

Teacher Expectancies Toward The Culturally Different

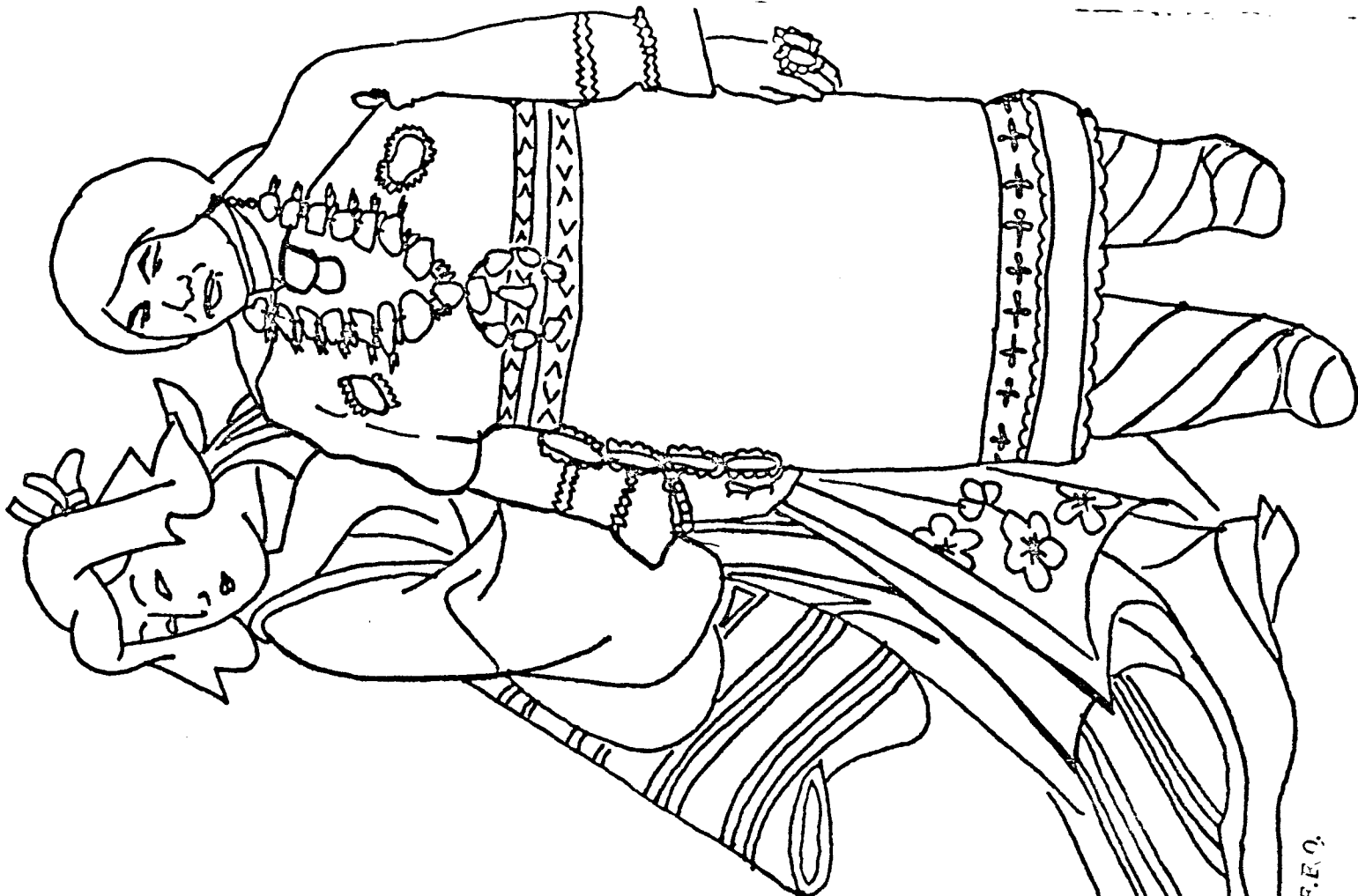
by **Harold M. Bergsma**

The educational system must accept the disadvantaged on their own terms and work to achieve its goals by serving as an ego-supporting, meaningful institution which encourages diversity. This would enable the disadvantaged to become their best possible selves by utilizing their culture, not by trying to change it (Goodman 1972).

The research relating teacher behavior to student school achievement indicates the complexity of the teaching art. David A. Potter (1974) states this well when he says that the quest for understanding the meaning of student-teacher relationship might validly be compared to the apocryphal blind men attempting to describe an elephant; that each research examines a limited portion of an extremely complex interactive process, and that is is not surprising that research has not captured the essence of teaching.

One aspect of this "essence" is the expectation a teacher holds for the students she/he instructs. One is led into a maze of studies beginning with Rosenthal (1968) which relate to teacher expectancy and one can conclude as did Marlaine Lockheed-Katz (1974) recently that reviews of teacher expectancy literature shed very little consistent light on the answer to this question. The Rosenthal and Jacobson experimenter bias study (1968) raised questions about teacher expectations and student performance. Other studies attempted to replicate Rosenthal's findings. These provoke new thoughts about the role of teachers in classroom settings as related to their expectations or cultural bias (Lehman & Mehrens 1971). David Potter (1974) raises a valid question when he asks just how much of the variance in student achievement could have been accounted for by variance in teacher behavior? In the literature survey of Mar-

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laine Lockheed-Katz (1974), four groups of studies concerning measures of teacher expectation are reviewed. Her third and fourth categories, i.e., inferring teachers' expectancies, and measuring the expectancies of groups of teachers - respectively concern this writer, as these relate to teacher experience in cross-cultural settings.

Many European and American educators have worked in a number of international settings. The media of instruction were in many cases either the French or English languages. The students they taught, as in the case of Peace Corps teachers, or direct hire expatriates, were nationals, whose mother tongue was not English or French. In many instances, the students, such as those who lived in West Africa, came from homes where parents were non-literate subsistence farmers, or semi-literate small city dwellers. From this writer's experience far-questions about teacher expectancies and achievement levels of American students from certain classes and races as related to teacher expectation or bias. We have read so much in recent years about "deprivation", economic, social and linguistic. Baratz and Baratz (1970) have discussed this in an article, Early Childhood Intervention, Social Science Base of Institutional Racism, and many of their arguments bear serious scrutiny. Ray Rist's study (1970) infers that the (social class, race) characteristics of students, created a level of expectation in the teacher which structured her classroom behavior, and of course her unconscious attitudes were reflected in the type of interpersonal interactions she was able to maintain in order to insure that such expectations would become a reality.

Is it possible that numbers of American teachers have over a long period of time come to believe a number of myths about persons from other cultures? George A. Miller in an introduction to *The Cultural Context of Learning and Thinking, an Exploration in Experimental Anthropology* (Michael Cole et al 1971), states this position so well.

One of our most persistent (myths) is that non-literate people in less developed countries possess something we like to call a 'primitive mentality', that is both different from and inferior to our own. This myth has it that the 'primitive mind' is highly concrete, whereas the 'Western mind' is highly abstract; the 'primitive mind' connects its concrete ideas by role association, whereas the 'Western mind' connects its abstract ideas by general relations, etc. The dangers inherent in this hodge podge of half-truths do not derive solely from the blunders they inspire in our relations with the Third World. The same stereotype is likely to be applied to ethnic minorities living in the west.

If the concept of "primitive people" is a generally held, culturally conditioned belief for many American and European teachers, how appealing would be the research which shows that the achievement levels of certain groups or races is lower. Certainly one could anticipate that the learning situation would be affected by a teacher holding such views about children who are culturally different. Ray Rist's study (1970) provides a valuable insight, that a given teacher's attitude can create classroom structures which in fact may pre-determine, to some extent, the success or lack of success of a group of children over an extended period of time. Could not personally held biases toward "different" children be "excused" by teachers who misread and misinterpret the flood of recent literature, (i.e., Jensen, 1969, Shockley 1971, Rohwer 1971) which ties relative achievement potentials to a race or group? Clifford and Walters' research as reported by Lockheed-Katz (1974) examined the effect of physical attractiveness on teachers' estimation of the child's I.Q., social relations, skills, parents' attitudes toward school, and level of expected academic school completion. The attractive students were rated high in all four categories! There was a strong predisposition among these teachers studied to evaluate attractive children more highly than unattractive children. If the child's color (or his hair texture) is also held to be less than desirable or attractive, his home to be inferior; do we not have the possibility of a rather large problem in schools enforced busing or desegregation may in fact aggravate?

Teachers who have worked abroad in different cultural settings soon came to recognize that they were in fact a minority element, that their unconscious personal habits singled them out as being different and in many cases as deviant or "ugly Americans", that the complexities of a foreign language they attempted to learn were often staggeringly difficult to master, that persons who initially all "looked the same" took on unique and desirable individual attributes. Not only are excuses for holding prejudicial attitudes in such a situation very quickly re-examined, the teacher abroad was forced to re-examine his teaching methodology, in fact, a great deal of his professional repertoire underwent an overhaul in his effort to adjust to the culture of his students. This is the point. The writer concurs with Potter who reported that out of 302 reports of investigations (in this case related to reading) between July 1, 1971, to June 30, 1972, not one single study reported or inquired into the relationship between teacher behavior and student achievement! It appears that the approach utilized in the educational system is to structure and reconstruct curriculum, or programs, or research the learner. Are we not trying to tailor students and curriculum (a la Sesame Street or Head Start Program) to fit the teacher? William Labov (1971) locates the problem of teaching black children in the relationship between the system of schooling and teachers who try to make black children white, rather than the problem being in the children. If teacher expectations could be changed, greater progress could perhaps be made when the teacher faces differences in her/his classroom.

The writer is not aware of any international studies dealing with teacher expectations in cross-cultural settings. From personal observations in India and Nigeria the writer has observed numbers of successful expatriate teachers who have related well with their students. Long years after they have left they correspond and maintain friendships. How were cultural bridges built? Carl Rogers (1952) has an expression which comes to mind, "unconditional positive regard." According to Rogers, such a positive regard occurs if the teacher (therapist) holds for her/his students (clients) feelings which are unprejudiced in expectation - that is, that the student is not prejudiced in the cultural-personal mirror of the therapist - teacher.

Is it possible that the concept of cultural deprivation was a myth created by researcher or teacher expectations? Nell Keddie in his book *The Myth of Cultural Deprivation* (1973) talks of this point. How does a myth become institutionalized? Is it possible that testing and research of a certain sort, structured by teachers and measurement experts supports myth formation? There in fact now may very well be a unicorn in our educational garden.

Another observation regarding teacher expectations deals with verbal interaction between the teacher and student. The writer has personally observed situations in teaching in Michigan in which foreign exchange students, (in both cases including attractive upper-middle class young ladies, from Europe and South America) spoke English with heavy accent, and spoke using poor grammar and idiom. Their teachers and fellow students held them in high regard, provided a help here and there, with chuckles and good will all around. Both of these Rotary exchange students left after one year speaking English so well they were making the rounds of business clubs giving speeches! There seemed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy for success and for various reasons the teachers held these students in high esteem.

The writer observed reciprocal genial attitudes of good regard prevailing among many national students and expatriate teachers in West Africa . . . Many students achieved well, and spoke and wrote in a second language and eventually went on for advanced degrees using the second language.

Conversely, witness empathetically the experiences of Hentoff (1967) and Robert Coles (1970) of situations in which little or no positive high regard or teacher expectation was held for students who reacted in frustration and failure. From one of the writer's personal experiences in teaching disadvantaged blacks in adult education classes, in college classes and in high school completion courses connected with industry, initial reactions were noted as, "what horrible English," "what slurred sounds," "what a heavy accent," - etc. One has to catch oneself in such situations and be reminded that such speech is simply different, and related to cultural conditioning. Martin Deutsch (1965) states, "Strong evidence can be adduced to support the assumption that is the verbal engagement of people who surround him which is the operating influence in the

child's language development." A good part of this verbal engagement, or lack of it, is with the teacher in school. Clayton Lafferty, in a speech given a couple of years ago at Western Michigan University, stated that the biggest problem faced by junior high students is the fear of being wrong and of failing in one way or another. Lafferty made the point strongly that in order to compensate for this, students become "magical thinkers". One magical way of avoiding failure or being "put down" is not to speak or react verbally, especially if the student feels that the self-fulfilling prophecy for talking will be failure or disgrace.

Educators have placed much emphasis on changing the curriculum, rewriting texts to include important historical figures and models from other than the "white race". In William Charles' work (1973) *Recommendations for Cultural Pluralism in the School Curriculum in Desegregated Schools* he argues for the need to provide means to change the curriculum to foster the dignity of minority groups. Jim Haskins' work (1973) a *Black Manifesto for Education* considers the problem of black rights, including the need for curricular relevance. Numbers of others have spoken to this need, the list is a long one, as Potter (1973) found, the concern is legitimate and real.

Another approach to the problem of optimizing the learning environment has been to modify the child or learner behavior, and/or restructure the learning experiences for students so as to facilitate relations between races and generations. See Robert Corkhuff and George Bank's work (1970), *Learning as the Preferred Mode of Facilitating Relations between the Races and Generations*.

It is the contention of the writer that teachers' expectations or lack of such for certain students have a significant effect on students' achievement. Is there not a need to modify teacher behavior, both in preservice and in-service programs in racial awareness and in awareness of problems and prospects of educational process in cross-cultural situations? This would include the need to re-emphasize international education programs, cross-cultural involvements, and research to develop models to create such awareness. See Paul Goldin's work, "A model for racial awareness training of teachers in integrated schools" (1970). Social Science teachers graduate from colleges and have often had no significant cross-cultural experience, have been isolated within the main stream ethnic and unfortunately often teach bias against racial or minority groups in well intended teaching sessions. Too often the teacher communicates much more than the lesson, and creates a "self-fulfilling prophecy" among minority students. Jack Daniel (1970) writes about many verbal devices the teachers employ that blacks use to judge the sincerity of their statements. Much more emphasis should be placed on real life cross-cultural experience for teachers. We talk a great deal about competency based programs; how many of these include a demonstrated ability of dealing with children of all races with an attitude of unconditional high regard?

James Goodman (1972) stressed the need for the educational system to accept the disadvantaged on their own terms. One finding of the Coleman Report (1966) among many, was that the teacher's role was a very important factor when tied to student achievement. A great deal more can be done in teacher training programs, especially in new competency based programs, to institute elements of cross-cultural contact, in simulated fashion if real opportunities are lacking, and especially to stress real life experiences of tutoring and helping students of various backgrounds throughout the four years of the undergraduate preparation period. The educational process only has value to the degree that individuals (students and teachers) gain insights and experiences with people and their thinking, other than self. Rist (1970) states, "The thrust of the educational experience should be toward diversity, not homogeneity." Teachers and students alike should be given every opportunity to interact with as wide a variety (as possible) of individuals in the world community of people and their ideas.

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