



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Resource Sheet

Empathy and the « Pygmalion » effect: the positive influence of a positive view on the Other

Section of the module /Define

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“As soon as the teachers started treating him like a good student he truly became one: if we want people to deserve our trust, we must begin with trusting them”

Marcel Pagnol

1 - Thematic

The theme discussed here is **“Empathy and the “Pygmalion” effect: the positive influence of a positive view on the Other”**.

The purpose of this resource sheet will be to answer the question of the special place that the theoretical considerations on the so-called "Pygmalion" effect (i.e. self-fulfilling prophecy) and on the "Golem" effect can take in the work of educational and pedagogical accompaniment of learners with Special Educational Needs.

The purpose of this fact sheet will be to describe the work and research in the field of social psychology and pedagogy concerning these Pygmalion and Golem effects, in order to extract the key elements allowing teachers and caregivers to set up **pedagogical tools** and a **relational positioning** that can enable the child with SEN to develop his / her potentialities at most.

The Pygmalion effect: the positive influence of a positive view on the Other

The Pygmalion effect, also known as the "Rosenthal and Jacobson effect" (named after the psychologist and educator who studied it in an experimental way), refers to the idea that **preconceptions that a person (as an authority figure) designs on another (especially the teacher on his / her pupil) influences and determines the latter in his / her construction, his / her behaviours, and his / her potentialities.**

The psychologist Robert Rosenthal discovered the Pygmalion effect in a singular psychology experiment: a group of 12 rats was divided into two equal groups, then each group was assigned to a

group of 6 students to take them through a labyrinth. A classic experiment in experimental psychology, but to which Rosenthal gave a particular colouring, wishing to **verify the effect of the presence of the experimenter on the results of the experiment.**

Indeed, one of the two groups of students was told that the rats entrusted to them were particularly efficient and that excellent performance was to be expected (which was false since these rats were randomly selected). On the contrary, it was told to the other group that the rats entrusted to them had genetic characteristics that promised poor results (which was, of course, also false).

The results of this experiment were staggering and destabilizing for this scientist: the rats entrusted to the students believing that they were particularly efficient performed very well. As for the group of rats deemed deficient, the performances obtained were on the contrary bad! Thus, emerged in Rosenthal's research the **fundamental question of the influence of the accompanying person's view on the accompanied.**

Pygmalion effect and learning relationship:

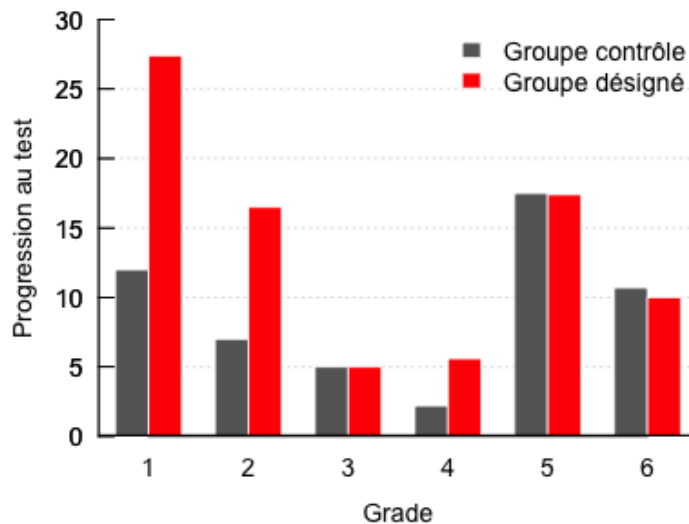
From this experience, and to understand the processes involved in this phenomenon, Rosenthal proposed the idea that **teachers' positive prejudices about their students have a major influence on the latter's potential.** To test this hypothesis at the experimental level, Rosenthal postulated that: if teachers are made to believe that their students are gifted, this will have a positive impact on the latter's progress and results.

To demonstrate this, an experiment was held at Oak School Elementary School in the suburbs of San Francisco. A school then led by pedagogue Leonore Jacobson.

The experimental set-up is as follows: researchers give IQ tests to all children. The actual results obtained in these tests are not communicated to the teachers. Among these pupils, a small number is chosen randomly. The researchers make teachers believe that these randomly selected pupils (regardless of their actual intelligence test scores) have a remarkable intelligence profile and that dramatic results are expected to be forthcoming. These researchers will give the same IQ test to all pupils at the end of the school year.

The results of this experiment will be published in 1966 (Rosenthal and Jacobson, *Psychological Reports*, vol 19., 1966) and are self-explanatory: the progression to the intelligence test for randomly selected children who are deemed "high performers" will be significantly higher than other children's outcomes.

“Control group” and “designated group” comparative results



Here, the « Grade » axis corresponds to the pupil's class.

Source : <https://sciencetonnante.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/leffet-pygmalion/>

Rosenthal named this process "Pygmalion effect" in reference to the famous Greek myth of Pygmalion and spoke about this process of a "**self-fulfilling prophecy**" (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968): the assumptions made by the teacher on the future of a child's schooling are realized simply because they have been formulated, influencing the very person who formulates them **in his / her positioning with the learner**.

The Golem effect: the (negative) influence of a (negative) view on the Other

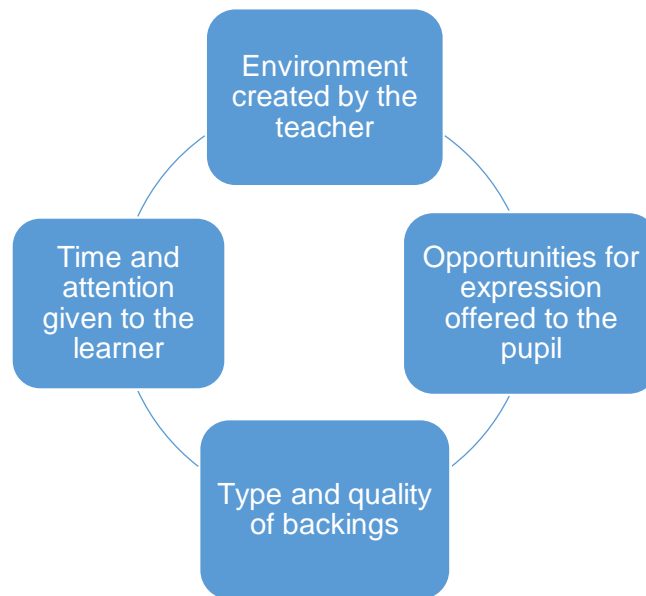
The Pygmalion effect is to be differentiated from its negative counterpart the "Golem" effect, from the name of the Jewish myth. Where the Pygmalion effect concerns the positive influence on a person of the preconceptions of an authority figure who believes in his / her success and his / her qualities, **the Golem effect for its part concerns the negative influence on a person of the preconceptions of an authority figure who does not believe in his / her success.**

It should be noted that what is at stake here is not a hypothetical "malicious intent" or a will to favour the "teacher's pets". These processes are in fact mostly unconscious. The preconceptions that are at work here are internalized, and do not determine behaviours consciously motivated by this belief. On the contrary, these preconceptions (in the sense defined by Allport, 1954) act by an effect of unconscious influence, just as it is the case for stereotypes (Hamilton & Troler, 1986). It is this part of the insidious but decisive influence of preconceptions in the learning relationship that will be at the centre of Rosenthal's work.

Empathy and the view on the Other

In order to explain how this process unfolds in the context of the learning relationship, Rosenthal developed a model describing **four factors structuring the teacher-learner relationship**:

The four factors of the learning relationship



We can see it here: **structuring the learning relationship is partly based on the empathic capacity of the teacher**. A factor to be considered in the construction of educational tools in order to take advantage of the Pygmalion effect, or limit the Golem effect.

Rosenthal said that it is these empathic abilities that are lacking in the Golem effect. Rosenthal proposed on this subject a model of the **particular relational modalities that can be built between a teacher and pupils that he / she judges to have lower abilities**:

On the non-verbal level:

- Teachers tend to stand at a greater physical distance from students they think are less effective;
- Teachers are less likely to look in the eyes of students they consider weaker;
- Teachers tend by their non-verbal attitudes (acquiescence, etc ...) to be more supportive of proposals made by students they consider better;
- Teachers tend by their non-verbal attitudes to be less supportive of pupils they consider to be less effective when they speak out.

On the verbal level:

- Teachers question less often pupils they think are performing less well;
- Teachers offer less complex content to students they consider weaker;
- Teachers make it easier to take the floor for students they consider to be effective (by providing clues to find a solution, etc.);
- Teachers rephrase more often their questions to students they consider to be effective.

As we can see, the empathic capacity here is the way to work on these factors and to think about the learning relationship or the helping relationship by proposing frameworks, benchmarks and organizational modalities (see, for example, the practical sheets "*Time organization and landmarks*" and "*Positioning and orientation in space*") to keep in touch with the needs of children with singularities, related to their Special Educational Needs.

2/ Context

We are in a class (primary or secondary school) where a pupil is psychologically disabled. This pupil is in difficulty from the point of view of his behaviour (he has indeed behavioural disorders). The teaching staff points to the difficulty of working with this pupil who has a low "self-esteem" and constantly questions his ability to succeed.

Here, based on the work and findings related to the Pygmalion effect, the teacher can set up a pedagogical tool aiming at mobilizing positive views on this pupil (on his abilities, his potentialities, his strong points, etc. ...). For example, he / she can set up a **"Cross-presentation" workshop**. A workshop in which pupils are split into small groups and where, in turn, each one introduces one of his / her classmates. The instructions may be to present the other from the positive things he / she has done this week, his / her successes etc ... This workshop is supervised by the teacher who comes to **mobilize every one's empathic abilities, and favour children's positive views on their comrades**. The teacher can contribute to these cross-presentations by bringing positive elements for each child.

Based on the same pedagogical vision, it may be proposed to a pupil to keep a **"logbook"** in which he / she is invited to note the positive things he / she has done during the day, his / her successes etc ... Time for exchange between the teacher or the accompanying person and the pupil are scheduled during the week to make an "assessment". This time is an opportunity to mobilize **the pupil's self-empathic abilities** (Rosenberg, 1999), **and thus foster a positive view of the child on him-/herself**.

3/ Goal

This sheet is to be attached to the module's trunk D as Define. It is a matter of defining here what we are talking about when talking about empathy as a real driver and a resource in learning. It is a question of providing resources to the teacher or to the accompanying person enabling him / her to modify his / her representations of what empathy allows from the point of view of teaching and learning, and thus to promote the implementation of innovative educational tools and promising relational modalities.

4/ Limits

The limit here is that the Pygmalion effect and the Golem effect belong to complex processes, and that many works in psychology and pedagogy are connected to them, moving towards often different educational visions.

Indeed, Rosenberg's initial work has been greatly supplemented and complicated by many researchers and educators. Thus, we have here a field of research that determines many orientations and educational tools.

The other major difficulty will be to translate the main principles and the Rosenberg model into specific pedagogical tools and into a specific positioning in the learning relationship.

5/ Prospects

To overcome these limits, it is up to everyone to take note of the wealth of resources available on the "Pygmalion effect", and to build from this diversity one's own practice.

To go further on this point, we invite everyone to refer to the article by David Trouilloud and Philippe Sarrazin, "*Current knowledge on the Pygmalion effect: process, weight and modulators*" (Revue Française de Pédagogie, N° 145, 2003 - http://ife.ens-lyon.fr/publications/edition-electronique/revue-francaise-de-pedagogie/INRP_RF145_7.pdf).