

## Language Arts eNews March 2019



Harvard psychologist Robert Rosenthal conducted an experiment in 1964 that illustrated the power of high expectations.

Rosenthal received permission from the principal of an elementary school to administer a fictitiously titled IQ test, the “Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition.” Rosenthal told teachers that the test revealed which of their students were destined to “bloom” academically. However, the researcher had identified these students randomly. Nevertheless, the students who had been “chosen” excelled, regardless of their previous performance, *due to the teachers’ belief in their students’ potential.*

Rosenthal’s findings, dubbed The Pygmalion Effect, illustrate the meaningful impact of high expectations. Rosenthal concluded, **“when teachers expected that certain children would show greater intellectual development, those children did show greater intellectual development.”**

Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jakobson identify four factors that create the Pygmalion Effect:

**Climate:** Teachers are nicer to students of whom they have high expectations and create a warmer climate for them.

**Input:** Teachers teach more material to students of whom they have high expectations.

**Response opportunity:** Teachers provide more response opportunities to students of whom they have high expectations and help them shape the answers.

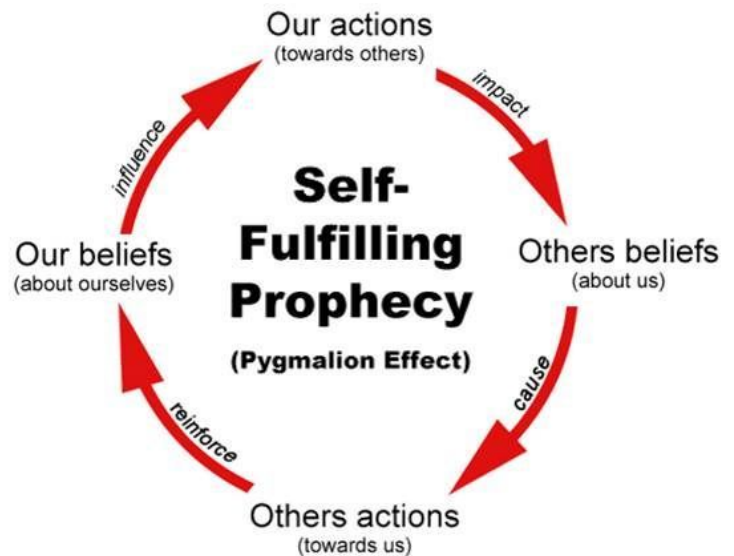
**Feedback:** Teachers praise students of whom they have high expectations more and provide them with more detailed and constructive feedback when they get their answer wrong.

From *Pygmalion in the Classroom* by Rosenthal and Jakobson.

Belief in the power of expectations is consistent with Culturally Relevant Teaching. As discussed in the [language arts division’s February 2019 eNews](#), establishing and maintaining high expectations for all students and respecting their cultural identities impacts student learning and benefits the whole child.

Wego seniors enrolled in Contemporary Literature discussed the impact of race in school in conjunction with the novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. While a number of the responses identified areas for growth, other students communicated positive experiences.

A Latina wrote, **“When a teacher is asked for help by a student, a teacher will try [his or her] hardest to help and not think that students are not smart enough because of the stereotypes a culture may have.”**



A white female student stated, **“DURING SOPHOMORE YEAR, I REMEMBER ONE OF MY TEACHERS PUSHING ALL OF US TO GO TO COLLEGE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. THIS ONE GIRL WHO WAS AFRICAN AMERICAN SAID SOMETHING ALONG THE LINES OF HOW PEOPLE LIKE HER DON'T GO TO COLLEGE. MY TEACHER AUTOMATICALLY SHOT DOWN THAT IDEA . . . AND SAID THAT ANYONE CAN GO TO COLLEGE. THIS SHOWS THAT MY TEACHER KNEW ABOUT STEREOTYPES AND WAS TRYING TO BREAK DOWN THAT STEREOTYPE, INSTEAD OF ENFORCING IT.”**

A white female wrote, **“HERE AT WEGO, TEACHERS AIM TO BETTER THE STUDENT, REGARDLESS OF RACE, GENDER OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION.”**

A final comment from a Latina was **“in my classes I've taken here at Wego, if not all of them fairly most of my teachers haven't lowered the expectations of my academic skills and instead when I or any other student doesn't perform well, then they would first ask what is happening or if they can help with something instead of jumping to conclusions that me or another student is not smart enough.”**

District 94 strives to nurture and accelerate all students, and the professional development that Wego teachers engaged in during the 1st semester of the 2018-2019 school year was designed to improve the cultural competence of teachers, which can transfer to increased student learning.



The National Education Association (NEA), defines cultural competence as “having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families.” Cultural competency is a key component of Culturally Relevant Teaching. Wego faculty continue their efforts to further enhance this skill and mindset, which serves students. The NEA concludes that cultural competence requires “the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a

tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator's classroom."

Thirteen years after Rosenthal discovered the Pygmalion Effect, Israeli researchers Elisha Babad and Jacinto Inbar partnered with Rosenthal to investigate the consequences of low expectations. They found that "low-expectancy students of high-bias teachers receiving a more negative treatment and perform[ed] less well than any of their peers." Labeled the Golem Effect, the implications of these findings are critical for schools, particularly diverse school districts where stereotypes about bilingualism, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status can negatively impact students. Continued efforts to educate teachers and communities about the value of diversity and multiculturalism, as well as culturally relevant teaching practices can offer students positive self-fulfilling prophecies, which will benefit all.

