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ECDE7008 - Combating Prejudice & Discrimination in Education (Assessment 1)

Critically discuss whether prejudice and discrimination, in the form of teacher expectations of learners, are of urgent concern in contemporary education environments.

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Introduction

The concept of teachers expectations and its outcomes upon its students has been researched widely and the performance gap thus created has captured the attention of all stakeholders involved, particularly academics, researchers and policy makers (Bishop, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Strand, 2014 ; Weinstein, 2004). This essay will review the literature around prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping in the form of teachers expectations and will attempt to evaluate whether this is of urgent concern in the context of today's education environment.

The study of prejudice has been a focus of social psychological research for many years, as it forms is a key element of social relations and is an ongoing societal problem (Allport, 1979). As a means of introduction to this essay, it is important to explore some of the definitions surrounding prejudice, discrimination and indeed stereotyping. According to (Allport, 1979) a definition of prejudice must include two key constituent parts; the attitude of favour or disfavour and the inclusion of an overgeneralized, erroneous belief. Exploring (Whitley & Kite, 2005), they state that contemporary psychologists take a more detailed view by separating beliefs, or stereotypes, from the evaluation part of the belief and from the behaviour toward members of the groups about which the belief is held. To understand the definition of stereotyping, one can explore (Whitley & Kite, 2005) citing (Lippman, 1922) who describes the concept as '*Pictures in our Head*'. Lippman elaborates stating that people's behaviour is not based on actual knowledge but on pictures made by them. Discussing negative behaviour, (Myers, 2009) suggests that this type of behaviour built on prejudice is called discrimination and exploring this further, (Vescio & Bloodhart, 2010) state that discrimination is the behavioural component of attitudes within a group and touches on how these people have been treated differently with regards to the group to which they are attached to.

Exploring stereotyping, (Myers, 2009) demonstrated that stereotyping represents the attempts of people to simplify and generalise behaviour by giving labels and categories to people and groups, whereas (Greenwald & Babaji, 1995) define stereotyping as people attached to a group that have certain attributes or traits. These traits can be of course negative or positive, for example poor or rich. To better understand the stereotype phenomenon, (Golu, 2013) develops the argument that stereotypes demonstrate the emotional part of people's attitudes, while prejudice represents the cognitive part, and discrimination is the action part of these attitudes. According to (Bandura, 1971) social learning theory describes how people learn from those in their environment. Speaking of prejudice, Bandura states that influential people, such as parents or leaders through example, and their approving reactions, teach children negative thoughts towards certain groups, and how they should express themselves through aggression toward these people. Therefore, is it true that this learned behaviour is one of the lasting reasons why prejudice & discrimination prevail?

Teachers Expectation

Exploring Teachers Expectations, (Peterson, Rubie-Davies, Osborne, & Sibley, 2016) ask the question, *"What are teachers' expectations and what difference do they make?"* Here, they define teacher expectations by understanding that teachers holding particular beliefs about their students' academic ability and achievement possibilities. (Rubie-Davies, 2015) expand by stating that these expectations are generally influenced by a number of factors such as students' ethnicity, gender, social class or indeed their prior achievement. (Strand, 2014) highlights other factors including student behaviour, the child's name, personality and friendliness. It is interesting to note that according to Strand, the success of a child's older brother or sister has a lesser effect on teacher expectations. According to (Saracho, 2006) teachers have different expectations from those of their students and this is often noted as a reflection of their perception of these pupils. Some students are perceived by teachers as more able and competent than others while others are seen as less proficient. Teacher expectations would be higher for those perceived as more able than for those perceived as less able (Saracho, 2006).

Most researchers and education professionals alike tend to agree that it is important for teachers to believe in their students and to maintain high expectations about their students' ability to achieve their educational goals (Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016). Albeit that this is a key argument towards the motivation of teachers and their work, according to (Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016) there has been a lack of research that has been able to show whether or not teacher expectations actually matter for student outcomes outside of specific experimental settings. As far back as the 1960's,

economists have sought to understand the factors that drive variation in educational outcomes. Around this time, according to (Becker, 1964) schooling was an investment in human capital. Sociodemographic gaps in educational attainment in recent years have been given a focused attention, mainly due to the fact that it is generally accepted that education facilitates upward economic and social mobility across generations (Bailey & Dynarski 2011) and there are social benefits of a more educated population (Moretti, 2004).

According to (Papageorge, Gershenson, & Kang, 2016) who cite (Brophy, 1983; Ferguson, 2003; Jussim & Harber, 2005) discussing the causal effects on students outcomes, they state, *“teacher expectations constitute one potentially important, but relatively understudied, educational input that might contribute to socio-demographic gaps in educational attainment. Despite pervasive views that teacher expectations matter, however, it is difficult to credibly identify their causal effects on student outcomes”*. Analysing this statement, it could be argued that teacher expectations may just reflect predictions about educational attainment and if this is the case, then it could be argued that teacher expectations do not influence outcomes, but rather reflect the information teachers have about their students true student potential. On the other hand, if a causal impact happens, such as bias, then it could be said that teacher expectations create self-fulfilling prophecies in which investments made in or by students are altered, thereby leading to outcomes that resemble teachers’ initially incorrect beliefs.

According to (Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2014) in the classroom, first impressions last and a teachers’ perceptions of a students’ performance, including their judgments for the students’ future performance are generally valid and as this prejudice is set, the teachers’ expectations tend not to change. There are many characteristics which feed the teachers expectations for academic achievement such as physical attractiveness, socioeconomic status, race, use of language and history of grade retention. Teachers tend to overestimate the achievement of high achievers, underestimate the achievement of low achievers, and predict least accurately low achievers’ responses (Gottfredson, Marciniak, Birdseye, & Gottfredson, 1995) and when really teachers know their students, the more accurate their expectations for student academic success, especially in the early elementary grades (Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016).

Exploring some of the seminal work in this area, Rosenthal & Jacobson’s *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), investigated elementary school teachers and their students test scores. The Pygmalion study, which found that teachers held very negative views of students who unexpectedly showed sharp IQ gains and the findings of this experiment showed that changes in

teacher expectations can produce changes in student achievement. When teachers expect students to do well, students tend to do well; when teachers expect students to fail, they tend to fail. Exploring this argument from a different view (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996) state that teachers may have contrasting expectations for disparate ethnic groups which may be influenced by the stereotypes and implicit prejudiced attitudes they hold in relation to the students from other ethnic groups. Examining teachers expectations and the concept of how a teacher might approach the setting of work (Rubie-Davies, 2015) states that teachers' expectations can affect the types of learning tasks they set. Specifically, teachers set high-level learning tasks when they have high expectations, but low-level tasks when they have low expectations.

Taking a view to the ethnic background argument around teachers expectations, the study by (Van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, Voeten, & Holland, 2010) explored students from ethnic minority backgrounds and demonstrated that these students in general are at a higher risk for school failure and also show a higher propensity to negative teacher expectations. The study analysed Muslim children who enter elementary school in The Netherlands who all display significant barriers from language delay and also a delay math studies directly related to Dutch children. Ven Den Bergh et al., cite (Duncan & Magnuson, 2006; Gamoran, 2001) who state that many aspects of this lower academic achievement of ethnic minority students have been identified over the years and therefore these ethnic achievement gaps have been attributed to family socioeconomic resources.

Relating this research by Van Den Bergh et al. to Irelands educational challenge with regards to migrants, according to (Carey et al., 2008) Irish schools teach approximately 50,000 pupils from migrant families. These children span over 150 different nationalities. The students have hugely diverse backgrounds from a cultural, language and religious perspective with most of the migrant families are based in urban settings. Discussing the challenges associated with educating such a large migrant pupil population, (Carey et al., 2008) state, *“This diversity presents challenges for the delivery of primary and secondary education and these challenges arise in relation to the largely denominational nature of Irish schools, providing language supports, accommodating diversity, training teachers and monitoring and evaluation”*. In dealing with these relatively new challenges for teachers, teacher training has been highlighted as a major source of action to alleviate prejudice by teachers towards these minority groups. According to (Eurydice., 2004) training for teachers is key if intercultural education is to be developed as part of enhancing the overall education provision within schools. The Eurydice study states that the intercultural approach to teaching requires skills that should be acquired during initial teacher education, for example training around the ability to deal appropriately with prejudice at school.

According to (Devine, 2005) teaching has changed over the last twenty years and teachers in Ireland have more responsibility, new processes to learn at both local and policy level and intercultural education forms a key element of this change. This new approach has been termed by Devine as the '*intensification of teaching*'. Teachers have highlighted the challenges arising from educating minority ethnic groups and they feel unsupported in many of the challenges they face and are open to learn new approaches, particularly around awareness of the ethnic achievement gap between majority and minority students.

(Papageorge et al., 2016) make the point that there were earlier studies that examined how self-fulfilling prophecies can sustain negative bias against groups. There was a study conducted by (Rist, 1970) where subjective teacher perceptions driven by social class was analysed as to how this behaviour affected both teacher and student in the classroom. The results of this research demonstrated that the student outcomes corresponded to the teachers original and negative beliefs regarding the students from lower social class. In response to Rist's research, (Jussim & Eccles, 1992; Jussim & Harber, 2005) recognise and agree that there is a large percentage possibility that self-fulfilling prophecies may contribute to a correlation between expectations and outcomes.

Teacher expectations and academic achievement

According to (Peterson et al., 2016) with regards to the extent of teacher expectation effects on students' achievement, there is still a debate around this. They refer to a recent meta-analysis which discovered the average effect size across all students was modest ($d=0.43$) (Hattie, 2009). Examining this data, (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Van den Bergh et al., 2010) offer their argument by stating that even though the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement may be modest overall, they can still be powerful. The threat of stereotyping seems to be a huge factor when it comes to the teachers expectations and the academic achievement gap. Exploring this in more detail, (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Van den Bergh et al., 2010) comment that students from ethnic minorities and relatively low socioeconomic groups could possibly be susceptible to teacher expectation effects through the threat of stereotyping. One could argue that the academic achievement of students could be affected by stereotyping and implicit prejudiced attitudes teachers hold about students from a particular group (Jussim et al., 1996). When prejudiced attitudes and stereotypes are explored, explicit and implicit stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes are created from the repeated exposure to a group which have certain characteristics. This is most evident throughout education in the achievement gap between majority and minority students (Peterson et al., 2016).

Explicit expectations, Implicit prejudiced attitudes and student achievement

According to (Peterson et al., 2016) who cite (Hattie, 2009; Jussim, Robustelli, & Cain, 2009; Van den Bergh et al., 2010) who highlight that there have been a number of research studies undertaken which explores the effects of teachers' explicit expectations on actual student achievement but one thing that seems to emerge is that there is no account for these students prior achievement and therefore it is not entirely possible to ignore the possibility that explicit expectations from teachers towards different groups really only accurate predictions of widely studied ethnic achievement gaps. Building on this theory (McKown & Weinstein, 2008) studied teachers expectations towards European American & Asian American students to outperform African Americans and Latino Americans. The research demonstrated that at the end of an academic year their teachers expectancies accounted for between 0.29 and 0.38 standard deviations of the ethnic achievement gap. On the contrary to the study by McKown & Weinstein, (de Boer, Bosker, & Van der Werf, 2010) research discovered that teachers expectations were not definitively driven by students ethnicity, gender or achievement motivation, but instead, were attached to the students' socioeconomic status including their intelligence and their parents aspirations.

According to (Peterson et al., 2016), the research into implicit ethnic prejudiced attitudes and student achievement has been limited but a study by (Van den Bergh et al., 2010) examined this area in some detail. This study used a traditional Implicit Association Task (IAT) to assess teachers' general implicit prejudiced attitudes toward different student groups. The IAT asked students give judgments in relation to other students' names that were associated with three different ethnic groups. These were then paired with words that had generally positive or negative connotations, but were unrelated to achievement. Albeit there were limitations in the form of generalisation and no account for students prior achievements, this study provided the first demonstration that teachers' general ethnic-based implicit prejudiced attitudes related to student achievement (Van den Bergh et al., 2010).

Exploring the Challenges of Inclusive Practice – The Teachers Perspective

Inclusion and diversity in schools has been around since research began on these topics (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). According to (Travers et al., 2014) inclusion in education is interpreted with a general approach, looking at it from the perspective of it being a process of increasing the access, participation and benefits of all learners in an education system. Exploring (Shevlin et al., 2009) they conclude that an inclusive learning environment refers to a learning environment that regards and

respects all pupils, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic background or special educational need. (Horne & Timmons, 2009) propose that inclusive practice relies on knowledge, skills, understanding, resources and attitudes. They also focus on positive attitudes of the teacher stating that these are critical and have been shown to be associated with positive attitudes to inclusion. According to (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) they argue towards the importance of professional development in the establishment of teachers' positive attitudes and some research has indicated that teachers who are actively implementing inclusive programmes, together with experience of inclusion are more likely to have a positive attitude. (Avissar, 2000) talk about teacher resistance to inclusion linked to the challenges teachers constantly face when trying to implement this inclusive practice. Avissar comments here;

“These challenges have been linked to teachers' lack of confidence relating to personal instruction, skills and availability of resources, teachers' inadequate professional development and the ability to deal with a variety of disabilities and/or special educational needs.”

(Borko, Davinroy, Blien, & Cumbo, 2000) speak about the teachers' ability to work inclusively stating that this may require a new approach towards a more student-centred method focused on discovery, problem-solving and co-operative learning as opposed to the traditional didactic approach. (Tomlinson, 2003), on the other hand, speak about the teachers' confidence as an issue and their ability to implement different instructional strategies to cater for diverse needs, as well as knowledge of their students' needs in the form of teachers expectations. This approach of differentiated instruction, according to Tomlinson, is looked upon as being a better solution than the 'one-size-fits-all' teaching approach where (Westwood, 2003) refers to this approach in the learners sense, for example, learning subject matter differently according to learners' unique differences.

Are teacher expectations of learners of urgent concern in contemporary education environments?

Once a teacher develops an expectation (the self-fulfilling prophecy concept), even if this is incorrect, the behaviour is as if this belief were true. When a teacher displays prejudice behaviour towards a student, they are automatically given more opportunities to learn with the teacher typically calling on these students more frequently, which by definition means that the students who are not called upon by the teacher should learn less as they are given fewer such opportunities (Stipek, 2013). In a modern educational context, teachers should not behave this way as it clearly displays a negative prejudice which is discriminatory by its nature. Exploring the evidence based research from (Papageorge et al.,

2016), they conclude by stating that teachers expectations matter and in particular are of urgent concern, based on three key findings;

1. Teacher expectations are a concern as they directly affect students' ability to achieve their educational goals – this finding has an overwhelming power to it, basically what they are saying here is that students will achieve based on teacher bias. This has to be of concern in modern day education (Papageorge et al.,2016).
2. All teachers are overly optimistic about students' ability to complete their studies, however, this degree of over-optimism is significantly larger when bias is involved spurred by ethnicity or socioeconomic background - Again, here we have evidence based research which raises a huge concern on the students ability to perform based on their teachers expectations of them on certain personal criteria, is this not of huge concern? (Papageorge et al.,2016).
3. Matching the teacher to the school's pupils – This finding suggests that if a school can match the teacher to the general pupil population then there could be a higher achievement rate of learning from students, i.e.. black teachers for black students or the teacher from the same socioeconomic area as the children – of course this is just not possible and one could argue that this could be seen as totally unacceptable by all stakeholders, therefore again, here we have evidence that raises a huge concern (Papageorge et al.,2016).

Research in education and teaching methods, has over the years, attempted to understand the best teaching methodologies in relation to what and how students learn (Leifler, 2020), that being said, this research question still seems to be open-ended with no real answer as to what works best for different students and why. (Peterson et al., 2016) state that prejudiced attitudes and stereotypes can be positive or negative, with (Hattie 2013; Tamm et al., 2019; Timperley , Wilson , & Fung 2007), demonstrating evidence that when teachers are seen to support their students and have some sort of positive expectations for them, that these students achieve a higher learning outcome and also have a more enjoyable teaching and learning experience. Analysing this, is it not fair to say that when a teacher supports their students and within this support the teacher has some kind of 'expectations' for each of her/his students, then this is a positive support mechanism? Therefore, the argument that when a teacher has negative expectations towards their students that these are more than likely built on some sort of prejudice based on a number of factors (Strand, 2014).

Based on the fact that in general, the teacher is seen as a significantly important factor for the students overall learning, therefore is it a fair assumption that teachers are expected to understand their classes learning ability? Breaking this down further, the teacher must then understand each of her/his

students individual needs based on that students ability, not the teachers expectation for that student based on her/his prejudice (Jensen, 2017; Spencer 2011).

To conclude this essay, there is urgency to this problem of prejudice in the form of teacher expectations. There needs to be intervention at a teacher training level to better develop a 'student centred learning environment'. According to (Glock & Karbach, 2015) teacher training programmes that focus on how to identify and reject discriminatory thoughts by teachers could be helpful in reducing the potential negative impact this kind of behaviour has on students and their outcomes. There is evidence to suggest that although implicit attitudes are automatic, they can be managed if cognitive control is exerted (Blair, 2002). Exploring the research of (Tomlinson & Javius, 2012) who offer a solution in the form of Re-Booting Teachers' Expectations. This Re-booting concept is all about refining and expanding teachers' expectations for all students'. They argue that achievement for all is an essential aspect of establishing a student centered learning culture. Tomlinson & Javius identify seven connected principles that can inform a teachers' belief when they want to assist all children in the classroom to learn to a high level. Their research concluded that when this '*Re-Booting*' is brought into the classroom practices on a whole school basis, over a period of time, the schoolwide teacher expectations can re-boot the overall school culture which in turn increases all student's learning.

Overall, more research is needed to understand the role of implicit and prejudiced attitudes within educational contexts. According to (Glock & Karbach, 2015) there is requirement for further pedagogical research using implicit measures to assist and impact in the reduction of the potential teacher expectations together with other attitude driven biases on the future learning outcomes, careers and lives of our children.

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