

Note: This article appeared in the June 1979 issue of the Kappan magazine. In 1980, the program title was changed from EOC, Equal Opportunity in the Classroom, to TESA, Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement.

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"Why Did You Call on Me? I Didn't Have My Hand up!"

Teacher Expectations And Student Achievement

by Sam Kerman

Mr. Kerman has perfected techniques in a long-term Los Angeles project that may have important implications for teachers everywhere.

Mr. Smith, eighth-grade social studies teacher, has just posed a question to his class: "What advantages did the North have over the South during the Civil War?"

Following a reasonable pause, Mr. Smith calls upon Betty to answer. Betty stares at Mr. Smith incredulously and asks, "Why did you call on me? I didn't have my hand up!"

Betty's response is familiar to all experienced teachers. And it didn't surprise Mr. Smith. All of her teachers perceive Betty as a low achiever; she rarely answers questions when called upon. So teachers call on her less frequently than other students. Why bother? It's a waste of valuable class time. Moreover, calling on an unprepared student embarrasses that student in front of his peers, according to the conventional wisdom.

What Mr. Smith may not be aware of is the fact that Betty, as early as kindergarten, *learned* that she's not called upon as frequently as other students in class; over the years she has progressively "tuned out." We can now raise a very important question: Was Betty unable to answer because she was incapable of following the class discussion, or because she wasn't listening and didn't hear the question?

Extensive research shows that teacher interaction with students perceived as low achievers is less motivating and less supportive than interaction with students perceived as high achievers. Research also tells us that high achievers receive more response opportunities and are given more time to respond to questions. When high achievers do have difficulty, teachers tend to delve, give clues, or rephrase the question more frequently than with low achievers. This fact should not be construed as an indictment of teachers, since the biases demonstrated in teacher/student interactions are, in most cases, unconscious. Discriminatory interactions can as easily be identified between parents and their children, principals and their teachers, and corporate executives and their administrative staffs.

Calling on students to answer questions, express ideas, or give opinions constitutes one method of involving students in class activity. As we learned in that first teacher prep course, giving students opportunities to respond is a useful teaching strategy. Yet researchers Thomas L. Good and Jere R. Brophy discovered as long ago as 1969 that students perceived as high achievers were being given response opportunities three to four times more frequently than those perceived as low achievers.

During inservice training, more than 2,000 teachers in California, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Oregon were asked why they believed high achievers might be called upon more frequently than lows. Overwhelmingly, the responses were: "It might embarrass my low achievers"; "The whole class benefits from a good response"; "It is important to cover the curriculum content, which leaves little time for calling on those who are unprepared, slow, or confused."

Is it any wonder that low achievers who have tuned out of classroom discussions over a period of years react with a blank stare when called upon? The stare only reinforces the teacher's perception of the student's low status.

Part of the remedy should be obvious. Teachers must start calling on perceived lows as frequently as they call upon other students in class. Not that the lows will suddenly come forth with brilliant responses. They won't. But we have proven, over the course of a seven-year project, that they will, within a relatively short time, begin "tuning in." They become conscious of being called upon more frequently, and they begin to adapt to the new situation.

Normally, one defines low achievers as those students functioning below grade-level expectancy; high achievers function above grade level. However, a teacher must realize that the terms "low achiever" and "high achiever" are above all else relative. As an example, consider a National Merit finalist enrolled in a freshman physics class at MIT. He may

very well function at a level below most of the other students in his class. In the eyes of his professor, such a student is a low achiever. A student in a fourth-grade remedial class, on the other hand, may be perceived as a high achiever, the one selected to carry notes to the office, assist in distributing materials, or lead the Pledge of Allegiance. The point is that all classrooms, regardless of number enrolled, curriculum content, grouping strategies, etc., will, in the eyes of the teacher, have low and high achievers. And how they are perceived will predictably determine how they are taught from day to day.

In 1970 consultant Mary Martin of the L. A. County Schools Office approached me with an idea for developing an inservice training program based on comparatively new research dealing with the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement. She asked if I would be interested in collaborating in such an enterprise, and I accepted with delight.

The next year, with funds made available through an ESEA Title III grant, we embarked on a three-year study to find out whether, if teachers practiced *specific* motivating and supportive interactions more frequently with low achievers, statistically significant academic growth would result. The project, titled Equal Opportunity in the Classroom (EOC), was conducted under the auspices of the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools.

Fifteen separate interactions were identified that educators would recognize as being supportive and motivating. Research was cited proving that these interactions were practiced in classrooms with high achievers more frequently than with lows. An interaction model was developed for the presentation of these specifics. The interactions were grouped in three major strands, five interactions in each strand. (See the accompanying chart.)

During the three-year study a total of 12 teachers from more than 30 school districts in Los Angeles County volunteered to participate. There was equal representation of elementary, middle school, and secondary teachers. The teachers were divided into experimental and control groups. In order to test the hypothesis that teachers unconsciously interact more favorably with high achievers, a statistically significant number from each group were observed interacting with their students prior to initiating inservice training for our program. As the teachers practiced the interactions we were to introduce in training, a tally mark was placed opposite the name of the student recipient. The teachers were observed on two occasions approximately one week apart. The collected observation data clearly substantiated the hypothesis. All teachers in both groups, without exception, practiced the identified 15 interactions more frequently with high achievers. Once we had established this baseline data, we began inservice training.

The implementation design consists of scheduling five workshops approximately one month apart. Each workshop is three hours in length. Three interactions, one from each of the major strands, are introduced. With each of the specific interactions, we cite literature and research. Participants discuss techniques, and all concerned offer illustrations, demonstrations, and role-playing activities. Most important, since a majority of the techniques are well known to teachers as "good teaching strategies," the training focuses on identifying all possible reasons why these techniques are not being practiced as frequently with "lows" as with "highs."

Following each workshop, during a period of approximately three weeks, participants observe each other a minimum of four times, each observation of 30 minutes' duration. A teacher is observed no more than twice a week and (preferably) not on two consecutive days. While being observed, teachers consciously attempt to practice the interactions covered during the workshop with all students in an equitable manner. The observer simply records the frequency of the interactions occurring with target students. The observation data are always left with the teacher, who may, at his leisure, examine them and draw his own conclusions. In order to alleviate possible anxieties about being observed, much emphasis is placed during workshops on explaining that this is not an evaluative procedure; rather, it is a reporting instrument.

At the conclusion of the three-year study, approximately 2,000 identified low achievers in experimental classes showed statistically significant academic gains over their counterparts in the control classes. Not only were academic gains

Equal Opportunity in the Classroom Interaction Model

| Monthly Workshops | Strand A Response Opportunities | Strand B Feedback | Strand C Personal Regard |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Workshop #1 | 1. Equitable distribution | 1. Affirm/correct | 1. Proximity |
| Workshop #2 | 2. Individual help | 2. Praise | 2. Courtesy |
| Workshop #3 | 3. Latency | 3. Reasons for praise | 3. Personal interest and compliments |
| Workshop #4 | 4. Delving | 4. Listening | 4. Touching |
| Workshop #5 | 5. Higher-level questions | 5. Accepting feelings | 5. Desist |

noted; also, there was a significant reduction in absenteeism and a significant reduction in discipline referrals. Although project emphasis was directed to perceived low achievers, all students in the experimental classes, not just the lows, showed statistically significant gains over those in the control classes.

One of the most valuable and significant program spinoffs grew out of the observation/coding component. Since the program is not directly related to any one curriculum area or grade level, teachers of various disciplines and grade levels are observing each other. This has resulted in improved communication and understanding between teachers, kindergarten through twelfth grade; awareness and appreciation of the accomplishments of those in other subject areas; observing good teaching strategies that can often be replicated, regardless of the subject area.

In 1974 the EOC project won over 1,800 Title IV-C projects as one of the most outstanding in the nation and was awarded an Educational Pacesetter Award by the National Advisory Council on Supplementary Centers and Services.

From 1974 through 1977 EOC received three consecutive dissemination grants from the California State Department of Education. During the dissemination years project staff members were instrumental in installing the program in more than 100 school districts, experiencing the same success that met the pilot program.

Also in 1974, it became apparent that the number of project staff members was inadequate to meet all district requests for implementation services. It was then that a new component was added to the program, the "training trainers." Project Coordinator Training Seminars were initiated in December, 1974. School districts desirous of implementing the program were instructed to send one or more of their staff to be trained as program coordinators and implementers. Those identified for training were to possess experience and skills in the area of staff inservice training or show potential for success in this area.

EOC project coordinator candidates attend a three-day seminar conducted by

the EOC staff from the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools. The project concept is simple enough so that within these limited time periods the training will prepare one to supervise the five-month inservice program for teachers. In the past five years 1,200 educators representing 480 educational agencies have attended these seminars. Numerous comments by educators attest to the success of the program. Here are typical comments:

Marvin L. Marshall, director of secondary education, Baldwin Park Unified School District — "The Equal Opportunity in the Classroom project is, in my estimation, one of the best staff preparation programs available to classroom teachers."

Clifford Low, area administrator, Portland Public Schools — "The results of this program have been positive beyond our highest expectations. I am highly impressed by the fact that our phenomenal success with this program was built on a mere three-day leadership training experience."

M. A. Nottingham, professor of educational administration, University of Southern California — "My observation of the program over the past three years convinces me that it should become a part of university teacher training programs."

James W. Clemenger, principal, Redondo Beach City Schools — "It is the finest teacher inservice education program I have ever seen."

The Equal Opportunity in the Classroom Project is not a simple program to be mastered in one reading of a manual. It is, on the contrary, a five-month experience built around 15 teaching practices that must be internalized by the teacher and incorporated into the classroom experiences of the student.

Students are not all alike physically and mentally, but they are all alike in having the right to an equal opportunity to learn. □