

THE BULLETIN

Alabama Association of Secondary School Principals

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Bill Ernest, Editor

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From the Editor

LIKE TO WRITE? *The Bulletin* is always looking for informative and practical articles. Material can be as brief as a paragraph or as long as 20 typed pages (book reviews 4 pages).

Manuscripts should be typed double spaced on 8½ x 11 bond with ample margins. Please submit two copies of the manuscript. Photographs, drawings, cartoons, and other illustrations are welcome. The author's name, address, and telephone number should appear on a separate cover letter attached to the original.

We invite you to submit your article to the editor. We do reserve the right to edit your article.

Since the submission of their manuscripts, Dr. Wilmer Cody and Dr. Foster Watkins have accepted new positions. Dr. Cody is Superintendent of Montgomery County Maryland Schools and Dr. Watkins is President of Gainsville Junior College, Gainsville, Georgia.

The Principal as Pygmalion: Executive Professional Leadership

Some 25 years have passed since the first publication of the book, *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. That often discussed and frequently reviewed research by Rosenthal and Jacobson has focused much attention upon the teacher as Pygmalion.¹ Relatively few efforts, however, have been made to look in analogous ways at the role of the principal. This article considers briefly a management level application of the Pygmalion concept in the realm of business, reviews two divergent interpretations of the earlier research findings, and relates the Pygmalion research to the significant but underutilized study of the principalship reported by Gross and Herriott.²

In an effort to provide some documented basis for making conjectures about the role and function of public school administrators, professional educators often make analogous comparisons between business and education. In "Pygmalion in Management,"³ however, the direction is reversed as J. Sterling Livingston raises implications from Rosenthal and Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the Classroom* for consideration in the realm of business. While Livingston does not base his entire thesis on the Rosenthal and Jacobson study which apparently established for teachers what has been long believed for managers—i.e., behavior can be influenced by perceived expectations—he does give a prominent place of emphasis to the study. He goes on, then, to reinforce his premises regarding management techniques with a review of findings from such diverse settings as banking, insurance sales, public utilities, and automobile dealerships in which managerial expectations seem to have led to so-called "self-fulfilling prophecies" for subordinates. In those settings where the manager's expectations for the performance of the individuals or groups under his/her direct influence

were high, the results of effort by those involved bore out the implied prediction of success. Conversely, when superordinates conveyed a low-expectancy level, performance levels confirmed the anticipated outcome. Rosenthal and Jacobson had earlier sought to establish the same relationship between teachers' expectations and students' demonstrable skills.

Perhaps because many teachers, frustrated by the enormity of the task facing them in the classrooms, are eager to the point of desperation for something—anything!—which will increase their effectiveness, the "Rosenthal effect" has become the St. Christopher on the dashboard for them. However, just as St. Christopher's effectiveness as a protector of travelers is directly linked with the attitude and skills of the driver and with the condition of the vehicle he or she attempts to guide, even so must the charm of the "Rosenthal effect" be coupled with some other possibilities than expectancy.

As teachers struggle to plan appropriately for their classes, many simplistically interpret the "Pygmalion effect" to mean merely "the teachers get what they expect from students." This tendency was strengthened by zealous early reviews which gave unqualified support to this belief by stating that Rosenthal and Jacobson add "data in education that support the hypothesis that one person's expectation for another's behavior could come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy" or that "the findings support the notion that teachers' favorable expectations can account for improved intellectual performance in children."⁴ The efficacy of this opinion perhaps should not be questioned on its surface. However, does it go far enough to form a basis for teacher behavior in the classroom or for administrative behavior in the larger school setting? Must not the charge of

the "Pygmalion effect" be coupled with ingredients other than expectancy alone?

James J. Buckley in a more cautious review expressed some doubt that Rosenthal and Jacobson's findings are as strongly applicable to education as indicated above when he stated that "this book does not prove that teachers' expectations of their pupils' performances serve as self-fulfilling prophecies."⁵ In this review the "Pygmalion effect" was challenged on the basis of the failure of teachers' expectations of success to lead to "dramatic effects on children in the lowest track."⁶ Buckley went on to label as "futile" the effort to prove that the expectations of teachers "have a major influence on pupils' academic success."⁷ However, in a seeming contradiction of his own position, Mr. Buckley stated in a concluding paragraph that "the results of the well-documented experiment provide evidence that one's expectations of another's behavior may come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy."⁸ This contradiction became less jarring as Buckley continued and raised the question of the effect of expected performance on the teachers rather than the students, which leads to interesting implications for administrators. Consideration of these implications provided the initial impetus for this article.

What the two reviews cited earlier failed to treat in *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. Mr. Livingston deals with in his business analysis of the Pygmalion concept. That is, if teacher expectancies do provide results but not quite enough, are there neglected areas of investigation which, if pursued, might allow the "Pygmalion effect" to be increased in classroom viability? Mr. Livingston develops the thought that managerial expectations **alone are not enough**. These expectations must be linked with a belief by subordinates that ". . . the boss's high expectations

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(are) realistic and achievable."⁹ Subordinates apparently have to believe themselves capable of high productivity in order to achieve it. Yet, heavily influencing the subordinates belief in his own capabilities is his attitude toward the abilities of his boss. Mr. Livingston says, "To become self-fulfilling prophecies, expectations must be made of sterner stuff than the power of positive thinking or generalized confidence in one's fellow men . . ." ¹⁰ And ". . . the superior manager's record of success and his confidence in his ability give his high expectations credibility."¹¹ So, another dimension is added to the "Pygmalion effect." The cycle of expectations, directly related to the self-concept of both super and subordinates, may be the pivot on which Pygmalion's magic hinges.

Therefore, if the business/education analogy is continued, in order to fully implement the "Pygmalion effect" in the classroom, the manager (principal) must perceive himself/herself to be successful, and must be so perceived by subordinates; must allow his/her subordinates (faculty) to think of themselves as positive forces for initiating desired behaviors; and, "sub-subordinates" (students), must be guided to believe themselves capable of exhibiting those behaviors also. The continuum of realistic positive expectancies must pervade the total school setting and, at each level (principal, faculty, students). Mr. Livingston appears to indicate that the self-concept of the individual will influence the results of the "Pygmalion effect."

Gross and Herriott in their significant study of the principalship were concerned with staff development in schools in a manner similar to Livingston's systematic research in the business world. The key concept of their inquiry was Executive Professional Leadership (EPL) which was defined "as the efforts of an executive (principal) of a professionally staffed organization (school) to conform to a definition of his role that stresses his obligation to improve the quality of staff performance."¹²

A 12-item scale was developed which secured responses from faculty members relative to perceptions of the performance of their principal from an EPL point of departure. The multiple concerns reflected by Livingston as an extension of the "Pygmalion effect" (1) for the generation of high performance expecta-

tions (2) which are viewed as being realistic and obtainable, and which (3) are communicated in supportive ways which enhance the development of a positive self-concept come through clearly when the items on the scale are studied. Illustrative items for each of these concerns are given below:

Performance expectations:

1. Displays a strong interest in improving the quality of the educational program.
2. Takes a strong interest in the professional development of teachers.
3. Gets teachers to upgrade their performance standards in their classrooms.

Which are realistic:

1. Maximizes the different skills found in his faculty.
2. Has constructive suggestions to offer teachers in dealing with their major problems.
3. Helps teachers to understand the sources of important problems they are facing.

Provided in supportive ways:

1. Gives teachers the feeling that their work is an "important" activity.
2. Gives teachers the feeling that they can make significant contributions to improving the classroom performance of their students.
3. Treats teachers as professional workers.

Returning to the pivotal cycle of expectations as advanced by Livingston, the principal who is able to operate as described by the illustrative items above must see himself/herself in a most positive and secure view and must believe himself/herself capable of contributing to the development of others and must be willing to assume responsibility for doing so. Such a positive two-way perception on the part of the principal would seem to be the key to successful implementation of the essence of the Pygmalion concept.

Extending their inquiry into the domains of teacher morale, teacher professional performance, and pupil academic performance, Gross and Herriott reported tenuous but positive correlated relationships between EPL behavior by the principal and these desired measures of teacher and student performance.¹³

Their findings provided empirical support for increased emphasis upon the principal's role in professional staff development and should cause us to look very closely at the implications of the "Pygmalion effect" for these efforts. More recently, Brookover,¹⁴ Edmonds¹⁵ and a host of others¹⁶ have observed leadership and participation of the principal from perspectives which parallel the Executive Professional Leadership concepts described earlier by Gross and Herriott as key ingredients in schools which make a difference in the lives of students and teachers.

In his address to the recently conducted Annual Conference on the School Principalship in Montgomery, Thomas Sergiovanni raised a possibility which has Pygmalion/executive professional leadership implications. Addressing the distinction between management and leadership, he took the position that there is some developing evidence that the emphasis in the Accountability Era on classroom visitations by the principal and the widespread use of assessment/appraisal forms and procedures for continuing professional growth of teachers may be generating a Pygmalion-type spin-off. He conjectured in informal conversation after his prepared remarks that the "mere attention" that is being focused upon teachers as a result of these developments may be combating the feelings of personal isolation which are cited repeatedly by professionally oriented inservice teachers as one course of dissatisfaction which leads to tendencies toward teacher stress and burnout among them.

Paraphrasing the summary comments of Livingston, the evidence seems to indicate that if the principal with a positive perception of self is skillful in communicating high but obtainable levels of expectations to the staff, their self-concepts will grow, their capabilities will develop, and their performance will be high. More often than they might think, principals can be Pygmalion and contribute to the development of true professionals rather than just practitioners.

Concluding questions for reflection—Do Alabama principals see the continuing professional development of their teachers as one of their major responsibilities? Are they willing to be held accountable for continuing professional growth of their teachers?

- Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968).
- ² N. Gross and R.E. Herriott, *Staff Leadership in Public Schools: A Sociological Inquiry* (New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), p. 22.
- ³ J.S. Livingston, "Pygmalion in Management," *Harvard Business Review* (July-August, 1969), pp. 81-89.
- ⁴ J.A. Roderick, "Selected for Review," *Educational Leadership* (1969), vol. 26, p. 415.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ⁹ Livingston, p. 85.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- ¹² Gross and Herriott, p. 22.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.
- ¹⁴ W.B. Brookover and others, *Creating Effective Schools: An Inservice Program for Enhancing School Learning Climate and Achievement* (Holmes Beach, Florida, Learning Publications, Inc., 1982).
- ¹⁶ "Toward More Effective Schools," *Educational Leadership* (1982), vol. 40.
- ¹⁷ T.J. Sergiovanni, First Annual Conference on the School Principalship. "Leadership and Management: Is There a Difference?" Auburn University at Montgomery, Montgomery, Alabama, September 22-23, 1982.
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