

# The Self-fulfilling Prophecy and Your Students: "I Knew You Could Do It!"



By Julia G. Thompson

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## **The Self-fulfilling Prophecy and Your Students: "I Knew You Could Do It!"**

Although most teachers are aware of their responsibility to serve as role models, counselors, and advocates, we tend to underestimate the effect that we can have on our students. The reasons for this lie in the daily struggles that happen in classrooms everywhere. We work in a formidable flux of constant decisions, difficult demands, and hard-to-manage problems. With all of these facing us as soon as the bell rings, it's not always easy to remember that your attitude about your students can really change everything.

You have enormous power over the lives of your students. In fact, you can make the children in your classroom into successful students or you can make those same children into failures. Your beliefs about your students create this power in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The self-fulfilling prophecy begins with the expectations you have about your students. These expectations are your unconscious as well as your conscious attitudes about your students' ability to succeed. You constantly communicate those expectations to your students in many subtle ways such as though your body language, the assignments you make, the language you use, and how much time you spend with individual students.

Because humans tend to behave as they are treated, your students will react to the way that you communicate those expectations to them. If you think highly of your students, they will tend to behave better for you than for the teachers who obviously do not enjoy being with them. If you act with a calm assurance that conveys your belief that the students in your

class are capable of good behavior and academic accomplishments then your students are highly likely to behave well and strive for success.

If you doubt this power, consider the alternative. Why would students struggle to learn, to behave, to come to school without a caring adult who appears glad to see them succeed? For some students, a teacher is their only lifeline.

How can you use your expectations to create a self-fulfilling prophecy that can create a classroom climate for success? Every day, you can pass along transmit your belief in the abilities of your students in a variety of ways.

- Start with assignments that your students can achieve with ease. Success builds upon itself. When students see that they can accomplish what you ask of them, they will want to continue that success.
- Celebrate often with your students. After all, their successes are your successes. You do not have to dedicate lots of time to formal celebrations. A simple posting or display of good news, a class signal that allows classmates to acknowledge each other in positive way, or a quiet word with individual students will all establish a positive tone.
- Be as consistent and as fair as you possibly can. Students of all ages are quick to react negatively when they detect even a small hint of suspected unfairness. They will shut down quickly when this happens.
- Post motivational signs, mottoes, and other messages to encourage students to give their best effort.
- Reward effort as well as achievement. It is important to make sure your students see the link between success

and effort.

- Create an risk-free environment in which students can risk trying new things without fear of failure or ridicule.
- Tell your students about your confidence in their ability to succeed. Tell them this over and over.
- Teach your students how to set measurable goals and how to achieve them. Model this for students. Set goals as a class and have students set small daily or weekly goals until it is a habit and part of the culture of your classroom.
- At the end of class ask students to share what they have learned. Often, they are not aware of how much they have really actually achieved until they have the opportunity to reflect.
- We all know that open-ended questions and assignments can serve as sparks to deepen critical thinking skills. They can also serve to motivate students to work hard because of their intrinsic interest and risk-free nature. Open-ended questions and assignments are a respectful way to demonstrate your faith in your students' ability to tackle tough work.
- Teach your students how to handle the failures that everyone experiences from time to time. Help them understand that they can learn from their mistakes as well as from their successes.
- Formative assessments can be helpful tools for those teachers who want to empower their students to believe in themselves. Use a variety of assessments to help students evaluate their progress and determine what they need to accomplish to finish assignments.



**About Julia Thompson**

**As a workshop leader and writer, best-selling author Julia Thompson has taught thousands of teachers how to create student-centred classrooms, thrive during that important first year of teaching, motivate reluctant learners, prevent discipline problems, and sustain high expectations for the success of their students as well as for themselves.**

**A practicing classroom teacher, Julia is the author of several resources for teachers. In each of her books, she presents classroom-tested ideas, activities, and strategies designed to make each school day a successful one. Because she is a full-time teacher herself, Julia focuses her advice on the practical aspects of a teacher's busy professional life. She understands first-hand the realities of today's classroom. This extensive experience and the insights she has gained as a teacher trainer have shaped her beliefs about the daily challenges that can confront even the most steadfast teachers.**

**Julia's dedication to promoting excellence among her colleagues and to helping new teachers translate their dreams into successful practice is the focus of her work as an author of professional development resources and as a teacher trainer.**

**Books written by Julia and available to order from Amazon**

