

# THE PYGMALION EFFECT IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

The appraisals that students receive at school can have important repercussions on their personal growth and on the development of individual self-esteem. The evaluation in the school context can be traced back to both the informal plan, whose actors are not only teachers but all those involved in the interactions, including students, but can also be traced back to a formal plan, the main actors of which are precisely the teachers who, through tests of various kinds, are required to make judgments on the academic performance of students.

Both types of assessment can have important influences on those involved in the interaction process and significantly affect each person's overall school experience.

These aspects are more relevant when taking into consideration pupils in disadvantaged conditions who, unfortunately, may encounter more frequent phenomena of discomfort and social exclusion.

The evaluation in the educational and scholastic domain is configured, as in other contexts, as a process that is primarily subjective and that can be influenced by stereotypes or prejudices that can invalidate its objectivity. The aim of this work is to reflect on the possible consequences deriving from evaluation distortions by teachers on school inclusion. In particular, we will try to investigate the possible implications, both positive and negative, that the "Pygmalion Effect" or "Rosenthal Effect" can have in the school context and, in particular, on the emotional and motivational components of students who are in conditions of fragility.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Motivation, Pygmalion effect, Evaluation distortion, School inclusion.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the school environment, the Pygmalion effect is considered one of the main errors of subjective evaluation. This leads to a distortion of judgment. The distorting effects of evaluation, in addition to being viewed negatively, can also be constructively used, in a positive key. Such effects may well be, for students, a source of motivation for learning, looking towards them positive expectations, not necessarily expressed verbally [1]. This helps the pupil to have self-confidence.

The central role is certainly that of the teachers who, by establishing a good relationship with the students, also aim for educational success. Teachers are a source of input (stimuli), in particular with the children in whom they place greater hopes. The teacher expects more from the children involved in the pygmalionic relationship.

There will be suggestions, aids, metaphors, concrete cases and greater patience towards such students, giving the pupil the opportunity to express their opinions, thoughts and opinions and trying to fully involve them.

Should errors occur, there will be greater availability towards the pupils involved in the pygmalionic relationship; the pupil will be corrected through a timely, specific, explanatory and affectionate intervention. Therefore, a pupil's success is due to two factors: the teacher's gratification and motivation [2].

Characterizing is the "reinforcement" procedure, which is a psychological learning procedure that refers to a specific scientific procedure. "Reinforcing an answer" is important since it does not mean repeating or having it repeated but rather means increasing the likelihood that the correct behavior will repeat itself. An example: if the teacher has praised a pupil, the pupil will make sure to repeat the behavior for which he was praised [3].

The process of evaluating pupils by teachers is central. Evaluation is an action to know and understand followed by the category of interpretation, a subjective fact that is conditioned by emotions, feelings, images and our projections. Originally, the word "evaluate" means recognition, the attribution of a value that involves the explication of a judgment. In the didactic practice, observation is characteristic. D.

Pennac in his novel "Monsieur Malaussène" states "... The teacher has not only eyes to see, he has eyes that show, he knows how to see with the eyes of others" [4].

Through observation, the teacher sees the pupil with a holistic perspective, collects data and information that are laid down as foundations for interpersonal relationships, an important element for effective teaching action [5]. Very often, for various reasons, the assessment tends to be inaccurate and this generates discontent for the student, with consequences also on the future performance.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In evaluating, the teacher must try to be as careful and precise as possible; he must make use of his cognitive skills to establish which is the correct evaluation to attribute to students' performance.

However, the teacher is a human being. Even when the teacher tries to be very objective in evaluating pupils, he is affected by external influences that affect the evaluation. The background of the teacher, that is the cultural background, his knowledge, influences his actions since he tends to compare the situation to be evaluated and the situations that have arisen in the past, in order to be able to evaluate the differences [5].

The judgment errors that are generated within the context in which the teacher works generate what is known as assessment bias. Assessment biases correspond to a deformation of the evaluation, in this case in the educational field, due to a prejudice on the part of the subject who evaluates. The effects that the evaluation distortions generate are important, and among these is the Pygmalion effect [6].

Pupils are able to understand "evaluative injustices" and the disappointment due to judgment leads them to discouragement and also to abandoning the study of the discipline.

The assessment should be used to make the pupils to understand their strengths and weaknesses on which to intervene, avoiding attitudes that lead to discouragement and that generate the so-called Pygmalion effect, that is, in this case, the conviction of being an incompetent.

Due to the Pygmalion effect, students adapt to teachers' expectations and this can have a positive value since it can have the positive meaning of pushing students towards expected performance [7].

This is how prejudice comes into play: stimuli and questions are selected based on expectations. The teacher believes he knows the student's cognitive limit and skills without carrying out a real assessment.

The choice of the questions to ask and the stimuli to be submitted in this case is not accidental, but tends to confirm the prejudice. If the prejudice were to be denied, it is not always canceled but there is a tendency towards randomness related interpretations.

Academic performance and learning opportunities vary according to various factors, including social, cultural and environmental factors. Tests are characteristic for evaluation, they provide elements of knowledge, but to be meaningful they need further elements and erroneous interpretations can be applied to these.

There are different types of tests, such as the intelligence test, the multiple or specific aptitude test.

Profit tests are typical in the school environment, which can be limited to a specific topic, articulated with various questions to be answered. Profit tests are divided as follows: entrance test, unit test and summary test.

The traditional form for the assessment of profit is the oral question, which is an interview with the teacher which should involve the whole class, causing a guided discussion in which the teacher has the role of listener, stimulating deductions, connections and reflections.

The oral exam allows communications involving several dimensions: verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal and proxemics. All this should make us reflect on the influence our judgment has on others, whether positive or negative, especially in children.

Being valued is like being identified by others through specific characteristics, such as being labeled. But what happens if we label pupils as lazy, clueless and rude? It would affect the perception that children have of them and this would lead to a change in them: they will tend to behave as they are labeled.

The school environment is a place to test yourself. To increase the motivation to learn and to improve, it is necessary that the student has positive school experiences and that these experiences are attributed

to the real causes. School failure is the result of various factors, including socio-cultural, personal and socio-economic factors.

The difficult situation of children at school is defined by the term "school marginality", which can have an explicit form, expressed through failures and dropouts, or a latent form, expressed through self-exclusion due to the lack of relationships with teachers and classmates.

The latent form risks having repercussions on the formation of the identity and on the educational and professional outcomes of the child. The term "early school leaving" refers to situations in which slowdowns or interruptions in the normal course of study or training occur. But school failure is also the result of an incorrect assessment due to prejudices on the part of teachers towards pupils.

Teachers would implicitly tend to consider "normal" that only a percentage of students can achieve good results, considering pupils as belonging to a population with randomly distributed characteristics and school and teaching as partially affecting the basic potential of students.

According to some researchers, this phenomenon is interpreted as a consequence of forms of social pressure, which would push teachers, to be professionally credible, on the one hand to permanently attribute a certain percentage of negative evaluations to their students and on the other, to limit positive evaluations, especially at the expense of disadvantaged students, who would thus run the risk of being doomed to scholastic failure.

By implementing prejudices, teachers are unable to objectively evaluate pupils; as human beings, teachers are conditioned by external influences that affect evaluation, and this very often does not allow to carry out an authentic assessment. Authentic assessment focuses on the learning process, not just the occasional performance.

Authentic assessment helps to evaluate not only "knowledge", but helps to reflect on how knowledge is used to perform a task. The intent of authentic assessment is to engage students in tasks that require applying knowledge in real-world experiences [8]. It is based on the belief that school learning is not demonstrated with the accumulation of knowledge, but with the ability to generalize, transfer and use the knowledge acquired in real contexts. In this sense, what characterizes it is a personal intent, a reason to commit oneself and a listening beyond the teacher's ability.

But what happens through the evaluation? What do prejudices cause?

The teacher has prejudices towards pupils that influence their attitude and behavior, favoring pupils towards whom there are positive expectations. Through prejudices, teachers create an image of pupils that does not correspond to reality. All this manifests itself through verbal and non-verbal channels, consolidating perceptions also in the students, thus putting into effect the "self-fulfilling prophecy". If a teacher tends to believe that a pupil is good, he will tend to positively influence him in various ways, through positive, encouraging and trusting attitudes and messages.

Unconsciously, however, the teacher tends to have an opposite behavior towards the pupils who are considered not very capable; there will be a negative influence towards them, characterized by an attitude of indifference, mistrust, pessimism.

### **3 RESULTS**

Pupils are not evaluated for their real abilities and potential. All this causes them discomfort and distrust, leading to several strictly negative consequences. According to the Pygmalion effect, children tend to change their attitude based on the judgment attributed to them, and consequently they will behave according to how they are defined. In this case, the pupils will think they will not be able to carry out the didactic activities and acquire knowledge. They will lose confidence in themselves and their abilities; they will feel abandoned because, not considered capable, they will not enjoy the same attention as the children who are considered intelligent.

The characterizing factor of the students is the motivation, which corresponds to the emotional relationship that the students have towards the study and the school world. It is expressed as the cognitive commitment that the student invests in achieving school goals [11].

Motivation is closely related to the perception of oneself, one's abilities and one's sense of self-efficacy. Furthermore, it is influenced by the beliefs that the individual has of his or her value, expectations of success or failure. It arises and develops through the interaction between teachers and pupils.

Individuals are spontaneously motivated to learn when they are not afraid of failure, when they understand the importance, from a personal point of view, of what they are learning, when they have a relationship of esteem and support from the teachers.

Pupils feel motivated to learn when teachers offer them the opportunity to make independent decisions and to exercise some control over their learning process. To foster motivation, the school should encourage each student to be active, foster the natural learning process, and allow for dialogue and exchange of ideas. Teachers need to be aware of the consequences their attributions have on pupils.

When this fails, the student will lose motivation, so we will talk about demotivation, and the student will not encourage himself to always bring out the best in his abilities. If a pupil believes that school is a waste of time, he will give life to emotional experiences that range from apathy to boredom, from anxiety to anger [9]. If the student will have emotional experiences that vary from enthusiasm to interest and curiosity, obviously the opposite will happen. Success or failure is not due to the individual, but to the components of the situation itself.

How do you get students to study? The decision to study must be made by the students themselves, while the school has the task of encouraging each student to be active, it must favor the natural learning process, it must allow dialogues, comparisons, etc. Obviously to make this happen, there should be no bias on the part of teachers, teachers should create the same opportunities for all students regardless of their abilities, since, as Rosenthal and Jacobson demonstrated with their experiment, with the right support and encouragement from teachers everyone can achieve excellent results regardless of basic preparation [10].

“Students need to value their learning experience and to know and reflect on the meaning of studying”.

Low self-esteem can lead to early school leaving. This phenomenon in Italy covers 17%. In general, this phenomenon refers to processes of delay in the course of study, which sometimes lead to abandonment.

Generally, school dropout is not the result of a sudden choice, but is usually a consequence of a long path of insufficient educational results. This corresponds to the abandonment of children from the school context; at the base there are innumerable factors, including causes of a personal nature linked to the sense of inadequacy and failure, sometimes linked to unrecognized disorders, which generate failure and consequently mistrust and suffering.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Many students are dissatisfied with the school, for the didactic programs, for the teaching methods, for the difficult relationships with the teachers and the prejudices of the latter are precisely among the causes of school dropout, since the incorrect evaluation of the pupils generates in them discomfort leading to refusal to study and causes school dropout [12]. Being a very complex phenomenon to be countered, collaboration within schools and by all the actors involved becomes fundamental.

Teachers differ in the criteria used for student evaluation. Mistakes are viewed negatively, as something to be avoided. Low-achieving students rarely achieve perfect results, and as a result, treating mistakes as something to be avoided will negatively affect them, as they will continually feel humiliated. Generally, in the school context, the four factors characterizing the positive Pygmalion effect are not implemented. We are self-convinced that prejudices correspond to reality and consequently attitudes will be implemented that will prove their truthfulness.

The situation is similar with respect to pupils with disabilities, as regards their learning and their assessment [13]. There are many negative effects that are generated in relation to the assessment, in relation to all pupils. It often happens that these children do not have good school support, also due to the lack of a support teacher.

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