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PREVIEW

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**Effects of labels and student performance data on the  
formulation and maintenance of teacher expectations**

Cirone, Sharon O'Neill, Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1990

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PREVIEW

EFFECTS OF LABELS AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA ON THE  
FORMULATION AND MAINTENANCE OF TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

by

Sharon O'Neill Cirone

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of  
Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction

Under the Supervision of Professor Reece L. Peterson

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1990

DISSERTATION TITLE

Effects of Labels and Student Performance Data on the Formulation

and Maintenance of Teacher Expectations

BY

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EFFECTS OF LABELS AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA ON THE  
FORMULATION AND MAINTENANCE OF TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Sharon O'Neill Cirone, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1990

Advisor: Reece L. Peterson

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence the labels Learning Disabled, Behavior Disordered, and At Risk had on the academic, study skill, behavioral, and instructional expectations teachers formulated for students as well as the role successful student performance information played in mediating any label-influence found to exist. Teachers' expectations were measured in this study through an instrument which presented a two-part vignette requesting teachers to assume a student was to enter an existing "average" class. The first part of the vignette described the student in general terms and assigned one of the label conditions: the second part of the vignette provided more detailed student information which reflected successful past performance yet continued to assign the initial label or non-label condition. After reading each student description, participants indicated their expectations by responding to performance statements on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Information from 522 middle-level special and regular educators was analyzed using multi-variate analysis of variance and follow-up procedures.

Findings from this study support the contention that teachers are negatively influenced by labels as they formulate and maintain expectations for students. The results of this study indicate that the labels Learning Disabled, Behaviorally Disordered, and At Risk

have significantly different, yet negative, impact on teachers' academic, study skill, behavioral, and instructional expectations for students. Successful student performance information exercised a significantly positive influence on the expectations teachers reported initially; however, a negative label influence continued to hold. Finally, special education and academic regular education endorsements significantly influenced the expectations teachers formulated for students, with special education teachers holding higher expectations for all students across all expectation areas with the exception of study skill expectations for non-labeled students. Based on data from this study, however, the endorsement area of the teacher does not interact with the label of the student to influence expectation levels for the student.

PREVIEW



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PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the individuals who have offered support, encouragement, time, and expertise to this research project:

Reece L. Peterson, my chair, whose support, guidance, and high expectations enabled me to sustain my efforts toward the completion of this study;

Jane Close Conoley, Jill Stoeffen-Fisher, and Ward Sybouts, my committee members for their time and expertise;

Bob Cirone, my husband, without whose patience and generosity of time, understanding, and support I could have neither started nor completed this research;

Mary K. O'Neill, my mother, whose love and teaching encourage commitment;

Jessica and Kevin, my children, who continually remind me that growth and learning never cease.

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## Introduction

Proponents of the Regular Education Initiative, a movement toward integration of regular and special education delivery systems, call for as many students as possible to be served within regular classrooms (Will, 1986; Stainback & Stainback, 1984, 1987; Reynolds, Wang, & Wallberg, 1987; Pugach, 1987; Hagarty & Abramson, 1987). Much of this research and concern is focused on mildly handicapped students whom some consider as more similar than dissimilar to non-labeled low-achieving students (Shepard, 1987). Educators are urged to reallocate expenditures, emphasizing programs that can be delivered in the regular education environment which can respond to individual needs of students (Gerber, 1988). According to this view, utilization of labels as a means of programming for handicapped students may do more to interrupt communication between regular and special education teachers than it does to provide a basis for designing educational programs (Lortie, 1978).

The practice of "labeling" or "categorization" developed during the 18th and 19th centuries, when services became available for children considered to be atypical. Services began as treatment programs (Schmid, 1979) and have evolved to specialized programming delivered within the public schools. Horn (1924) formulated the first system for classifying exceptional children for the purpose of providing a basis for entitlement decisions. The similarities between the system formulated by Horn and the system currently used has been pointed out by Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shenn and McGue (1982).

Just as the practice of classifying children has historical roots, so too does the recognition of problems associated with it. Hobbs (1975) cautioned those providing services for exceptional children that the classification of children had become a significant social issue. Points raised relative to the positive aspects of labeling involve: facilitation of treatment, organization for research purposes, and provision of structure for funding purposes. Issues raised regarding the negative aspects of labeling include: stigmatizing effects for students and teachers, simplification of complex conditions, and lack of educational relevance of the labels and categories utilized (Hobbs, 1975; Gallagher, 1976; MacMillan, 1983).

In a recent review of literature on the practice of classifying students, Ysseldyke (1987) states: "When all is said and done, the only clear positive effect of labeling and classification is that they are tied to legislation and lead to obtaining funds that help better the educational services that handicapped students receive". (p. 267)

Recognition of the power and influence of the categorical funding structure is cited in the Regular Education Initiative literature (Will, 1986; Stainback, & Stainback, 1987). Recommendations regarding changes range from working within the current structure while empowering building-level administrators to provide programming alternatives specific to student need rather than category (Will, 1986), to discontinuance of any categorical system as appropriate education is offered for all students functioning within a single educational system (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Without regard for

specific recommendations, the message is clear: provision of educational programs based on specific labels and categories delivered apart from the regular education system is of unsubstantiated benefit and may be a particular disservice for mildly handicapped students (Reynolds, & Lakin, 1987).

Calls for future research efforts specify a need for focusing on effective instruction rather than the setting of instruction (Reynolds & Lakin, 1987; Epps & Tindal, 1987). A major concern with regard to labeling centers on the influence labels may have on the expectations teachers hold for labeled students (Hobbs, 1975; MacMillan, Keogh, & Jones, 1986; Algozzine & Mercer, 1980). Research has been conducted substantiating observable differences in the instructional behavior of teachers toward students of high versus low expectancy levels (Good & Brophy, 1984). Consideration of this phenomenon would seem appropriate as regular educators are called upon to assume primary roles in the direct instruction of handicapped students.

Impetus for research in the area of teacher expectations was generated by Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) study in which they examined the self-fulfilling prophecy effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. This study, known as Pygmalion in the Classroom, was designed to examine the effect of artificially-induced, favorable teacher expectations on the intellectual growth of students. Teachers were informed that certain students were tested and considered to be due for a significant amount of intellectual "blooming" during the current school year. Student growth was to be

determined by the difference in pre-post test scores on Flannagan's Tests of General Ability (1960). Students grades one through six were randomly assigned to the experimental (induced favorable expectancies), or control (non-manipulated expectancies) conditions. Results indicated no significant achievement gains for students in grades 3 through 6. However, students in grades 1 and 2 for whom teachers' expectancies were favorably manipulated, did demonstrate significantly greater growth than their counterparts in the control groups. Rosenthal and Jacobson interpreted these findings as substantiation of a "teacher-expectancy" effect on student achievement. Although reactions to this study were varied, (Rubovits & Maehr, 1971; Elashoff & Snow, 1971; Snow, 1969, Thorndike, 1968), there can be no question that this Rosenthal and Jacobson study generated a vast amount of research in the area of teacher expectations.

Teachers do form differential expectations for students based on a variety of factors. Discussion of differential teacher expectations for the purposes of this paper will be limited to differing expectations for students perceived to be high or low achievers and differing expectations as influenced by the placement of educational labels on students. Finally, delineation of the effects of differential expectations for students on the behavior of teachers and students will be discussed.

In their meta-analysis of the literature regarding the bases of teacher expectancies, Dusek and Joseph (1985) found that several sources were related to the formulation of teacher expectancies for



their students. Those bases found to be related to teacher formulation of high versus low expectations for students were reported as: student attractiveness, student classroom conduct, cumulative folder information, race, and social class. Those sources of questionable relationship to the formation of high or low expectancies for students were reported as: older siblings previous performance, sex-role behavior, and, name stereotypes. Factors unrelated to the formation of high or low expectations were cited as gender and one-parent family situation. Information from the cumulative folders or observation of actual classroom conduct would appear to be objective, relevant sources on which to base expectations. Good (1987) points out that teacher expectations are generally accurate assessments of student ability based on objective information and that teachers commonly change expectations as more information becomes available. Problems may arise when other than objective sources are used in the formulation of expectations or when teachers do not monitor student performance or are not sensitive to student functioning that does not approximate that initially expected (Good, 1987).

Labels have also been found to be influential in the formulation of expected academic and behavioral performance of students (Rolison & Medway, 1985; Algozzine & Sutherland 1977; Foster, Ysseldyke, & Reese, 1975; and Foster and Ysseldyke, 1976). The initial effect of labels can be mediated by contact with students as well as information regarding competence (Algozzine & Stoller, 1971; Stoller, Algozzine, & Ysseldyke, 1981; Delclos, Burns, & Dulewicz, 1987; Reschley &

Lamprecht, 1979). MacMillan, Jones, & Aloia (1974) reviewed literature pertaining to the effects of the mentally retarded label concluding that research to that point had not conclusively documented that labeling had devastating or long-lasting effects for those labeled. Studies have demonstrated differences not only in expectation levels as impacted by labels, but also differences in attributions for successful performances as influenced by labels (Severence and Gasstrom, 1977; Lavelle, 1977). In summarizing the literature on labeling and expectations Algozzine and Mercer (1980) state: "The problem arises when label-based groupings serve little positive advantage, expectancies generated by labels are qualitatively and/or quantitatively negatively biased, or attributions assigned to a labeled child's performance are different from those assigned to the success or failure of a non-labeled youngster. It seems that these negative results of labels (as expectancy-generating stimuli) are prevalent within the current labeling literature " (pp. 235-6).

Observational studies in classrooms have documented the presence of differential teacher behaviors toward students considered to be high or low achievers. Good & Brophy (1987) identify specific differential teacher behaviors substantiated in observational studies as: demanding less of low achievers, calling on them less often, waiting less time for their answers, and giving low achievers answers or calling on another student rather than cue correct responses; generally paying less attention to low achievers, seating them further from the teacher; interacting less with low achievers, with

interactions characterized as less friendly and supportive, more structured, and private rather than public; demonstrating less acceptance of low achievers ideas than those of students considered to be average or high achievers; criticizing low achievers more often for failure, praising them less frequently than high achievers for successful performance, and rewarding inappropriate behavior or incorrect performance by low achievers; providing briefer and less informative feedback to low achievers' questions, and failing to give feedback at all to responses made publicly by low achieving students; evidencing less use of effective instructional methods with low achievers when time is limited, and grading tests and assignments differentially for high and low achievers, giving less benefit of the doubt to lower achieving students.

Review of these differential behaviors emphasizes the importance expectations can play in classroom dynamics. In reviewing this summarized listing, it is necessary to caution that these teacher behaviors do not always occur in relation to differential expectations. They have, however, been observed to correlate with such expectations in the studies cited. Not all teachers behave differentially toward high or low achieving students; those who may behave differentially do not necessarily exhibit all of the behaviors listed. Differential behavior toward specific students is certainly not equal to poor teaching. Certain differential behaviors on behalf of individual students characterize effective teaching. The relative value of differential behaviors can only be assessed with regard to their appropriateness for individual students.

Inequalities appear to arise when teachers are unaware of their differential behaviors, do not systematically reassess individual student performance independent of expectations, or are in need of information concerning the best ways to respond to students exhibiting difficulty (Brophy, 1983; Good, 1987). Even when differential treatment is correlated to student achievement, no causal link between teacher expectation levels and student achievement is unquestionably established (Meyer, 1985). Brophy (1983) estimated the self-fulfilling prophecy effect accounting for about 5% of the variance in achievement in most classrooms. This would not appear to be a staggering effect. Combining this effect with the sustaining effects of teacher expectations, along with consideration that most effects of differential teacher behavior are detrimental to low achievers provides cause for extended research.

#### Statement of the Problem

##### Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact the labels Behavior Disordered, Learning Disabled and At Risk have on how teachers develop and maintain expectations. All of these labels refer to students who experience difficulties in the school environment.

As discussed earlier, studies have been conducted on the impact labels have on teacher expectations. The labels Behavior Disordered and Learning Disabled have been included in these studies. No study has examined the impact of the label At Risk on teacher expectations. The term "at risk" has been evident in literature examining the characteristics and school experiences of students considered to be

"at risk" for completion of high school. The recent emphasis on this population of students may be attributed to the impact "dropouts" have not only to education, but to society at large. This national focus has increased the use of the label "at risk" as well as the creation of programs and services for students bearing this designation.

The present study is unique as teacher expectations for labeled special education students, specifically in the mildly handicapped range, will be studied along with teacher expectations for regular education students described as either at risk or without any categorization. Expectations as to projected classroom performance in the areas of academics, study skills, behavior, and specialized instructional needs will be examined as well as any change in expectation levels reported by teachers once data on successful previous performance is provided.

#### Research Questions

1. Do the labels Learning Disabled, Behavior Disordered and At Risk influence the academic, study skill, behavioral and instructional expectations of teachers as measured by a self-report questionnaire based on brief simulated student descriptions?
  - A. Do labels have a differential impact on teacher expectations?
2. Do teachers change their expectations based on data indicating successful student performance?

- A. Does successful performance information have differential impact on the specific types of expectations teachers hold for students within specific labeling conditions?
3. Are special education and academic regular education teachers influenced differently by labels and student performance as they formulate expectations for students?

#### Definitions

Behaviorally disordered is an educational label which may only be applied to students who "... demonstrate patterns of situationally inappropriate behavior which deviates substantially from the behavior of his or her age group with frequency, intensity, and duration. The child's inappropriate behavior shall interfere significantly with educational performance " (NDE, Rule 51, 1987, p. 25). This label may be applied to students meeting these criterion only through the process outlined in federal and state regulation; as implemented by local school districts.

Learning disabled is an educational label which may only be applied to students who demonstrate a discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in the areas of: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation and mathematics reasoning. Specific parameters are applied to both intellectual level, which must be measured in the average range, and achievement levels, which must be measured at least 1.3 standard deviations below assessed ability and must fall at or below 90 standard score points (NDE, Rule 51). The process of identification as learning disabled must follow the

processes required by federal and state regulation; as implemented by local school districts.

At Risk is a descriptor applied to an increasing number of students who demonstrate poor academic performance, less than average rates of attendance which may be due to truancies or suspensions, and misbehavior in the school setting and possibly in the community. Students who have been retained, who are working a significant amount of time in outside employment, who are teenage parents, who come from homes where there is less parental supervision, who are of single-parent families, and, students whose parents have not graduated from high school may all be considered to be at risk (OERI, 1987). In general, at risk may be applied to any student who is considered to be less likely than his or her classmates to successfully function in the educational environment. These students are often considered to be potential dropouts. There is not one definition of "at risk" consistently used in the literature. One of the purposes of this study is to determine the impact of the label "at risk" on teachers as they develop expectations for students, no further attempt will be made, therefore, to limit the meaning of the term "at risk".

Academic Expectations refer to the levels of achievement teachers expect students to reach in their classrooms. Teachers form expectations for individual students as well as groups of students based on data from a variety of sources:

Behavioral Expectations refer to the general behavior patterns teachers expect from students. These behavior patterns may include:

compliance with classroom rules and procedures, participation in class activities, attention to task, and completion of assigned work.

Study Skill Expectations refer to the levels of organization, class participation, attention to task, and task completion teachers expect students to demonstrate. Study skills may also include following verbal and written directions, requesting help when needed and working with other students.

Instructional Expectations refer to the degree to which teachers believe the student may need specialized instruction. Specialized instruction may include modifications to instructional processes currently implemented, such as: preferential seating, shortened assignments, more frequent feedback, increased parent communication, behavior contracts, peer tutoring, modified grading scales, consultation with other staff members, additional time for assigned tasks, and/or alternate instructional materials.

Teacher Expectation Effects "are student outcomes that occur because of the actions that teachers take in response to their own expectations" (Good, 1987, p. 32).

Self-fulfilling Prophecy Effect refer to student outcomes influenced by erroneous expectations held by teachers (Cooper & Good, 1983).

Sustaining Expectation Effects refer to student outcomes influenced by a teacher's maintenance of initial expectations, which although accurate at the time of formation, do not reflect changes in student performance (Cooper and Good, 1983).