

# Teacher expectations impact how students learn

By Alix Spiegel, NPR

In a recent “Morning Edition” story, I look at expectations – specifically, how teacher expectations can affect the performance of the children they teach.

The first psychologist to systematically study this was a Harvard professor named Robert Rosenthal, who in 1964, did a wonderful experiment at an elementary school south of San Francisco.

The idea was to figure out what would happen if teachers were told that certain kids in their class were destined to succeed, and so Rosenthal took a normal I.Q. test and dressed it up as a different test.

“It was a standardized I.Q. Test,” he says, “Flanagan’s Test of General Ability, but the cover we put on it, we had printed on every test booklet, said ‘Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition.’”

Rosenthal told the teachers that this very special test from Harvard had the very special ability to predict which kids were about to be very special – that is, which kids were about to experience a dramatic growth in their I.Q.

After the kids took the test, he then chose from every class several children totally at random. There was nothing at all to distinguish these kids from the other kids, but he told their teachers that the test predicted the kids were on the verge of an intense intellectual bloom.

As he followed the children over the next two years, Rosenthal discovered that the teachers’ expectations of these kids

really did affect the students. "If teachers had been led to expect greater gains in I.Q., then increasingly, those kids gained more I.Q.," he says.

But just how do expectations influence I.Q.?

As Rosenthal did more research, he found that expectations effect teachers' moment-to-moment interactions with the children they teach in a thousand almost invisible ways. Teachers give the students that they expect to succeed more time to answer questions, more specific feedback, and more approval: They consistently touch, nod and smile at those kids more.

**Read the whole story**