



Your Expectations Shape Your World

DAM Monday January 29, 2001

For today's DAM Monday I thought I'd share a study I recently read a review of. I have not confirmed the existence of such a study. This supposed study may fall into the category of urban legend however I think the message is still important and most likely it is a true story.

The psychology department of an Ivey league school conducted a study on learning and teaching styles.

For one year the students and teachers of an inner city school were studied, questioned and observed in a classroom setting. The researchers identified the skilled teachers and the gifted students. They then matched learning and teaching styles of students and teachers. Then a class of grade school students who were "highly gifted", exceptional learners were placed in a classroom with a teacher who was also "highly gifted" and ideally suited to teach in a style the "gifted" students would thrive.

The teacher was told she would be teaching a "highly gifted" class of quick learners and her teaching style and ability was the best possible match for this class. The students were not told of the special learning environment.

For the entire school year the teacher taught her "gifted class" with no discipline problems, above average attendance, good class participation and an accelerated curriculum.

By the end of the year the students were performing, on average, two-grade levels above in reading, writing and math. Obviously the matching of learning and teaching styles from the previous year had paid off. But at the end of the school year the researchers dropped a bomb on the teacher and school administration.

The teacher was informed the study was not really on learning and teaching styles. The study was on expectation.

Both the students and teachers were selected at random with no regard for learning or teaching styles. In fact the class was made up of a cross section of all skills, abilities and IQ levels. And the teacher was just a teacher with no special identified gifts. The goal of the study was to learn what results would occur if teachers believed they and their students were special.

The staff and teacher were the only ones who believed the class was gifted. Teaching and treating these kids as if they were highly skilled learners and while at the same time believing she was a skilled educator the students performed as if they were "highly gifted."

Believing she and her class were exceptional she had no choice but to expect the exceptional and she got what she expected. Is it possible that by just believing the students were exceptional they recognized their own unique abilities?

I suppose the reason this study is difficult to believe is because the results were positive. I'm sorry to say that most people would believe this story if the situation was reversed. Negative expectancy is easy to swallow and make happen. Positive expectancy is for some reason difficult to believe. Don't believe me how many times have you made yourself sick when you expected to get sick?

We all have created results like these in our own lives. We expect and focus on great things and great things happen, we expect and focus on the not so great and the not so great occurs.

I'm not sure what this has to do with masters swimming, except I expect to teach and coach the very best people living in the metroplex. I know the DAM swimmers are exceptional. I hope you know it too.

Thanks swimmers.