

what do you expect?



Perception is a powerful thing, says Paul Dix, so perhaps it's time to change yours and change theirs...

Outstanding teachers sustain high expectations of children even in schools where behaviour is shaky, the community struggling and the constant

measuring of progress infuriating. They retain the enthusiasm and idealism of newly qualified teachers that is often contrary to their experience of the system.

They may not expect a great deal of change in what comes in from the world outside the school but they expect a great deal from the children they teach.

Experience weathers expectations and colours them. Human beings naturally collect and form stereotypes over time. We have all heard the opinions of those who have been battered by the storms so much that their expectations are

firmly and negatively set, 'I've seen your sort before', 'Those children, from that estate are born to fail'.

The connection between high expectations and achievement and low expectations and failure is well documented. In Rosenthal and Jacobsen's *Pygmalion in the Classroom* experiments, students were given an IQ test to predict their achievement in the next academic year. The teachers were told which children would 'surge' forward and which children would not. In fact the test scores were ignored and students were randomly grouped as 'surgers' and 'non surgers'. Over the course of a school year those identified as 'surgers' achieved significant improvements in standardised tests, those identified as 'non surgers' did not. The expectations of the teachers had been the pivotal element.



True to form

After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jane Elliot tried to bring the realities of racism to her all white class. She told her pupils a pseudo-scientific explanation of how eye colour defined people that dramatically affected achievement. The brown eyed students, she told them, were inferior to blue eyed students. Brown eyed students were described as untrustworthy, lazy and stupid while blue eyed students were given extra privileges. She segregated the two groups and made a point of praising the blue eyed children and being negative to the brown. The transformation was dramatic. The blue eyed children were bossy and derogatory towards their brown eyed classmates. The brown eyed students quickly became withdrawn, timid and defeated. Blue eyed students improved their

grades and were succeeding with tasks that had seemed out of reach before while even the most gifted brown eyed students stumbled over simple questions.

Simply put, when teachers expect students to do well and show intellectual growth, they do; when teachers do not have such expectations, performance and growth are not as encouraged and may in fact be discouraged in a number of ways. We know this as the self fulfilling prophecy and it plays havoc with learning, assessment and behaviour.

Raise your expectations

Your expectations translate into how you arrange the class, where students sit, how they are grouped, your diligence in preparation, the amount of risk that you will take and the amount of responsibility you delegate. When we expect children to misbehave we tend to

take less risk in the activities we ask them to do. When we expect the class to act responsibly, for children to learn independently our planning changes.

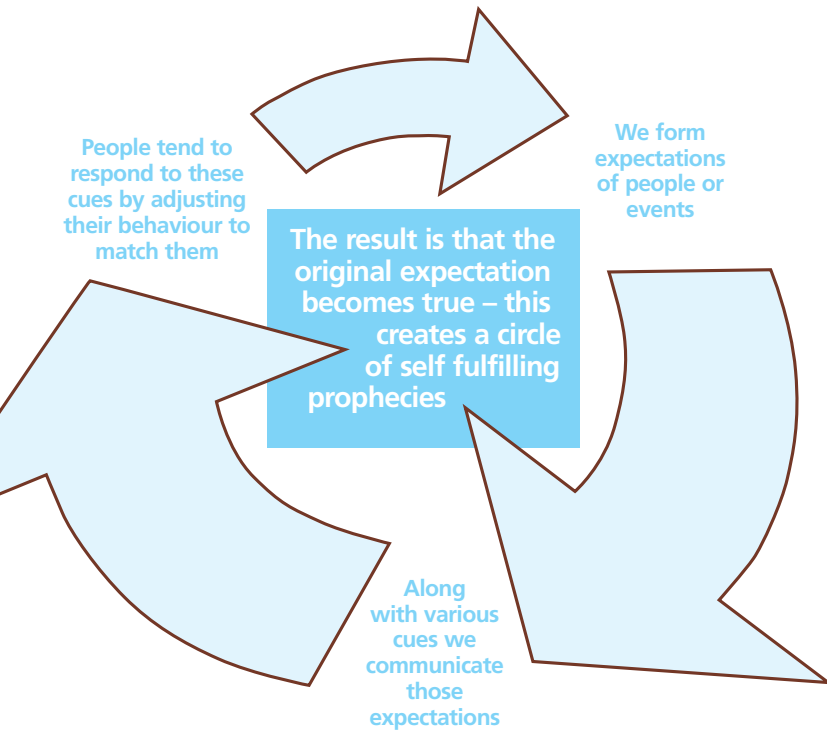
Your expectations are communicated in how you discuss learning with children. Spoon feed targets to students and they get the idea that you believe they cannot think. Deliberately structure target discussions and you can help pitch expectations and leave the student with targets they own. Even when some of them were guided by your own experience and knowledge of the student

Starting each new day with a clean sheet is more than just erasing previous consequences and restarting at zero. It means resetting your expectations, checking your language and maintaining a firm self awareness. Your emotional brain needs to be kept in check. While your rational

brain wipes the slate clean the emotional brain holds more stubborn stains. It stands ready to reveal past sins in an instant

Set the bar high

When the community surrounding the children strangles high expectations, gently counter them by making a clear division between what is expected outside and what is expected in this class or school. 'At Bannockburn School this is how we do things...', or 'When you walk into this classroom remember how we do things, remember the behaviours that are different'. In many independent schools these absolutes surround the children. The consistency of tradition is overwhelming. Like good parents you cannot put a Rizla paper between the messages of one parent and the other. The rules and many of the expectations are not elastic, they are not constantly



“ You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she is treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you because you always treat me like a lady and always will ”

– *PYGMALION* (1913), BERNARD SHAW



adjusted for individuals. The children learn the precise behaviours that are appropriate to the context, they take the values home, they affect the rest of their lives. In teaching we play the cards we are dealt. We work to achieve the best for every child. Even though the deck of cards you have been dealt may not be the same as the teacher in the independent sector you can still promote absolutes in behaviour. Persistently demand that ‘This is how we do things’ and, in time, what seems a high expectation

now will be an accepted part of daily routine.

Our expectations are just as affected by staff room banter as they are by difficult lessons and tricky interactions with parents. The most able, the least able and those in between all need your dogged pursuit of high expectations. Even when these expectations fight against your experience, preconceptions and stereotypes. Even when Trevor tells you he not the sharpest knife in the box. Even when his mum tells you the same thing.

Don't dumb down

Speaking to a group of teachers from schools in Wolverhampton who recently returned from visiting schools in Canada they reported how shocked they were at the language of teachers and pupils. They were stunned at how advanced the vocabulary the teachers used was and how quickly and easily the children picked it up and used it. There was no simplification, no dumbing down and children enjoyed the daily challenge of learning and using new words. The teachers have resolved to pursue the same high expectations of their own classes knowing that the same high standards will be achieved.

Wipe the slate clean

FIVE PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING YOUR EXPECTATIONS...

- 1 Start each day with a truly clean sheet by ratcheting up your self awareness, refusing to join in with labeling amongst colleagues and countering negative banter with positive reflections.
- 2 In your own mind separate work and behaviour and write down your expectations for each. Use these in target setting discussions.
- 3 Use an extended vocabulary and refuse to dumb down your language. The more children are surrounded by language that challenges, the faster they learn it and widen their vocabulary.
- 4 Along with your ‘just for today don’t get angry mantra’ remind yourself that ‘When you change the way you look at things the things you look at change’
- 5 Regularly reinforce specific expectations for and with the children. Display them clearly and refer to them tirelessly.