

**TEACHER EXPECTANCY AND ITS EFFECT ON  
STUDENT SELECTION FOR  
SPECIAL CLASS PLACEMENT**

**BY**

**ALISON CROSS SHORES**

TEACHER EXPECTANCY AND ITS EFFECT ON STUDENT  
SELECTION FOR SPECIAL CLASS PLACEMENT

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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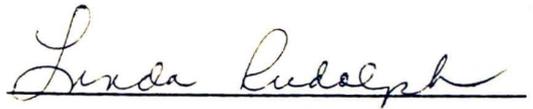
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
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by  
Alison Cross Shores  
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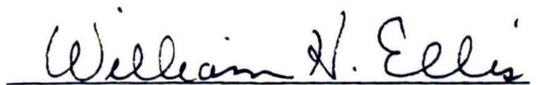
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Alison Cross Shores entitled "Teacher Expectancy and Its Effect on Student Selection for Special Class Placement." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Counseling and Guidance.



Major Professor

Accepted for the Graduate Council:



Dean of the Graduate School

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

People, more often than not, do what is expected of them. Most of us, generally, respond to a given situation in a manner dictated by widely shared norms or expectations. There is, of course, a wide variability of human behaviors so that often we can more accurately predict the behavior of a person we know well than that of a stranger. To a great extent, our expectations for another's behavior are accurate because we know his past actions. There is now evidence which suggests that our prediction or prophecy may in itself be a factor in determining the behavior of other people (Rosenthal, 1969).

The role of self-fulfilling prophecy in teacher expectation and its frequent result of changed pupil performance has been the main topic of numerous researchers, the most noted of all being Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968). The 1968 report of the findings of Rosenthal and Jacobson has received much publicity, both critical and supportive, and has been the basis of many research efforts. The original study included students attending a school in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood on the West Coast. There were three classrooms for each grade: one class for children of above-average ability; a class for children of average ability; and a class for children with below-average ability. About 20 percent of the children in each classroom were chosen at random to form the experimental group. During May of 1964, the children in grades kindergarten through five were given the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition as part of a "Harvard-NSF Validity Study". As described to teachers, the new instrument

purported to identify "bloomers" who would probably experience an unusual forward spurt in academic and intellectual performance during the following year. Actually, the measure was Flanagan's Tests of General Ability (TOGA), chosen as a nonlanguage group intelligence test. The test provided verbal and reasoning subscores as well as a total I.Q. score. TOGA was judged appropriate for the study because it would probably be unfamiliar to the teachers and because it offered three forms. Twenty percent of the children enrolled in the school in the fall were randomly selected and designated as "bloomers", irregardless of their scores on TOGA. The teachers were given the names of this group and told that these children had scored high on the test for intellectual blooming and would show remarkable gains in intellectual development during the next eight months. In reality, there were no intellectual differences between these children labeled as "bloomers" and their classmates.

At the end of the school year, all the children were again given the same I.Q. test (TOGA). The children who had been designated as "bloomers" showed only a slightly greater gain in verbal I.Q. (two points) than their classmates. However, in total I.Q., the experimental group gained an average of four points more than their classmates, and in reasoning I.Q., the average gain was seven points over the gains of the control group.

As the children in the experimental group were described by their teachers, they were deemed more interesting, more curious, and happier than the other groups. The teachers also found "blooming"

children slightly more appealing, better adjusted, more affectionate, and exhibiting lesser need for social approval.

Usually, when educational theorists talk of improving scholastic achievement by improving teacher expectations, they are referring to children at the lower levels of achievement. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), however, found that teacher expectations affected children equally at the highest levels of achievement and at the lowest levels of achievement.

Considerable attention has been directed toward the relationship between teacher expectancy with regard to student ability and actual performance since Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) reported their findings. Despite this attention, the exact nature of the effects of teachers' expectations is still unknown. Numerous studies have failed to replicate the Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) findings; for example, Claiborn (1969), Fleming and Anttonen (1971), and Mendals and Flanders (1973). However, other studies, using different research paradigms, have fairly consistently shown expectancy effects. This disparity of research findings suggests support for the position taken by Finn (1972) that the effects of teachers' expectations cannot be explained simply, and that they probably are the results of a complex relationship among variables.

In attempting to explain the teacher expectancy effect, several variables have been investigated. Brophy and Good (1970) found that teachers demanded better performance from those children for whom they had higher expectations and were more likely to accept poor

performance when it was elicited. In contrast, they were more likely to accept poor performance from students for whom they held low expectations and were less likely to praise good performance from these students when it occurred, even though it occurred less frequently.

Similarly, Kester and Letchworth (1972) found that interaction between the teacher and student significantly increased and became more positive with ostensibly superior students. The researchers did not, however, report a change in academic achievement or school-related attitudes of the experimentally named "superior" students.

Rothbart, Dalfin, and Barrett (1971) found that college seniors, acting as discussion leaders for high school students, gave significantly more visual attention to students randomly designated as having greater academic potential. No differences were found in the number of reinforcers given those of supposed low and high potential. In a parallel study, Rubovits and Maehr (1973) reported that pupils labeled as gifted received significantly more criticism and more attention for answering questions from college students serving as group leaders for junior high school student discussion groups.

Miechenbaum, Bowers, and Ross (1969) discovered a somewhat different effect of expectancy instruction on teacher behavior. Their results also pointed to general differences in teacher attention to labeled students. Teachers' interactions with their delinquent adolescent students were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral. Two of the four teachers' positive interactions with students labeled as "late bloomers" increased significantly more than did positive

interactions with students not so labeled. In a third classroom a significant decrease in negative interactions with labeled students was recorded. The authors drew three major conclusions from their study: (1) individual teachers react differently to expectancy induction; (2) prior expectancy also influences teacher behavior; and (3) student effects of expectancy conditions are not always related to the teacher behavior that is chosen to be observed.

These studies provided considerable support for the viewpoint that changes in a teacher's attention to or interaction with labeled pupils may mediate reported interpersonal expectancy effects. Brophy and Good (1970) presented a model of explanation:

- (a) The teacher forms differential expectations for student performance;
- (b) He then begins to treat children differently in accordance with his differential expectations;
- (c) The children respond differentially to the teacher because they are being treated differently by him;
- (d) In responding to the teacher, each child tends to exhibit behavior which complements and reinforces the teacher's particular expectations for him;
- (e) As a result, the general academic performance of some children will be enhanced while that of others will be depressed with changes being in the direct of teacher expectations;
- (f) These effects will show up in the achievement tests given at the end of the year, providing support for the "self-fulfilling prophecy" notion. (pp.365-366)

Using the Brophy and Good (1970) model, the expectancy effect loses some of its magical or mystical aura. Support for this model comes from the anthropological observations by Rist (1970). Rist has provided striking anecdotes about teachers' differential treatments of differently judged children. He followed a class of black ghetto children from kindergarten through the second grade. The researcher collected information given to the teacher by parent interviews concerning the children's homes, families, and socioeconomic standings, and, by personal observation, he studied the students' appearance and performance during the first few days of school. From the researcher's observation, assignments of children to tables and to classroom tasks, as well as the general quality of teacher interaction, showed clear discrimination between groups of favored and non-favored children in the room. The initial groupings and differential treatments persisted throughout three grade levels.

A recent study by Smith and Luginbuhl (1976) has shed some light on possible ways to deal with the expectancy or labeling effect. According to the researchers, teacher expectancy effects appeared to be most evident when teachers were unaware of the possibility of such effects and, thus, were unprepared to deal with students of differing abilities grouped together. Unaware teachers directed both greater levels of encouragement and criticism toward the students of presumed greater ability. Teachers who were given special instruction that heightened awareness of expectancy effects were able to guard more successfully against qualitatively differential treatment of students of different abilities.

Simon (1969) found that scorers who were told that their 12-year-old subjects were above average gave significantly higher scores on 20 items taken from the mid-section of the vocabulary subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) than scorers who were told their subjects were below average. Test protocols of real subjects (all in the average I.Q. range) were used, but the ability labels were assigned randomly.

Palardy (1969) studied existing teacher expectations about the probable success of boys when compared with girls in learning to read. After returning questionnaires indicating their opinions, five teachers who thought boys' probability of success was about equal to girls' (Group A) were matched on the basis of race, experience, location of schools, grouping, and materials used in their classes with five other teachers who believed boys' probability of success was lower (Group B). Pretests had shown no significant differences in scores between students in these groups. After eight months of study, results showed that boys with Group B teachers scored considerably lower in reading achievement than girls of either group and boys of Group A. These findings suggest the possibility of differential reading achievement according to expectancies developed naturally by teachers.

Seaver (1973) investigated a possible expectancy effect due to teachers' prior experience in teaching a pupil's older sibling. From records of two elementary schools, 79 pairs of siblings were identified and separated according to whether or not the same or a different teacher had taught both siblings. The older siblings were separated by independent judges into "good" or "bad" categories on the basis of

their first-grade I.Q. scores, Stanford Achievement Test scores, and grade point averages. Within this four-fold classification, younger siblings were then compared, using six Stanford Achievement Test subtest scores and grade point averages for grade one. Four of the subtests showed significant interaction; younger siblings of good students obtained higher achievement scores if assigned to their sibling's former teacher than if assigned to a different teacher. Younger siblings of poor students did better with new teachers than their peers did with former teachers of their older siblings.

Kehle, Bramble, and Mason (1964) studied the effects of student characteristics (sex, race, intelligence, and attractiveness) on biasing of teacher expectations. Significant effects were attributed to the sex of the student, the sex by attractiveness interaction, and the interaction of these four variables. The researchers concluded that the expectations teachers hold for elementary students are extremely complex and are based on a combination of student characteristics.

Clifford and Walster (1973) presented evidence to suggest that teachers are biased by the attractiveness of the student. According to the researchers, attractive children were perceived by teachers to possess a higher I.Q., greater educational potential, and more interested parents than low I.Q. students.

Physical attractiveness may bias teacher expectancy on dimensions other than ability. In a study by Dion (1972), college females attributed fewer antisocial traits to attractive children after reading behavioral descriptions of differing levels of aggression

supposedly committed by the child. Further, attractive children were perceived as having transgressed less in the past and were rated as less likely to transgress in the future. Unattractive children who transgressed were perceived as more dishonest and unpleasant.

In contrast, LaVoie and Adams (cited in Adams and LaVoie, 1974) found that the effect of student conduct erased any differential effect due to physical attractiveness when elementary teachers evaluated progress reports of children who varied in both facial attractiveness and conduct. Teachers in the study predicted that good conduct children were more capable academically, would pursue more post-high school educational opportunities, would obtain higher status vocations, and possessed more leadership potential than poor conduct children. A more recent study by Adams and LaVoie (1974) investigating the biasing effects of the sex of the child, his conduct, and his facial attractiveness found teachers' predictions on all measures were significantly influenced by the student's conduct, while facial attractiveness exerted little effect.

Ross and Salvia (1975) also found that teachers rated attractive children more favorably than unattractive children. Teachers were more willing to recommend special class placement for the unattractive children and held lower expectations for future academic and social development for those identified as unattractive.

In a related study by Neer, Foster, Jones, and Reynolds (1973) the relationship between socioeconomic status and the diagnosis of mental retardation in children was explored. The research design involved three case studies in which identical information, varying

only with respect to socioeconomic status, was presented to the psychologists of a state guidance center system. Significant differences in favor of a diagnosis of mental retardation were found when comparisons between clients of low socioeconomic status level were made to those of middle or high socioeconomic status level.

In view of the many conflicting findings, the area of expectancy effect still has many unanswered questions of vital importance, especially to the field of education. The large numbers of recent studies indicate that this area is indeed active with research. The reported findings of Smith and Luginbuhl (1976) give purpose and direction to many of the studies being done in this area; namely, if one is aware of the possible effects of expectancy and labeling of other persons, one is less likely to be biased by these factors in dealing with others. This is, of course, crucial in the teacher-pupil relationship. The more variables that are investigated and the more information that is obtained before important decisions are made concerning students, the greater the basis teachers will have in defending themselves against the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Inasmuch as the effect of teacher labeling and teacher expectancy is such a controversial and complex issue, based on numerous teacher and pupil-related variables, the present study was directed toward further investigation of the role of the expectancy effect in children. Specifically, the present study will attempt to determine if the presence or absence of a parent in the child's home will affect teacher assignment of that child to a remedial classroom.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Subjects

The subjects included in the present study were 104 elementary, junior high, and special education teachers from Montgomery and Cheatham Counties in Tennessee. The sample included regular classroom teachers and special subject teachers representing each grade and subject from kindergarten through the eighth grade. All participants volunteered to serve as subjects for the study. The teaching experience of the teachers ranged from one through 41 years: 45 teachers or 43.3% of the sample had taught one through five years; 31 teachers or 29.8% of the sample had taught six through ten years; 14 teachers or 13.4% of the sample had taught 11 through 15 years; and 14 teachers or 13.4% of the teachers had taught more than 15 years. Among the subjects in the present study, 69 teachers or 66.5% of the sample held B.S. or B.A. degrees; 16 teachers or 15.4% of the teachers held B.S. or B.A. degrees with additional course work up to 31 quarter hours; 15 teachers or 14.4% of the sample held M.S. or M.A. degrees; four teachers or less than 1% of the sample held M.S. or M.A. degrees plus extra earned hours up to 31 quarter hours; no teachers held Ed. S. degrees; and no teachers held doctorate degrees.

#### Materials

The materials used in the present study were three school cumulative folders. Each folder represented a male, fifth-grade student about whom the following information was given: race, sex, grade, birthplace, birthdate, father's and mother's education,

father's and mother's occupations, days present and absent from school in grades one through five, grades received in reading, writing, language, spelling, arithmetic, science, health, social studies, music, art, and physical education in grades one through five, promotions or retentions in grades one through five, numbers of older and younger brothers and sisters in the family, and present status of parents.

The information on the folders was fictitious, but an effort was made to keep all demographical data as uniform as possible. Each of the folders was composed so that the major difference in each was the parental status: both parents present in the home; father absent due to divorce; and father absent because of death. In assigning the students' grades, similar low grades were recorded for each student in mathematics and reading to indicate a need for remediation in these areas.

### Procedure

Each teacher was given a set of the three cumulative folders to review. On the basis of the information given in the folders, each teacher was requested to select one of the three students for assignment to a remedial classroom for individual help in mathematics and reading. Teachers were also asked to indicate their years of teaching experience and their highest earned college degree.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The data are presented descriptively because the study design did not lend itself to obtaining data which could be analyzed by inferential statistical techniques. In order to analyze the data, the percentage of teachers who selected each of the three cases was computed. The data were further analyzed, using the chi square test for a single sample. These results ( $\chi^2 = 6.007$ ,  $p < .05$ .) indicated that the findings did not occur by chance alone.

As shown in Table 1, a total of 46 or 44.2% of the sample chose Case II (father absent due to divorce) as their choice for remediation. Thirty teachers or 28.8% of the total sample referred Case III (father absent because of death) for remedial help. Of the 104 teachers participating in the present study, 28 or 26.9% selected Case I (both parents present in the home) for the remedial class.

Table 1  
Remediation Selections of Total Sample Group

Subject	N	%
Case I. - Subject whose parents were both in the home.	28	26.9
Case II. - Subject whose father was absent from the home due to divorce.	46	44.2
Case III. - Subject whose father was absent from the home due to death	30	28.8

Table 2 presents the results of the teacher selections in terms of years of teaching experience. A division of four categories was made to represent the years of teaching experience. The percentages of the total sample's selections are shown.

Table 2  
Remediation Selections in Terms of  
Years of Teaching Experience

	YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE							
	1-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		more than 15 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Case I.	10	22.2	7	22.5	7	50	4	28.5
Case II.	19	42.2	14	45.2	6	42.8	7	50.0
Case III.	16	35.5	10	32.2	1	.07	3	21.4
Total Sample	45	43.3	31	29.8	14	13.5	14	13.5

Table 3 gives the results of the teacher selections in terms of the years of education completed by each teacher. A division of six categories was made to represent each teacher's highest earned college degree. No teachers surveyed held Ed.S. or doctorate degrees. The table shows the total percentages of selections for each category.

Table 3  
Remediation Selections In Terms Of  
Highest Earned College Degree

	Highest College Degree Earned							
	B.S. or B.A.		B.S. +1-31		M.A. or M.S.		M.A. +1-31	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Case I.	18	26.1	6	37.5	3	20	1	25.0
Case II.	30	43.4	7	43.8	7	46.7	2	50.0
Case III.	21	30.4	3	23.1	5	33.3	1	25.0
Total Sample	69	66.3	16	15.4	15	14.4	4	.01

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The present study was an effort to investigate the effect of teacher expectancy or labeling upon placement of students in remedial education classes. Specific attention was given to the factor of parental presence or absence in the home of the student and its influence upon the teachers' placement of the students. The results of the present study showed that a higher percentage of teachers selected a child of divorced parents for remedial instruction than a child whose parents were both living in the home or a child whose father was absent from the home due to death.

Although no studies were found in which parental divorce was a contributing factor to teacher labeling or expectancy, many studies have attempted to determine the variables influencing teacher bias toward students. In one such study, Palardy (1969) examined the effects of pupil sex upon teacher expectancy and found that boys, when compared with girls, were deemed by teachers as being lower in probability of reading success. In another study of teacher biasing, Clifford and Walster (1973) presented evidence to suggest that teachers are biased by the attractiveness of the student, as teachers in their study perceived attractive students as having higher I.Q.'s, greater educational potential, and more interested parents. Similarly, research by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) and Brophy and Good (1970) found significantly greater positive teacher interactions with students labeled as "superior" than with those students not so labeled. These studies yielded results which confirm the position taken by

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Finn (1972) that the effects of teachers' expectations are probably the results of a complex relationship among variables. Although no experimental evidence could be found that parental absence or presence affects teacher expectancy, the results of the present study indicate that this factor could be one variable of this complex interaction.

The investigations by Seaver (1973) which examined teacher expectancy effects due to a teacher's prior experience in teaching a pupil's older sibling(s) were not different from observations made by the present researcher. On several occasions, teachers were seen and heard discussing the three cases and their siblings. Many felt that they knew the identities of the cases and their siblings. Some comments from the teachers were to the effect that they selected certain of the three cases because the older brother or sister was also "really slow in mathematics and/or reading." Other teachers commented that certain of the three cases "should be smarter than that because his brother or sister was smart in my room."

As reported in the literature and noted by this researcher, teachers' expectancies can also be influenced by a student's socio-economic status (Neer, Foster, Jones, and Reynolds, 1973). Again, after selecting a case whose identity was presumably known, teachers made comments such as, "I picked Case 3 because his family just doesn't have anything and the special education teacher would probably help him a lot." Conversely, statements similar to the following were made: "I wouldn't put him in a remedial class. His parents can afford a tutor for him. He'd just be taking up a space that someone else could use. Why don't his parents send him

to a private school where he'd get more individual attention? They have the money."

On many occasions the researcher was urged to reveal the identities of the cases. Many subjects specifically stated that their knowing who the student was would not affect their selections, but would enable them to prepare for the possibility of having this student in their classroom in the future. One teacher remarked, "If you'll tell me, I'll know which group to put him in next year. I can get some work ready for him." Another teacher said, "I'll have a talk with his mother and get him straightened out before next year."

According to Smith and Luginbuhl (1976), the labeling effect could be negated somewhat by making the teachers aware of this phenomenon during their years of teacher training or by means of in-service programs. The reason that this has not been done extensively may be the lack of data defining the traits which cause this bias in teachers. Many researchers are undertaking the task of singling out these many variables, some of which include the student's I.Q., attractiveness, sex, siblings, race, and conduct. However, because many of the studies' results are conflicting, several unanswered questions still remain, especially in the field of education.

In examining the results of the present study, notation should be made of the type of data which were presented and limitations of these data. However, the chi square test, significant at the .05 level, does eliminate the factor that the teachers' choices occurred by chance. Inasmuch as there appear to be many factors related to

teachers' expectancies of student performance, it would seem worthwhile that this area be the object of further study.

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APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

Suppose you are asked to recommend one of your students for special help in the resource room. You have narrowed your choice to these three students. If recommended, the student would receive extra help in reading and math. Using only the information in the folders, would you please indicate the number of your choice. Portions of the folder have been covered for confidentiality.

Thank you for your assistance. You will be asked not to discuss the questionnaire until after your selection is completed. Thank you.

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CHOICE FOR THE RESOURCE ROOM:

1

2

3

Please indicate the number of years in teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate your highest degree: \_\_\_\_\_