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WHO IS ALIEN IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL CLASSROOM? A COMPARISON OF SOME STUDENT/TEACHER VALUES

However sympathetic teachers may be to developmental students' aspirations, they still often think that these students differ in striking ways from the typical college population. Developmental students, so the story goes, are the round pegs who must be remolded, cognitively and affectively, to fit into the square holes of academe. "Their salient characteristic," writes Patricia Bizzell, former director of Rutgers' developmental writing program, "is their 'outlandishness'—their appearance to many teachers and to themselves as the students who are most alien in the college community" (294). Mina Shaughnessy describes the basic writers she studied at The City College, CUNY as "strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life," and she cites their atypical backgrounds, growing up in "New York's ethnic or racial enclaves . . . [speaking] other languages or dialects at home and never successfully reconcil[ing] the worlds of home and school . . ." (3).

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Some theorists recommend the acquisition of an academic world view as the primary goal for developmental students (see Bizzell, Hays, and Perry for descriptions of an academic world view). But whatever the long-term goals for making students fit into academe, each teacher of developmental students must first pose and reach an important short-term goal: finding a common ground of values, perceptions, and knowledge with each group of students in each class so that the immediate tasks of communication and instruction can begin.

Frequently the dramatic differences between students' and teachers' goals and viewpoints make reaching this goal a complex and frustrating process. Not only do the students and teachers *not* share a world view; they also may not see the day-to-day operations of the class from the same perspective, differing on such basic matters as the importance of class attendance or of turning assignments in on time. Moreover, while developmental students may be the aliens in the greater world of academe, once the class is formed, the students are at their desks, and the classroom door is closed, it is not the students but the teacher who is alien. In effect, the teacher undergoes an abrupt shift from academic insider to classroom outsider, the minority representative who is isolated by values as well as language from a majority to whom he or she appears "outlandish." To create a climate for successful interaction, the teacher must discover first what values motivate his or her students and how the students define the learning situation.

What motivates developmental students? How do they see and interpret interactions with their teacher? And how do student-teacher differences affect those interactions? We looked for some answers to these questions in a two-part study. First, we surveyed educational psychologists' research on student/teacher values and expectations and adapted a theoretical model to describe interactions in a developmental classroom. Second, we studied two basic writing classes to test the model and to discover where a teacher might intervene most effectively to attain positive results (such as having papers turned in on time or persuading a student to attend class).

A Model of Student/Teacher Interaction

During the past twenty years educational psychologists have explored the influence of teacher expectations and values on learning outcomes. Beginning with Rosenthal and Jacobson's classic *Pygmalion in the Classroom,* researchers have repeatedly reaffirmed findings linking student achievement to teachers' perceptions and

behaviors (Cooper, "Pygmalion" 389–410). Evidence suggests that many teachers "slot" students into categories; the categories of their expectations tend to be self-fulfilling prophecies; and their behavior, reflecting their expectations, affects students' "self-concept, achievement motivation, and level of aspiration" (Maehr 887–896; Wang and Weisstein 418). Moreover, "the relation between teacher expectation and student achievement is bidirectional. . . . A student's actual performance serves as the primary influence on the expectation held by the teacher . . .," promoting "a cyclical process of mutual influence . . ." (Cooper, "Communication" 194). This "cyclical process" is described by the model in Figure 1 (adapted and expanded from Ames' value-belief attribution-model, 109).

If student and teacher values and expectations are well matched, the teacher will have no problem selecting appropriate behaviors to disrupt a negative learning cycle or perpetuate a positive learning cycle. However, if values and expectations are mismatched, the teacher will be more likely to select inappropriate behaviors, disrupting positive cycles and perpetuating negative cycles.

Developmental classrooms offer a special challenge for matching student and teacher expectations. Often teacher and students come from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds and represent opposite extremes, high and low, in academic achievement and motivation. Although both students and teacher can be assumed to share a common goal—successful completion of the course—they may differ dramatically in their definition and value of success, both as an end and as a process, and how they assess its cost. Figure 2 demonstrates the potentially negative interaction of a teacher and student with conflicting values.

In Figure 2 the teacher values school work first and assumes that fulfilling an assignment depends on internal control mechanisms—the desire or motivation to turn the assignment in on time. Therefore, the teacher interprets the unacceptable performance as a failure due to lack of effort and a possible precedent for future infractions. The punitive outcome reflects research findings that teachers are harsher in evaluating failure they attribute to causes controllable by the student than failure attributed to uncontrollable causes, such as lack of ability (Weiner 57–73). On the other hand, the student values family first and assumes external control of performance; consequently, the student interprets the failure as uncontrollable. Since the motivation to achieve depends upon students' belief that they can control their academic outcome (Cooper, "Communication" 193–211), the interaction described by Figure 2 results in lowered motivation and probably more rather
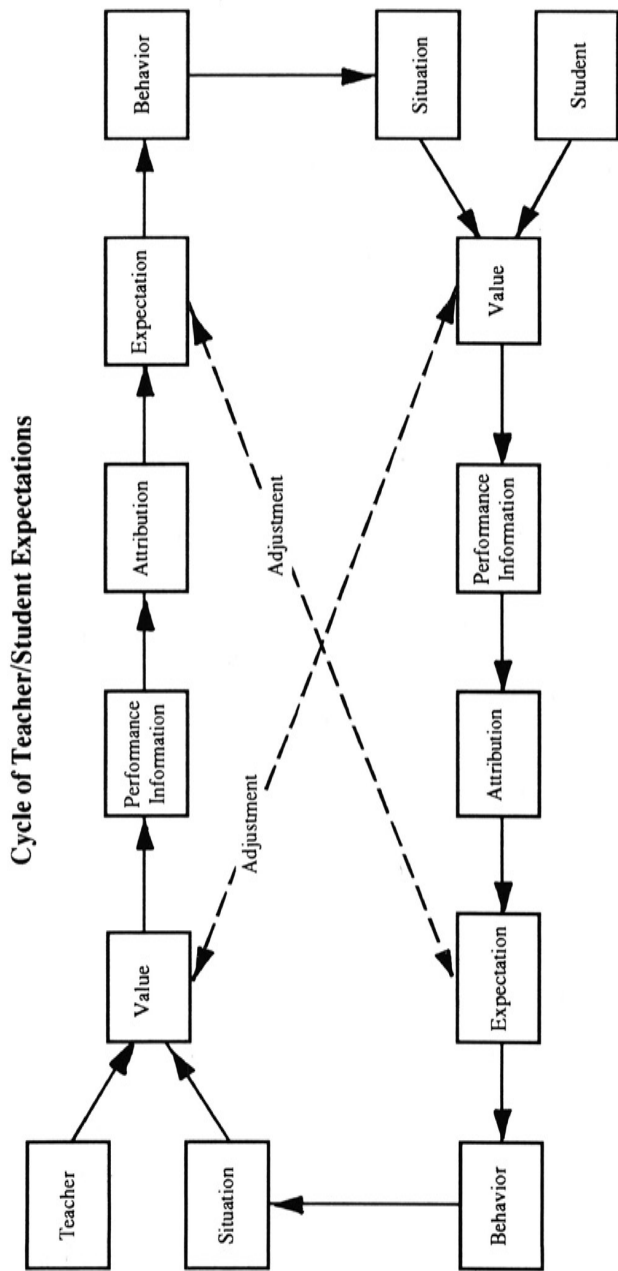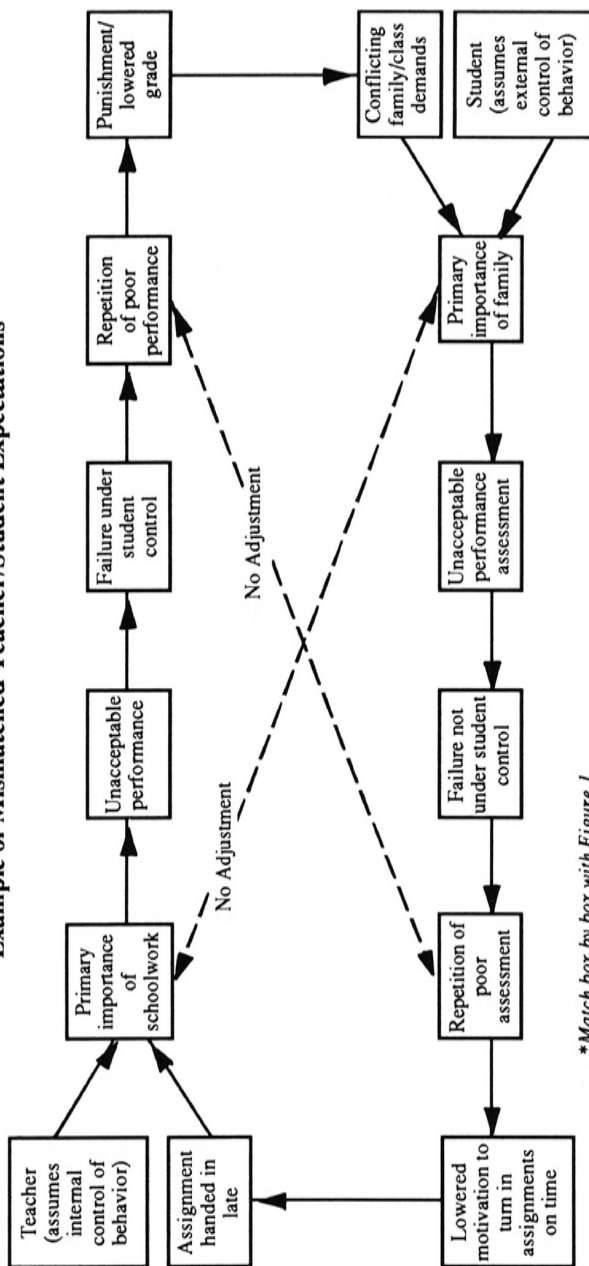
Figure 1

Cycle of Teacher/Student Expectations

Figure 2*

Example of Mismatched Teacher/Student Expectations

*Match box by box with Figure 1.

103

than fewer late assignments. The behaviors of both student and teacher are rational within the framework of their own value structures; however, in Figure 2 since student and teacher values and expectations are mismatched, each may perceive the behavior of the other as irrational and unpredictable.

Study of Two Basic Writing Classes

To test the predictions of the model, we studied two basic writing classes, both taught by the same teacher. The teacher described interaction in the classes as frustrating, with response to motivational strategies haphazard and student involvement uneven. The correlation between the teacher's evaluation of her students' success in the course, as measured by final grades, and the students' self-evaluated success, as measured by an end-of-the-semester poll of grades expected, was weak ($r = .44$, where r shows the degree of relationship between two variables and where the strongest possible correlation is $+1$ or -1). The correlations between the students' high school grades in English and both their final grades and their expected grades in the developmental course were also extremely low ($r = .10$ and $r = .09$). All three sets of correlations suggest that students found neither their past experiences in English courses nor teacher feedback in the developmental course to be particularly helpful in predicting their final grades.

Subjects

The study focused on 31 students, representing five ethnic backgrounds: non-Hispanic White (9), Native American (4), Hispanic (13), Black (2), and Oriental (3). All but one of the students were freshmen and had been placed in the course by low ACT (American College Test) and diagnostic test scores. The remaining student was nontraditional, returning to the university after an absence of several years and taking the course to review basic writing skills. Twelve of the students were the first in their families to attend college, while 19 had college-educated parents—a surprisingly high percentage (61%) for a developmental class and a possible indicator that these students would be closer in values and behavior to the general college population than were their classmates.

The teacher for both sections was non-Hispanic White, held a Ph.D. in English, and had been a first-generation college student.

Methods

The study combined qualitative and quantitative methods. To begin, we conducted classroom observations and interviews, collecting student and teacher comments and soliciting clarifying responses about the importance of the class, their commitment to their work, and the relative importance of other demands on their time and energies (see Raths *et al.* for research guidelines). We then used the comments and responses to prepare a values questionnaire that asked students to rate the importance of the various elements they had indicated comprised their lives (school, work, family, athletics, friends, church, clubs, creative interests, home); make decisions concerning class-related dilemmas; and explain the importance of a college education as well as the sacrifices they were willing or not willing to make to succeed in college. We asked the teacher to respond to the questionnaire on the basis of her value belief or "what ought to be" (see Ames 109) and her expectations concerning student values and behavior. And we also compiled student profiles, detailing demographic information, records of class attendance, and the excuses given for any missed classes or late assignments.

Results

To compare the teacher's expectations and students' expressed values, as reported on the questionnaire, we used a chi-square analysis as a "test of goodness of fit" (Spatz and Johnston 236). Analysis of each item in the questionnaire tested the hypothesis that students' expressed values would fit or match teacher expectations. The comparison of teacher and student ratings of the importance to students of school, family, friends, and so forth showed that they would only agree one in a thousand times (that is, a statistically significant difference at the .001 level). This result not only rejected the initial hypothesis but also supported the opposite hypothesis that student values did not fit and could not be predicted from teacher expectations.

Comparison of teacher and student resolutions of classroom dilemmas differed according to the type of question. We did not find a statistically significant difference on traditional study-skills questions. On these questions chi square equaled 1.5, resulting in acceptance of the hypothesis that student answers matched teacher expectations. But we did find a significant difference when choices involved the competing demands of family or friends. On the people-related questions, there was no fit between teacher expecta-

tions and students' answers. The tabulated chi-square value was 17.3, which was statistically significant to the .01 level; therefore, the initial hypothesis was rejected: students' resolutions of the classroom dilemmas did not match teacher expectations when the question involved family or friends.

Table 1

Chi-Square (X^2) Analyses:
Comparing A & B with levels of C, D, & E,
where p refers to probability or chance

A & B	X^2	P
C	20.2	< .01
D	1.5	> .05
E	17.3	< .01

A = Teacher Expected Value
B = Student Expected Value
C = Importance of School, Family
D = Study-Skills Questions
E = People-Related Questions

In further analysis we compared students' answers on people-related questions in terms of the students' ethnic backgrounds. We found no significant differences, suggesting that although the students disagreed with the teacher, they nonetheless agreed with each other. Moreover, we found no significant differences between the responses of students whose parents had attended college and students whose parents had not.

The final item on the questionnaire asked students to explain in essay form the importance of a college education and the sacrifices they would make to succeed. All of the students said that a college education is important, and 80% said they would be willing to make sacrifices to succeed; however, less than a third rated college at the highest level as "most important." Several defined importance in terms of pleasing friends and family, but most explained that college is necessary to get a good job. Three students indicated they would be willing to sacrifice "whatever it takes" to succeed, while twenty-one students qualified their willingness to sacrifice,

saying they were "willing to sacrifice some," "to sacrifice within reason," "to sacrifice almost everything." Family and social activities, sports, fun, and jobs were all mentioned as special reservations, with more of the students reserving family and friends than other activities.

The teacher's response to the same question described education as the "*raison d'être* for students during the college years" and, therefore, "the lodestone around which all other activities and commitments should be planned."

Discussion

Generally the data support the model of student/teacher interaction that we proposed earlier. The mismatch between teacher and student viewpoints seriously affected interaction in the classes, with the very real possibility that the teacher's attempts to motivate her students had the opposite effect. While the teacher placed an extremely high value on school in general and upon the basic writing class in particular, the students saw learning as only one of several important activities in their lives, some of which had prior and competing claims on their time and energies. To the teacher, class attendance and completion of assignments on time were base line behaviors—the beginning point of effort and evidence of students' commitment to succeed. To the students, commitment to the class could begin when commitments to family, friends, or jobs had been satisfied; they saw the base line on which to build success as a balance of school, social, and work activities.

Although we did not attempt to replicate the Bakan or Parsons and Goff research, the results of this study also point toward a difference in value orientation, similar to those they explore, between teacher and students. The teacher demonstrated some of the characteristics of an *agency* value structure. She emphasized individual achievement, self-assertion, self-protection, and isolation, and she appeared to segregate goals to achieve in school from goals to be affiliated or to form relationships with other people. The students, on the other hand, valued close personal relationships and helping behaviors; they seemed to integrate achievement and affiliation motives and to demonstrate characteristics of a *communion* value structure (see Bakan; Parsons and Goff 265–267; and Frieze, Francis and Hanusa 22–23).

These different value orientations also seemed to be related to contrasting perceptions of locus of control (see Wang 213–247). While the teacher saw individuals as responsible (controlling) for such classroom behaviors as attendance and turning assignments in

on time, the students saw external factors as controlling their behavior.

Table 2 outlines the different excuses students offered for missing class or turning in assignments late as well as some supporting information about diagnostic scores and background. Of the 31 students, 25 indicated they had been late turning in assignments because of external demands on time; only one student considered an excuse (studying for another class) "not legitimate" and, consequently, something for which he should be held responsible. Although there was no significant difference in the number of late assignments turned in by students in the upper and lower thirds of the class, there was a statistically significant difference in the types of excuses they offered. Students in the upper third were more likely to excuse themselves because of work, while those in the bottom third were more likely to excuse themselves because of personal activities.

Thirty students cited external demands as reasons for missing class. During the semester students reported 26 family crises, 7 emergencies at work, 10 doctor's appointments, 6 instances of car trouble, 7 hangovers, 5 emergencies having to do with other classes, 7 cases of oversleeping and tiredness, 12 cases described as "personal activities," and 1 case of not wanting to come, as well as 25 illnesses. Students in the upper and lower thirds of the class were equally likely to miss class because of family crises, work, and doctor's appointments; however, those in the upper third were more likely to cite illness and the demands of other classes as reasons for their absences. In addition, analysis of types of excuse in terms of ethnic groups showed a significant trend for absences specifically. Hispanics, Native Americans, and Blacks frequently cited family crises as a reason for not attending while no Orientals or non-Hispanic Whites used this excuse.

Of the 195 excuses that students offered for late work or absences, 160 or 82% were caused, they said, by external pressures or demands. These figures suggest that students saw external factors as controlling their behaviors and to some extent expected the teacher to share their view (otherwise, why offer the excuses?). "If it can't be helped, it can't be helped," one student told the teacher after he missed an in-class writing assignment in order to join his father on a hunting trip.

Given the different values orientations of teachers and students and their conflicting attributions of control, the interaction pattern diagrammed in Figure 2 describes many of the student/teacher interactions in the classes we studied. Classroom observations support this assumption. Students conscientiously reported to the

Table 2

Read down for each student's response; read across for class totals.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Excuses for Turning in Assignments Late:																															
Family Activities				2			2				1						1														
Illness																								1							
Work						4						1	5	2							8				2						
Other Classes							2	2							1																
Personal Activities (Friends, clubs, etc.)				1											2	4				2	12	8				2	2			1	1
Excuses for Missing Class:																															
Family Crisis				3	1	2	1	1	1			1	1			3		2	3	2	1	5									
Work													2	1								4									
Doctor's Appointments						2																	3								
Illnesses						2									1			1	1	1				2	2	1				1	
Car Trouble						1	1	1								1		1	1	4				2				1			
Other Classes	2	2																					1								
Hangover																		7													
Tiredness/Oversleeping															1					2				2	1	1			1		
Not Wanting to Come																					9						1				
Personal Activities (Friends, clubs, etc.)										2																					
Diagnostic-Essay Score[1]	65	67	70	65	65	70	65	62	67	72	67	55	55	55	65	60	70	75	60	65	55	72	69	65	70	70	65	62	70	64	60
Ethnic Background[2]	O	O	O	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	B	B	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W

[1] Scores based on possible score of 100 points, with 50 points assigned to organization and content and 50 points to the conventions of language usage and punctuation. A score of 80 points was required to by-pass basic writing.

[2] O = Oriental, H = Hispanic, NA = Native American, B = Black, W = Non-Hispanic White

teacher their reasons for missing class or turning in assignments late; some also provided excuses for not typing papers (although typing was not required) or for giving a task less than their best efforts. Nonverbal clues during these interchanges suggested the students were most confident but the teacher least accepting when the excuses involved *communion-type* values (family obligation, helping friends, and so forth). The students were less confident but the teacher more accepting when the excuses concerned *agency-type* values—the need, for example, to study for a midterm in another class or to achieve personal goals. Moreover, the teacher appeared to respond more negatively—refusing to accept late work, deducting points, or lowering a grade—when the excuses involved relationships than when they involved personal achievement goals or personal illness. When this behavior was pointed out to the teacher, she said she equated the family-crisis-type excuse with placing blame on others (an immature behavior to be discouraged); on the other hand, she felt self-oriented excuses, including not wanting to come to class, showed a mature willingness to accept responsibility for one's own behaviors and should be encouraged. Implicit in this analysis was a suggested belief that the family-type excuse actually masked some underlying personal motive for which the student did not wish to take responsibility.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The students in these classes rated the teacher highly on their end-of-the-semester evaluations, with one class giving her an "excellent" and the other an "above-average" rating. However, in both classes students indicated dissatisfaction with their own performance and said they would have liked more and clearer evaluative feedback. Several students questioned the fairness of grading procedures; moreover, the classes as a whole estimated higher deserved or expected final grades on their evaluations than the teacher actually assigned. Nearly two-thirds of the students did not, in the teacher's estimation, reach their potential. She expressed disappointment that during the final weeks of class, motivation appeared to decline rather than increase. Fewer students attended class regularly or took the opportunity to rewrite papers for higher grades.

Although neither teacher nor students felt they had failed in the course, neither felt entirely successful. Part of the dissatisfaction might be attributed to mismatched values and motivational structures; part, to unrealistic or even uninformed expectations. Clearly, both the students and the teacher needed to make some

accommodation in their perspectives. On the one hand, students have to develop the internal locus of control that researchers tie to success in learning situations (Wang 213–247). On the other hand, the teacher needs to develop a better understanding of and respect for students' *communion-style* values and motivations and to moderate her own expectations and responses in terms of those values.

"In creating motivation sometimes it is better and more convenient to change the situation rather than the person" (Maehr 894). Changing the situation through accommodation and better understanding would mean that no one, neither teacher nor students, need be alien in the developmental classroom. Once we recognize that performance situations created by teachers must in some sense adapt to students just as students must adapt to the demands of these performance situations (Maehr 887–896), we can alleviate some of the "outlandishness" that handicaps both students and teachers and begin to create a more supportive and productive classroom environment.

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