Standard American English; the ability to become a leader; a neat and clean appearance; coming from a family that is educated, employed, living together and interested in the child; and the ability to participate well as a member of a group. (Rist, p. 8)

These positive attributes, though completely independent of intellect, are highly valued by teachers and are often considered predictors for success. In a study by Lane, Givner & Pierson (2004), teachers indicated that social skills such as self-control and cooperation were important for school success.

The positive behavioral characteristics are usually displayed by middle-class children who know how to conform to school norms because of prior experience. In Shirley Brice Heath’s study (1983) of children in two working-class communities, the children that were viewed more favorably by teachers had the opportunity to “learn school,” meaning its rules and expectations. In a study by Espinosa and Laffey (2003), students

who displayed behavior problems were rated as less competent academically by their teachers. “This may be especially critical for children living in poverty who enter school with limited opportunities to learn the social skills necessary for successful participation in traditional school practices” (Espinosa & Laffey, p. 153). In this case, the teachers’ expectations of a student’s cognitive abilities were negatively influenced by the child’s display of inappropriate behavior.

Teacher expectations and instructional behaviors

More recent research has shown that teacher expectations alone have little influence on student performance, but that teacher behavior plays a much more decisive role in academic achievement (Goldberg, 1992). When teachers see students exhibit the characteristics that identify them as part of a lower social class, they may also perceive these students as low achievers (Rist, 2000). This is problematic because a teacher’s academic expectations of low SES students may lead to false perceptions of a student’s ability due to non-academic characteristics. These false perceptions can have a negative influence on teacher instructional behavior toward students of low SES. The feedback that a student receives from the teacher depends upon the teacher’s perception of the student’s ability. Teachers may provide more response opportunities to the high achievers than to the low achievers and may call upon the perceived low-achievers less frequently to answer questions, provide less wait time for them to answer questions, provide less detailed feedback, demand lower quality responses and interrupt their performance more frequently (Good, 1981).

When students receive less academic attention from the teacher, they become less interested in what is happening in the classroom. As they lose interest, these children will engage in other disruptive behaviors such as distracting other students and making comments to the teacher that are irrelevant to the lesson (Rist, 2000). As a result, those perceived as low-achievers receive more control-oriented feedback than the high-achievers (Fritzberg, 2001). These interactions become an expression of the student/teacher relationship and become patterns resistant to change (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003) perpetuating the “vicious circle” of negative teacher/student interactions (Rist, 2000). Furthermore, a teacher’s expectations play a key role in shaping students’ expectations about their own chances for future success (Muller, 1998).

Although the role of teacher expectations and their influence on teacher behavior has been examined in prior research, more research is needed to understand how teachers form opinions of students that lead to low expectations. A deeper understanding of the reasons behind low teacher expectations can lead to improved teacher education practices that help teachers address the needs of low SES students in their classrooms. By examining teacher expectations from a cross-cultural perspective, we may learn more from the similarities found in teacher expectations in the U.S. and in other cultural contexts.

A Study of Teacher Expectations of Low SES Students in Costa Rica

Setting and Participants

Costa Rica provides the best educational system in Central America offering free and compulsory schooling to all Costa Rican children for six years at the primary level and

for three years at the secondary level (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). It boasts a 95% literacy rate with equal rates of literacy for males and females (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2000). The government of Costa Rica eradicated its army in 1948, leaving more funds available for education. The government funding provides tuition-free education and free school lunches to all children; however, the government does not pay for the uniforms required of all public school students nor does it pay for textbooks and other school supplies (Stromquist, 2001). An economic crisis in Latin America during the 1980's led to a decrease in government spending on education. Poverty has been steadily on the rise with 16% of the population living below poverty (CIA World Factbook, 2006). Due to a lack of funding and a rise in public school enrollment, many schools have been forced into teaching two shifts per day, with each group attending school for one half day.

The present study was conducted in a small, rural Costa Rican town in the two different elementary schools where I completed my volunteer teaching. Due to the size of the schools in this rural town, the sample size is small. However, every one of the 17 teachers agreed to participate in this study. The children who attend these schools are in grades K-6 and come from varied socio-economic backgrounds ranging from middle class families to families living below poverty. One of the elementary schools serves a mixture of middle-class children and a population of low SES children. Most of the low SES families in this area are immigrant families who have moved to Costa Rica from Nicaragua hoping to escape extreme poverty. The second elementary school also serves a large population of low SES children and is located in a section of the town where many unemployed Costa Rican and immigrant families live. This area contains a

residential home for children who are orphaned or who have been placed in the residence by social services because of abuse or neglect. One of the limitations of this study is that it was not possible to obtain permission to interview the children at these schools. This prevented a more detailed investigation of the effects of teachers' expectations on their instructional behavior toward students.

Methodology and data analysis

Surveys (see Appendix A) were chosen as the primary method of data collection in order to avoid miscommunication across languages. All participants had the opportunity to choose between the Spanish and the English version of the survey (see Appendix B). The survey was distributed to all teachers at both of the elementary schools with a brief paragraph in Spanish attached in order to explain the study and thanking participants in advance for their participation. The survey was conducted in the format of a Likert scale containing eight statements. The teachers' responses to the statements were analyzed to determine whether teachers hold favorable or unfavorable expectations of low SES students' abilities and their academic potential.

In order to obtain more in-depth information, teachers were given the opportunity to expand upon their survey responses. An additional comment section was provided at the bottom of the survey in order to give all teachers the opportunity to expand upon their answers to the survey questions. In addition to the comment section on the surveys, many teachers engaged in informal conversations about the topic of the survey and willingly volunteered information to explain their answers to the survey questions. In order to ensure accuracy of all data, any Spanish language text including the survey, explanation paragraph and teacher comments were translated by a third party, a foreign

language teacher who is fluent in both Spanish and English. Additionally, only the English oral comments provided by teachers during the informal conversations were used as data for this study. The additional comments collected from the teachers on the survey and the English comments offered during the informal conversations were analyzed to determine if the teachers hold favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards low SES students. Quotes from the additional comment section and from the informal conversations will be used to support the survey data.

Results

According to survey results, the respondents have a combination of both favorable and unfavorable expectations of low SES students. The following are examples of favorable responses: 13 of the 17 respondents indicated that they believe low SES students are capable of learning the material presented in class, 11 of 17 believe that low SES students have the skills necessary to succeed in school and 10 of 16 respondents believe that low SES students are motivated to do their best in class. The examples of unfavorable responses are as follows: 11 of 17 respondents indicated that they believe low SES students will not perform academically as well as middle class peers, despite the teachers' belief that low SES students have the academic ability to do so. The same number of respondents stated that these students are likely to quit school at an early age. Only 6 of the 17 respondents indicated that they believe low SES students think that education is important. Table 1 shows the distribution of responses for each question and indicates whether the majority of responses reflect favorable or unfavorable expectations of low SES students.

Table 1 Survey results

* For the full survey, see Appendix A

Question: Low SES students...	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	Favorable + Unfavorable -
Will perform as well as middle-class peers	6	11	-
Average capability in reading and math *	8	8	+/-
Capable of learning class material	13	4	+
Have necessary skills for success	11	6	+
Are motivated to do their best *	10	6	+
Work very hard in class	8	9	+/-
Will quit school at an early age	10	7	-
Think that education is important	6	11	-

N=17

* One participant skipped indicated question

Favorable expectations

In the additional comment section and informal conversations, the participants had the opportunity to give the reasons behind each of their responses to the survey questions. Overall, the teachers' expectations of low SES students' academic abilities are favorable. The majority of respondents to the survey stated that low SES students are capable of the same academic performance as their middle-class peers and possess the skills necessary to succeed. The participating teachers do not believe that students' abilities are affected by socio-economic conditions. As one second grade teacher commented, "All students have the capacity to learn, no matter what their differences." Another stated, "Some of these students try very hard to do their work and succeed in spite of economic conditions." Respondents to the survey indicated favorable opinions about motivation and low SES students. The majority of teachers agree that low SES students are

motivated to do their best in class and believe that they make an effort to achieve. This motivation is believed to be intrinsic for some low SES students, “They have the ability to do well with the material, especially in the subjects where they have the most interest,” said one fourth grade teacher.

Unfavorable expectations

Despite some of the favorable opinions of low SES students, teachers agree that academic performance is affected by economic conditions. Students from low SES backgrounds face challenges which may prevent them from achieving academic success. The majority of respondents surveyed indicated that they expect low SES students will not perform as well as middle class peers. Various reasons were given for this unfavorable opinion in teacher interviews and comments. Lack of resources was noted as a major challenge. Because some families cannot afford to buy school supplies for their children, these children do not have the necessary supplies to complete homework assignments. Some families live in homes without electricity making it difficult for a student to study or complete homework after dark. Another resource that low SES students may lack is parental support. “Some parents work long hours and have little time to worry about their child’s school work,” explained one teacher. Many parents of low socio-economic status have not completed their education, work at low-paying jobs and have neither the time nor the ability to help their children with school work.

The majority of respondents surveyed agree that many low SES students will not continue their education through high school graduation. Most teachers cited work and family responsibilities as students’ reason for leaving school. Studies have investigated

the connection between family pressures and the high drop-out rate of students from low SES backgrounds (Blasco, 2004). Students whose families live in poverty are often encouraged to enter the work force early to help the family earn money to buy groceries and other basic necessities. This situation places education as a child's second priority. Some students who find jobs will attempt to stay in school, but miss class frequently because of work. As a result of missing so many classes, the school work becomes too difficult and students become frustrated with school. Eventually, they drop out of school because, as one third grade teacher stated, "They learn to hate school because it is too hard and as a result, they find it boring."

Unfavorable teacher expectations and student immigrant status

One finding that emerged in this study among the teachers with unfavorable expectations of low SES students was the link between socioeconomic status and immigrant status. In the two schools where data was collected, all of the immigrant students that were discussed by the participating teachers moved to Costa Rica from bordering Nicaragua. Teachers reported that Nicaraguan families move to Costa Rica in order to escape extreme poverty and are willing to work in Costa Rica for very low wages. Several teachers stated that some native Costa Ricans hold negative attitudes towards the increased number of Nicaraguans moving into Costa Rica. Because of the tension in the community between immigrants and Costa Ricans, Nicaraguan students do not enjoy the same status as Costa Rican students at school. In fact, a group of second grade children were observed teasing each other and using the term "Nica," referring to Nicaraguan, to insult each other on the playground.

The negative attitudes held by some teachers regarding low SES immigrant students were noted in the comments on the surveys and informal conversations. The issues of socioeconomic status and nationality became intertwined when respondents spoke of the immigrant students and their families. Some respondents stated that immigrant students do not have motivation to achieve in school because their parents do not value education and hard work. One fifth grade teacher stated, “The low-class immigrant families do not want to work. The children are not motivated to do well in school or get good jobs because their parents do not think that it is important. They do not learn work ethic at home and do not want to work at school.” This respondent clearly has negative views of immigrant students and their families because she feels that they lack work ethic.

According to some respondents, older siblings can also act as a negative influence in immigrant families. Older siblings who have dropped out of school are viewed by teachers as negative role models because they are showing younger children that it is acceptable to terminate their education early. “Most of the immigrants see education as a simple requirement. The ones who go to high school will likely quit as soon as they see that others in their house do not need education. They do not think of it (education) as a means to escape poverty.” Some teachers believe that when young students witness older family members dropping out of school, the older role models are discouraging a belief in the importance of education.

When questioned further about how they react to the perceived lack of motivation and work ethic from low SES immigrant students, participants identified feelings of frustration. Teachers stated that it is frustrating to make an extra effort to teach a student only to see the student drop out of school early. One teacher pointed to a boy in her

fourth grade class and stated, “His brother dropped out of school and I know he will do the same. Why should I take time with him when there are others who want to learn?”

The teacher noted that her time is better spent working with students who are motivated to learn and will stay in school. Among the teachers who voiced negative attitudes towards low SES immigrant students, their views regarding the work ethic of low SES immigrant families served as justification for their low expectations and lack of effort in teaching their children.

Influence of expectations on teacher behavior

Survey comments and informal conversations with teacher participants show that expectations influence teachers’ instructional behaviors in different ways. The teachers with more favorable expectations of low SES students indicated the importance of working to motivate these students. In some cases, the negative expectations surrounding a student of low socio-economic status can motivate teachers to go above and beyond the daily requirements of their jobs in order to help students of low SES achieve. One of the first grade teachers reported that she is aware of the low expectations and negative attitudes towards low SES immigrant students held by some teachers in her school. She stated that this knowledge motivates her and some of her fellow teachers to help students of low SES immigrant students. “I know teachers who buy pencils, notebooks and other school supplies for the students who cannot afford them. Sometimes, we stay after school to help these students with homework because their parents cannot.” The teacher who provided this information believes that she and other teachers are having a positive influence on students of low SES by making extra efforts to prevent their students from meeting the low expectations held by other teachers.

However, one respondent showed that even a teacher with good intentions may allow low expectations to become a negative influence on her teaching behaviors. This second grade teacher stated, “The students from this area are immigrants who are very poor and come from broken homes. Our main goal is for students to be happy when they come to school. It is not important how much they learn here because they’ll learn later in life.” Research has shown that teachers with good intentions may unintentionally fail students of low SES.

Some teachers criticize slower students for incorrect responses and are basically intolerant of slower students. Others reward marginal or even wrong answers and are unnecessarily protective of slower students. In each case, the teacher fails to provide feedback that is consistent with the adequacy of student performance. *Positive but appropriate* teacher expectations are associated with high-achieving classrooms. (Good, 1981, p. 417)

The respondent who gave this information has shown that she feels academics are not a priority for low SES immigrant students because she feels that the kind of knowledge her students will need in the future is not learned in the classroom.

Teachers with unfavorable expectations of students of low SES showed that low expectations can have a negative influence on their behaviors. Some teachers may neglect their responsibility to instruct because of their attitudes surrounding families of low SES and immigrant students. One fifth grade classroom containing nearly 50% immigrant students was observed while working on a writing assignment. For this assignment, students were told to write a description beneath a photocopied picture. While some students were busy writing sentences, others were completely off-task. Most of the students who were not doing the assignment were coloring or playing with school supplies. When questioned about this difference in student behavior, the teacher

remarked that the off-task students (the majority of them being immigrant students) were simply too lazy to work. This teacher stated that it was not worth the effort to encourage on-task behavior because most of the immigrant students would not continue with school past the sixth grade. The teacher clearly had identified some immigrant students as lazy and had determined that she does not have a responsibility to teach them.

Implications for the field

What can we learn from a study of teacher expectations of low SES students in Costa Rica when we compare the findings of this study to studies of teacher expectations in the U.S.? The comparison across the two cultures unfortunately tells us that the experiences of the low SES immigrant students discussed in this study are not unique. As this study has shown, teachers who are educated and employed may make assumptions about students whose family background with education and employment do not match their own. Although most of the teachers who participated in this study do not think that low socioeconomic status affects students' abilities, the teachers' perception of students' academic potential is lower than that of their middle class peers. This finding is similar to findings in numerous studies conducted in the U.S. which have shown that teachers hold lower academic expectations of low SES students (Heath, 1983; Valdes, 1998; Katz, 1999; Baker, 2001; Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland & Doumbia, 2003, Lane, Givner & Peirson, 2004).

Studies in the U.S. have also shown the negative effects of low expectations on teacher behavior (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Fritzberg, 2001; Rist, 2000; Goldberg, 1992). Some of the teachers who participated in this study reported making special efforts to

help students of low SES, while others struggled with frustrations in dealing with students who they perceive as having little motivation or academic future. In either case, a student's low SES immigrant status was seen by the teacher as a major defining feature of the student's academic potential. As studies in the U.S. have shown, teachers may link non-academic characteristics of a student, such as family and economic background, to the student's potential to perform in the classroom (Rist, 2000). This teacher-perceived link between non-academic characteristics and a student's academic potential influences the interactions between teacher and student.

It is not surprising that the expectations of the Costa Rican teachers who participated in this study are similar to teachers' expectations of low SES students in the U.S. Furthermore, the reasons for low expectations given by the teachers who participated in this study are interesting, particularly when low socioeconomic status is connected to immigrant status. The negative attitudes displayed by the teachers when questioned about their expectations of low SES students are strikingly similar to the negative attitudes held by some teachers of immigrant students in the U.S. who are non-native speakers of English, often called English Learners (ELs).

The negative comments about immigrant students provided by the teachers who participated in this study show the teachers' lack of understanding of the home culture of their low SES students. Studies in the U.S. have shown that a cultural mismatch between student and teacher can result in the teacher's deficit perspective of ELs (Collins, 1988; Crawford, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Snow, 1992; Baker, 2001). The deficit perspective is held by those who believe in the superiority of one's own ethnic background, norms, and values while also believing those whose background is different

have less to contribute in an educational setting (Delpit, 1995; Ovando, Combs & Collier, 2006).

The teachers who provided negative comments about immigrant students in this study clearly show that they hold a deficit perspective of Nicaraguan immigrant students and families. When teachers make judgments about a student's potential based upon non-academic characteristics such as the family's economic status, immigrant status, and attitudes about the work ethic of the family, the student notices these judgments carried out in teacher behavior. "Nonmainstream children can detect when a teacher does not expect much of them academically, and they often respond to this information in self-defeating ways. They resign themselves to 'going through the motions' in school, and their academic performance deteriorates as a result," (Fritzberg, 2001, p. 116).

Clearly there is a need for teacher education and professional development to address the issue of expectations because teachers may "construct and label learners in passive and deficit ways," (de Courcy, 2007, p. 198) due to their own unchallenged preconceptions. One of the first steps we can take to improve the education of low SES students is to address the disparity between teacher and student background and the perceived gap that background creates. Both new teacher preparation programs and in-service programs for current teachers must prepare educators to deal with the influence their expectations have on attitudes and behaviors toward low SES and immigrant students before frustration sets in and overwhelms the teacher.

Teachers in Arlington, Virginia participated in a program called TESA (Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement) where they were instructed about the effects of teacher expectations on student learning. Participants attended workshops focused on

three main areas of teacher behavior: questioning, feedback and student self-esteem. The teachers were given opportunities to practice new behaviors such as questioning students who are normally quiet in class and talking to their perceived low achievers outside of class. The Arlington teachers reported that the skills learned in the training program increased their instructional effectiveness with students who they describe as at risk for academic failure, (Gewetz, 2005). In a similar program, teachers in Oregon participated in a study using School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports where the emphasis was on positive interactions between students and teachers. One of the findings of this study was that teachers in low socio-economic schools benefited most from the intervention program due to the increased emotional resources and feelings of effectiveness that resulted from the supports provided in the program (Ross, Romer & Horner, 2012). These studies show that teachers can make positive changes in their interactions with all students when given the proper training and support.

But teacher training and support programs will not benefit students if only a small number of teachers or schools choose to participate. As this study shows, the variance in teachers' behavior toward low SES and immigrant students is another problem adding to the complexity of the effects of teacher expectations. Students who do not exhibit the norms of the middle class receive a variety of implicit messages as they move from teacher to teacher. Students who are in most need of structure and consistency receive an inconsistent pattern of feedback from teachers (Good, 1981). Low SES and immigrant students may receive extra attention from teachers who work to motivate all students to achieve, but may receive little attention from teachers who identify them as low achievers and unmotivated students. Because it is difficult for a student to constantly adapt to

different roles, this variability may result in a passive learning style and reduced student effort. Professional development must be implemented in all schools and education programs in order to avoid sending conflicting implicit messages to low SES immigrant students and to provide a more consistent and supportive educational experience for all students.

Conclusion

This study has shown that some teachers in Costa Rica hold lower expectations for their low SES students than they hold for their middle class peers. This study has also shown that teachers' instructional behavior is affected by low expectations. Teachers who participated in this study who hold negative views of low SES students often connect their views of students' work ethic to family immigrant status. This negative view of low SES immigrant students is similar to the deficit perspective investigated in numerous studies of low SES immigrant English learners in the U.S. (Collins, 1988; Crawford, 1991; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Snow, 1992; Baker, 2001). Teacher education must address the issue of teacher attitudes and expectations in order to prepare teachers to meet the needs of all students.

Appendix A

Please answer the following questions about the group of students who have been identified as students who live in poverty. Please refer ONLY to these students when answering the questions.

Circle one of the following:

SA - Strongly agree, **A** – Agree, **D** – Disagree, **SD** – Strongly disagree

1. I believe that the students will perform academically as well as their middle-class peers.

SA A D SD

2. I believe that these students are capable of at least average academic performance in reading and math.

SA A D SD

3. Most of these students are capable of learning the material presented in class.

SA A D SD

4. I believe that these students have the skills necessary to be successful in school.

SA A D SD

5. I believe that the students are motivated to do their best in class.

SA A D SD

6. I believe that most of these students work very hard to do their best in class.

SA A D SD

7. I expect that many of these students will quit school at an early age.

SA A D SD

8. I believe that these students think that education is very important.

SA A D SD

Appendix B

1. *Si, estoy acuerdo.*
 2. *Estoy acuerdo, mas o menos*
 3. *Estoy acuerdo un poco*
 4. *No estoy acuerdo*
-
1. Pienso que la mayoría de mis estudiantes están rindiendo en el nivel promedio para su año escolar en las materias académicas.
1 2 3 4
 2. La mayoría de los estudiantes son capaces de alcanzar los objetivos de esta clase.
1 2 3 4
 3. Expero que la mayoría de mis estudiantes pasen al próximo año escolar.
1 2 3 4
 4. Espero que la mayoría de mis estudiantes rendirán bajo el promedio de su año escolar este año.
1 2 3 4
 5. Pienso que los estudiantes tendrán el mismo rendimiento escolar que sus compañeros de clase media en su mismo año escolar.
1 2 3 4
 6. Pienso que los estudiantes son capaces de por lo menos alcanzar un nivel promedio de rendiemento en lectura y matemática.
1 2 3 4
 7. Pienso que los estudiantes están motivados a hacer lo mejor en la clase.
1 2 3 4
 8. Pienso que los estudiantes creen que la educación e muy importante.
1 2 3 4

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