

Reviewing the Literature on Teacher and Coach Expectations With Implications for Future Research and Practice

by Hasan F Mavi and Tom Sharpe

Abstract

Based on the varied expectancy theory literatures, this article provides teacher and coach educators, and practicing professionals, with a list of important strategies for ensuring consistently positive and constructive interaction with all students and athletes when operating in various teaching and coaching settings. Expectancy (e.g., Martinek, 1981) and related self-fulfilling prophecy theory is first revisited and coupled with a review of the literature contextualized by specific data-supported dangers inherent to differential student treatment. Grounded in this review, a circular effect relationship is next proposed and is explained and illustrated in behavioral terms in relationship to productive and not-so-productive teacher-student and coach-athlete interactions. Emphasis is on increasing sensitivity to effective teacher-student and coach-athlete interaction patterns and on continuing research and development into 'best' practice in relationship to expectancy theory and the proposed model of circular effect.

Teaching and coaching in physical education and athletic settings is a profession offering many rewards in terms of the potential for impacting on children and youth in positive ways. As with any opportunity, however, this potential also brings with it many challenges. One of the most challenging features of working with kids is the danger of inadvertently creating negative outcomes; the most dangerous of which is the creation of a set of negative expectations which in turn creates a negative self-fulfilling prophecy for students and athletes.

Physical educators and athletic coaches need to remain sensitive to the challenge of interacting with all of their students and athletes in a consistently positive and constructive manner. Most of us who have worked with kids for a long period of time know how difficult it is to avoid forming different expectations of, and even prejudices toward, different students and athletes. Characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, skill ability, physical appearance, academic achievement, past observations, and so on all contribute to potential biases in favor of or against particular students. These biases, in turn, tend to influence how we act and react in different ways with different students and athletes. Once teachers and coaches begin to show differential interactions in their educational setting, a student or athlete's motivation for participation and improvement may be adversely affected.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Demonstrating consistent interactions across all students and athletes, therefore, provides one of the greatest challenges to optimally effective teaching and coaching. Historically, the most common term in the teacher education literature used to describe this challenge has been expectancy theory (Martinek, 1981). In the contemporary education literature, the term self-fulfilling prophecy (Good & Brophy, 1987) is most commonly used. Expectancy theory and self-fulfilling prophecy are referred to when a teacher or coach perceives his or her students and athletes differently, and as a result provides differential treatment toward students and athletes who exhibit

Kozmitzki, 1996; Solmon, et al.,1996). For example, if a new student comes to your physical education class and you know that this student was an accomplished volleyball player when at her previous school, you will tend to label this student in positive ways in terms of being a highly skilled player. On the other hand, if this same student is the sister of one of your previous students with whom you had a lot of discipline challenges, then a negative label may override any potential positive expectancies in terms of volleyball or other athletic skills. It is in these regards, therefore, that teachers and coaches should limit themselves to using only current information (i.e., skill analysis or direct observations of current classroom interactions) in forming any expectations for a new student.

2. *Raise Awareness about Potential Biases*

As with the formation of expectations based on inappropriate information, the communication of differential expectations are often unconsciously presented as a function of general biases or past instructional experiences with particular students (Sinclair & Vealey, 1989). Oftentimes, a potential negative bias may even be part of a teacher or coach's regular interactions with a student -- interactions which are not really thought about as negative expectancies. For example, a swimming coach may be working with a particular athlete on his front crawl stroke without the athlete performing to the coach's expectations. After explaining and observing that athlete's incorrect attempts at the stroke mechanics the coach may blurt out something like, "How many times have I told you to reach forward with your right arm?.. your fingertips should enter the water first.. what is wrong with you?" Many times we, as teachers and coaches, do not even realize the potential negative expectancies and self-fulfilling prophecies we are setting up in our students and athletes with this type of interaction. In this regard, strategies such as talking with your students before and after practice individually and in groups about anything you may be doing which

is disagreeable, or soliciting direct observations of your teaching and coaching to collect additional information about any potential negative interactions may be of great help.

One proven effective means of providing some direct observation information, for example, is to use another student or athlete in your class who could not participate on that day to collect information on your interactions. This approach has been used with great success in middle school physical education classes as an important information source, and as a means to increase the sense of belonging and enthusiasm on the part of particular students (Wolfe & Sharpe, 1996). Such observations are easily constructed and can include information on feedback and encouraging statements, positive versus negative statements, interpersonal interactions, and various types of instructional practices.

3. *Use Individual Potential to Guide Expectations*

Many times, teachers and coaches will informally assess the learning potential of a group of students or athletes in intuitive ways. This may bring the teacher or coach to an inappropriate expectancy of the group's potential, or facilitate low teacher and coach expectancies for particular individuals lying outside of perceived group characteristics. Most often, teachers and coaches tend to look toward the high expectancy students and athletes in assessing the larger group's potential (Solomon & Kosmitzki, 1996). This challenge of misjudging a student or athlete within a group's potential, or inappropriately placing group expectations on a particular individual, is another facilitator of the circular effect. In this regard, it is important to include regular formal assessments of student and athlete ability, as well as formal assessments of how individual students and athletes perceive their ability and related progress. Clearly defining success in terms of individual progress is one means to avoiding inappropriately placed standards; standards which may act to drive low expectancies placed on some students.

4. Provide an Equal Opportunity Environment

As much of the research in this area shows, teachers and coaches tend to challenge less and provide less skill-practice for low expectancy individuals (Martinek, & Karper, 1984b). They also provide less interactive praise and encouragement, and less constructive and evaluative feedback for low expectancy individuals (Markland & Martinek, 1988; Rejeski, Darrscoth, & Hutskar, 1979; Solmon, et al., 1996). These self-fulfilling prophecy dangers all relate to the potential for establishing an unequal environment for students and athletes. In this regard, being sensitive to providing positive interactions with all your students on an individual basis, even if only fleeting interactions such as pats on the back or other non-verbal gestures of approval, is important. In addition, providing as many instructional sources as possible to ensure that all students are given equal amounts of instruction and practice will help ensure your students (or athletes) perceive that you are providing an equal opportunity environment. Many documented successful sources are available and range from the use of peer teachers and helpers, to individually prescribed instructional systems with secondary sources of information, to alternative organizational systems which allow teachers and coaches greater contact with individual students and athletes. Specific recommendations in this area include the importance of providing (a) equal amounts of practice time, (b) appropriate levels of individual difficulty, and (c) consistent instructional and interpersonal interactions across all students and athletes.

5. Continually Monitor and Revise your Expectations

Clearly, student and athlete performance and their related perceptions of the instructional setting do not remain stable over long periods of time. Failing to monitor for changes in student or athlete practice efforts, or failing to be sensitive to student and athlete changes in their perceptions is another leading factor in the creation of a poten-

tially negative circular effect (Sinclair & Vealey, 1989; Solomon, et al., 1996). Strategies designed to ensure the continuing accuracy of student and athlete characterizations include periodic assessments of skill practice and related student perceptions of that practice. Providing a specific time each day to reflect on your teaching and go over any interactive changes you should make with respect to particular students provides another means of ensuring continual revision of your teaching or coaching efforts with respect to the changes observed in particular students or athletes. Within this reflective time, analyzing the ways different skill practices might be broken down and reflecting on the alternative means available to teach a challenging student are also helpful to ensuring the continual revision of individual student expectations. Making written lists of the challenging situations encountered and alternative means of providing more effective interactions will help ensure that revised expectations are put into behavioral practice with future teaching and coaching efforts.

Conclusions

Clearly, teaching and coaching styles encompass a wide range of behaviors and practices across both subject matters and the varying characteristics of students and athletes. Those teachers and coaches who are most effective in avoiding the creation of negative expectancies and related negative circular effects, however, are those professionals who consistently subscribe to many of the recommendations we provide. This theoretical area also provides an area of academic study that remains rich in productive research and development possibilities. We agree with Solomon (1999), for example, that interpersonal and skill-based interactions across teachers and coaches of variable levels of experience, and across different student and athlete characteristics, remain important to study to come to a more complete understanding of the prophetic and circular relationships developed among those teachers, students, coaches, and athletes over

time. Much study remains to be done before a complete understanding of various expectancy and circular effect interaction patterns is available. Adherence to some of the general recommendations provided, and continued study of the behavioral character of teacher-student and coach-athlete interactions, however, should help practicing professionals and related professional preparation efforts to incorporate beneficial information related to teacher and coach expectations and their circular effects into their respective instructional repertoires.

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Mr. Hasan Mavi is a doctoral student in the department of Health, Kinesiology, and Leisure Studies at Purdue University. Dr. Tom Sharpe is the Teacher Education Program Director at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

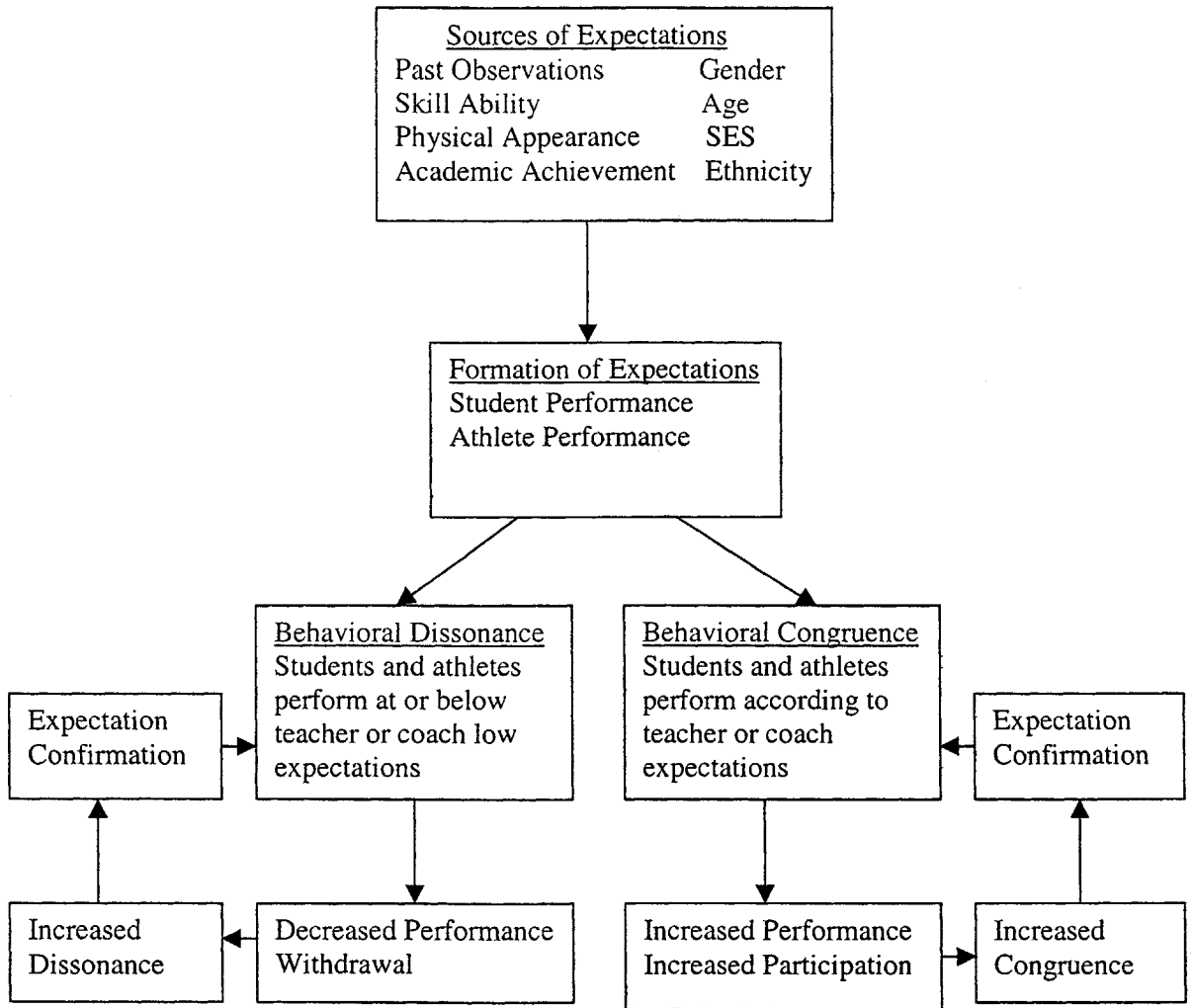


Figure 1. Circular Effect Illustration.