

Study shows teacher expectations match student success

October 9 2014, by Anna Kellett

A study of over 4000 students has revealed their success was influenced by the expectations of the people teaching them.

Zheng Li will graduate with a PhD next May after completing her study into teacher expectations at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education. She used 4617 [students](#) across 116 English language classes being taught by 50 [teachers](#) at two Universities in South China.

Zheng asked the teachers to complete surveys asking them to predict how good their students were going to be during the year, while the students were asked questions about classroom climate and their teacher's style. The students were also interviewed about the classroom instruction and their socio-emotional environment. Their scores were collected at the beginning and the end of the school year.

The teachers' survey results were collated to show if they were a high, medium or low expectation teacher. At the end of the teaching year the teachers' results matched the success levels of their pupils.

"If a teacher held high expectations for one class, they appeared to hold similar expectations for other classes, and the results were the same for teachers who held low expectations," Zheng says, "This shows teacher expectations are pervasive." Furthermore, teachers tended to develop their expectations as a result of their pedagogical beliefs and self-efficacy, and they were likely to cling to their expectation types throughout the whole school year despite latest student information

(even contradictory evidence). Teachers with different expectations also varied in the ways they instructed and interacted with students; their behaviours, depending on their expectations, led to different instructional and socio-emotional environments in classrooms.

Zheng says that's great for students who had a high expectation teacher, but not for the other students, because students with high expectation teachers were provided more frequent, more challenging and more rewarding learning opportunities and they were sharing a more friendly relationship with their teachers than students with low expectation teachers. As a result students with high expectation teachers were more likely to participate willingly in learning and achieved higher than students with low expectation teachers.

So the students in low expectation classes had lower grades and less success than those with high expectation teachers.

"Low expectation teachers didn't have positive relationships with their students.

They just believed the students couldn't achieve well.

"So the students are not so reliant on their teachers and they don't show much acceptance of their teachers. They are more reliant on their peers and class mates."

This thesis has provided more convincing evidence that teacher expectation effects are a function of teacher rather than student variables. The findings indicate that it is the teacher who makes a difference. "It seems to me that student learning is largely dependent on which teacher they happen to be placed with, because different teachers may lead to diverse learning experiences and outcomes," Zheng says.

The thesis has been a four year project for Zheng, who was a university lecturer in China for 10 years before she chose to return to full time study.

She now hopes to continue her research both here and in China in the hope that all teachers will become high expectation teachers for the sake of all their students' success.

Provided by University of Auckland

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