

# The Impacts of Teacher Expectations on Student Outcomes

**A Practitioner's Literature Review**

**August 2024**



# The Impacts of Teacher Expectations on Student Outcomes: A Practitioner's Literature Review

## Introduction

Teachers' beliefs about their students significantly impact how well students perform academically, and most studies focus on how these beliefs influence academic achievement. Research suggests that teachers' expectations of students are shaped by their beliefs about what different groups of students (such as those defined by race or socioeconomic status) can achieve when given appropriate learning opportunities. These expectations also stem from whether teachers believe students' abilities are fixed or can be developed (known as a growth mindset), as well as the quality of teacher-student relationships. Biased expectations can lead teachers to treat students differently in terms of the skills they teach or the support they provide. To improve student achievement, interventions should focus on factors aimed at raising teacher expectations. However, such interventions must be carefully designed, as some efforts have increased racial disparities (Porowski et al., 2014).

## Teacher Expectations Predict Student Outcomes

Throughout the school year, teachers' expectations shape their interactions with students, significantly influencing educational outcomes. When teachers have lower expectations, they tend to provide less support and fewer opportunities for student success, leading to poorer academic performance.

Figure 1 below represents a process model developed by Brophy and Good (1970), and further confirmed by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), highlighting how teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities influence their interactions and subsequent outcomes. For instance, students whose teachers have lower expectations may receive less favorable treatment, potentially impacting their academic and overall school performance. Studies such as *The Opportunity Myth* (TNTP, 2018) underscore the benefits of high teacher expectations, showing significant academic gains for students whose teachers believe in their potential.

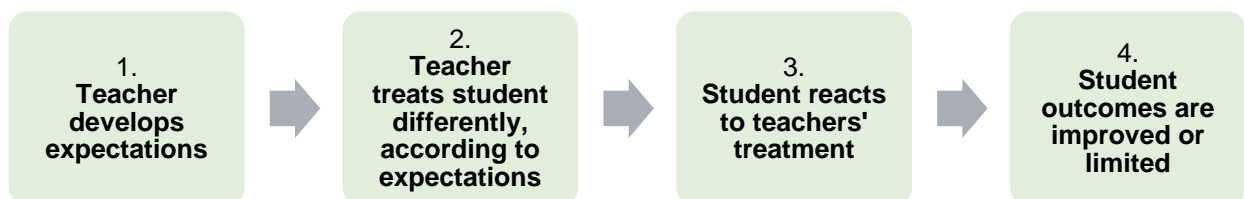


Figure 1. Process model of teacher expectations on student outcomes as proposed by Brophy & Good (1970).

## Biased Teacher Expectations

Research in social psychology highlights how biases influence teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards students. Studies consistently find that teachers' expectations vary based on student characteristics like race and socioeconomic status. For example, there is evidence that teachers often hold lower expectations for Black and Latinx students compared to their white peers (Wang et al., 2018; Campbell, 2015). This disparity can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where students conform to these expectations and consequently show lower academic performance (McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Shepard, 2011).

Similarly, students experiencing poverty often face lower expectations from teachers, which can negatively impact their academic engagement and achievement (Timmermans et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). However, studies also indicate that high expectations from teachers can serve as a protective

factor for students experiencing poverty, enhancing their academic outcomes and aspirations (Gregory & Huang, 2013; Van den Broeck et al., 2020).

Biased expectations based on race and socioeconomic status often stem from stereotypes and generalizations about students' intellectual capabilities. These stereotypes influence how teachers perceive their responsibility for student learning, potentially affecting educational outcomes (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Durante & Fiske, 2017; Diamond et al., 2004).

Moreover, biases can lead to overly high expectations for certain students, particularly those who are more affluent or white, which may also impact educational outcomes (Tobisch & Dresel, 2017; Papageorge et al., 2018).

Understanding how biases shape teacher expectations is crucial for fostering equitable learning environments. By recognizing these biases, educators can work to mitigate their impact on student outcomes. This involves fostering growth mindsets, strengthening student-teacher relationships, and promoting fair and unbiased behaviors in the classroom.

## **Understanding How Biased Expectations Lead to Differences in Achievement**

Teacher mindsets, student-teacher relationships, and a teacher's skillset and behavior are all mechanisms that have been suggested to influence biased expectations. Mindset theory, which explores beliefs about intelligence being fixed or malleable (Dweck, 2014), influences how both students and teachers perceive academic potential. Teachers' beliefs in students' ability to grow intellectually can significantly impact academic performance (Pishghadam et al., 2015). Interventions promoting growth mindsets among teachers have been shown to improve student achievement, highlighting the importance of fostering positive beliefs about student potential (Costa & Faria, 2018).

Additionally, teacher expectations shape their relationships with students, influencing factors like perceived closeness and conflict (Sebastian Cherg, 2017; Summers et al., 2017). These relationships can vary based on biases related to student appearance, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Positive relationships built on high expectations often lead to better academic outcomes and educational recommendations for students, underscoring the importance of equitable treatment and supportive interactions (Timmermans et al., 2019).

Finally, teachers' behavior towards students is heavily influenced by their expectations. When teachers have different expectations based on perceived student ability, it can often create disparities in learning opportunities and academic outcomes (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018). Strategies that prioritize equity, such as mixed-ability groupings and personalized support, are crucial in ensuring all students have equal opportunities to succeed (Duke et al., 2018).

Overall, understanding the impact of teacher expectations, mindset, and behaviors on student achievement underscores the need for equitable practices in the classroom. By promoting growth mindsets, fostering positive relationships, and implementing inclusive teaching strategies, educators can mitigate biases and create environments where all students thrive academically and personally.

## **Opportunities for Intervention**

Research in education and social psychology has identified specific ways to help teachers change their expectations. Addressing teacher mindsets shows promise, as it often leads to subsequent behavior changes. Research shows that reminding people that groups can change and improve can greatly affect how they behave in the future (Sparkman & Walton, 2014). Similarly, messages emphasizing the potential for individuals to change and learn have been shown to have long-lasting effects on social

behavior (Yeager et al., 2013). By highlighting students' potential for growth over time, teachers may develop higher expectations for them.

Moreover, teacher beliefs (which can be altered through targeted interventions) contribute to establishing a classroom culture of growth mindset (Murphy et al., 2021). Such interventions modify teacher behavior to enhance student outcomes, thereby influencing the mechanisms involved in forming student expectations (Bryan et al., 2021). Additionally, adopting an empathic mindset can shift teacher-student dynamics by encouraging empathetic responses. Initially aimed at reducing the influence of bias in student discipline, this approach also has the potential to boost student expectations through similar messaging (Okonofua et al., 2016).

Ultimately, there are various intervention opportunities that can enhance teachers' expectations for all students, which can be combined and tailored to specific contexts to achieve enduring positive changes.

## Conclusion

The impact of teacher expectations on student outcomes is crucial. The relationship is complex, as illustrated in an updated process model (Figure 2) that is a research-based evolution of the model presented in Figure 1. Bias, pervasive in societal contexts, influences both mindsets and interactions with students. These factors not only shape teacher expectations but are also shaped by them. Consequently, teacher behavior varies according to these expectations, leading to disparities in student achievement, a cycle that persists throughout the academic year.

However, research indicates that teacher expectations can be altered (Weinstein et al., 1991). Interventions targeting teacher expectations can leverage multiple points of influence identified in the process model. For example, interventions can address teacher mindsets and their relationships with students simultaneously, while promoting behaviors that reflect high expectations for all students. By implementing these changes, teacher expectations are likely to improve, leading to positive outcomes in student achievement.

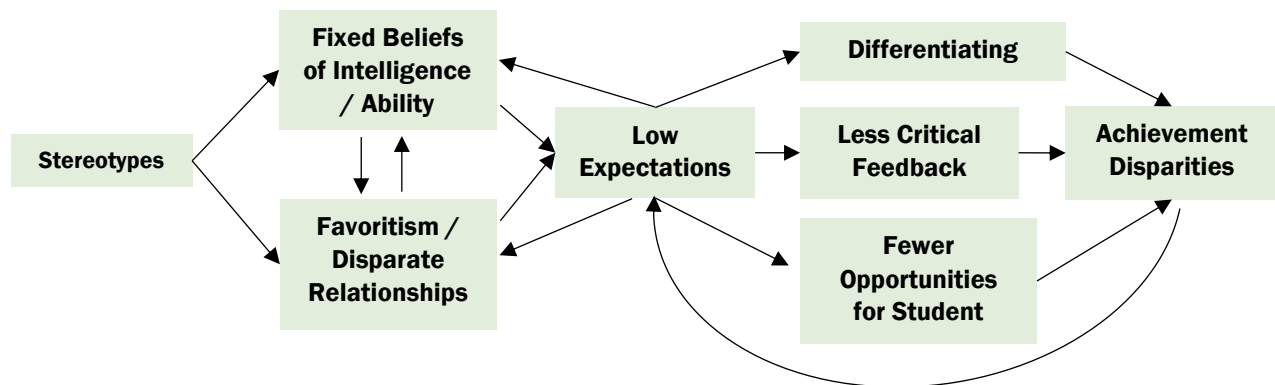


Figure 1. Updated process model.

## References

- Brophy, J., & Good, T. (1970). Teacher communication of differential expectations for children's classroom performance: Some behavioral data. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *61*, 365–374. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0029908>
- Bryan, C., Hecht, C., Blazar, D., Kraft, M., & Solheim, O. (2021). *Global Mindset Initiative Working Paper 2: Designing an Intervention to Motivate Growth Mindset-Supportive Teaching Practices* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3911995). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3911995>
- Campbell, T. (2015). Stereotyped at Seven? Biases in Teacher Judgement of Pupils' Ability and Attainment. *Journal of Social Policy*, *44*(3), 517–547. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279415000227>
- Costa, A., & Faria, L. (2018). Implicit Theories of Intelligence and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00829>
- Devine, P. G., & Elliot, A. J. (1995). Are Racial Stereotypes Really Fading? The Princeton Trilogy Revisited. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *21*(11), 1139–1150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672952111002>
- Diamond, J. B., Randolph, A., & Spillane, J. P. (2004). Teachers' Expectations and Sense of Responsibility for Student Learning: The Importance of Race, Class, and Organizational Habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *35*(1), 75–98. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.1.75>
- Duke, N. K., Cervetti, G. N., & Wise, C. N. (2018). Learning From Exemplary Teachers of Literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, *71*(4), 395–400. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1654>
- Durante, F., & Fiske, S. T. (2017). How Social-Class Stereotypes Maintain Inequality. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *18*, 43–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.07.033>
- Dweck, C. S. (2014). *Self-theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315783048>
- Fitzpatrick, C., Côté-Lussier, C., & Blair, C. (2016). Dressed and Groomed for Success in Elementary School: Student Appearance and Academic Adjustment. *The Elementary School Journal*, *117*(1), 30–45. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687753>
- Gregory, A., & Huang, F. (2013). It Takes a Village: The Effects of 10th Grade College-Going Expectations of Students, Parents, and Teachers Four Years Later. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *52*(1–2), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9575-5>
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2002). Modeling the Role of Child Ethnicity and Gender in Children's Differential Response to Teacher Expectations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *32*(1), 159–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb01425.x>
- Murphy, M., Fryberg, S., Brady, L., Canning, E., & Hecht, C. (2021). *Global Mindset Initiative Paper 1: Growth Mindset Cultures and Teacher Practices* (SSRN Scholarly Paper 3911594). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3911594>

- Okonofua, J.A., Paunesku, D., & Walton, G.M. (2016). Brief intervention to encourage empathic discipline cuts suspension rates in half among adolescents. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(19), 5221-5226.
- Papageorge, N. W., Gershenson, S., & Kang, K. M. (2018). *Teacher Expectations Matter* (Working Paper 25255). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w25255>
- Pishghadam, R., Meidani, E. N., & Khajavy, G. H. (2015). Language Teachers' Conceptions of Intelligence and Their Roles in Teacher Care and Teacher Feedback. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(1). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1049315>
- Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom. *The Urban Review*, 3(1), 16–20. doi:10.1007/BF02322211
- Sebastian Cherng, H.-Y. (2017). If they think I can: Teacher bias and youth of color expectations and achievement. *Social Science Research*, 66, 170–186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.04.001>
- Shepherd, M. A. (2011). Effects of Ethnicity and Gender on Teachers' Evaluation of Students' Spoken Responses. *Urban Education*, 46(5), 1011–1028. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911400325>
- Sparkman, G., & Walton, G. M. (2017). Dynamic norms promote sustainable behavior, even if it is counternormative. *Psychological Science*, 28(11), 1663–1674. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617719950>
- Summers, J. J., Davis, H. A., & Hoy, A. W. (2017). The effects of teachers' efficacy beliefs on students' perceptions of teacher relationship quality. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 53, 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.10.004>
- Timmermans, A. C., & Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2018). Do teachers differ in the level of expectations or in the extent to which they differentiate in expectations? Relations between teacher-level expectations, teacher background and beliefs, and subsequent student performance. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 24(3–5), 241–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1550837>
- Timmermans, A. C., Kuyper, H., & van der Werf, G. (2015). Accurate, inaccurate, or biased teacher expectations: Do Dutch teachers differ in their expectations at the end of primary education? *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(4), 459–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12087>
- Timmermans, A. C., van der Werf, M. P. C. G., & Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2019). The interpersonal character of teacher expectations: The perceived teacher-student relationship as an antecedent of teachers' track recommendations. *Journal of School Psychology*, 73, 114–130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.02.004>
- Timperley, H. S. (2003). School Improvement and Teachers' Expectations of Student Achievement. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 38(1), 73–88.
- TNTP, Inc. (2018). The opportunity myth. <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>
- Tobisch, A., & Dresel, M. (2017). Negatively or positively biased? Dependencies of teachers' judgments and expectations based on students' ethnic and social backgrounds. *Social Psychology of Education*, 20(4), 731–752. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9392-z>

Van den Broeck, L., Demanet, J., & Van Houtte, M. (2020). The forgotten role of teachers in students' educational aspirations. School composition effects and the buffering capacity of teachers' expectations culture. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 90*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103015>

Wang, S., Rubie-Davies, C. M., & Meissel, K. (2018). A systematic review of the teacher expectation literature over the past 30 years. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 24*(3–5), 124–179.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2018.1548798>

Weinstein, R. S., Soul, C. R., Collins, F., Cone, J., Mehlhorn, M., & Sintontacchi, K. (1991). Expectations and high school change: Teacher-researcher collaboration to prevent school failure. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 19*(3), 333–363. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00938027>

Yeager, D. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2013). An Implicit Theories of Personality Intervention Reduces Adolescent Aggression in Response to Victimization and Exclusion. *Child Development, 84*(3), 970–988. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12003>