
Rosenthal & Jacobson (1966)

A study of the role of teachers on our learning



Psychologists study both behaviour and cognitive processes. Intelligence is the ability to reason and think in complex ways as well as the ability to store and retrieve symbolic representations of knowledge based on experience. Researchers are interested in what factors influence the development of intelligence. A famous study demonstrated that IQ scores can be influenced by the expectations of others.

Rosenthal wondered if teachers' expectations of their students had an effect on student performance in the classroom. Since teachers in the USA were given the students' IQ scores at the beginning of the first grade, could this bias their expectations so that unintentionally teachers would treat some students as potentially bright and others as less bright?

Procedure

The **aim** of Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1966) was to investigate if teacher expectations could influence students' intellectual performance. The study took place in an elementary school with the cooperation of the school's administration.

At the beginning of the academic year all students were given an IQ test, which did not depend upon skills learned in school. The teachers were told that the students had taken the *Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition*. The teachers were also told that this test could predict whether students would improve academically in the year to come. In this way teachers were led to believe that students who scored high on the test would improve academically but the predictive value of the test was not true. Deception was thus used in order to raise specific expectations in the minds of the teachers.

18 classes from grade one through six were given the IQ test. The 18 teachers (16 women and 2 men) were then given lists of the students in each class who had scored in the top 20% on the Harvard Test. These students were identified as potential "intellectual bloomers" in the academic year to come. However, the children had been assigned randomly to the experimental condition.

Eight months after the start of the field experiment, the children were all retested with the same IQ test and a change score was computed for each child.

Results

Generally all children designated as potential bloomers had significantly greater gains in IQ scores than did children who were not identified as bloomers. This was particularly so in the first and second grades. First graders in the control group had a gain of 12 points compared to the experimental group who had a gain of 27.4 IQ points.

Table 1: Percentages of experimental and control participants gaining 10, 20 or 30 IQ points in First and Second Grade Children

IQ Gain	Control (n = 95)	Experimental (n = 19)
10 points	49	79
20 points	19	47
30 points	5	21

In grades 5 and 6 the difference was not significant. For example, the mean gain in grade 6 was 10.7 in the control compared to the experimental group 10.0.