



Inclusive Practices & SEN

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It's in our hands

By Mohammad Hosam Alnahas

As educators, our perception of students' competence, tinted by our expectations, can dramatically impact their achievement. According to Kelly (1963) "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events." Therefore, our thinking and subsequent actions may be greatly influenced by our expectations. It might sound rather trite, but to what extent do we perceive our students as capable individuals with the potential to grow and succeed?

Areej, an undergraduate student whom I tutor, sought my assistance with a 4-stage group project that she had been assigned to complete on her own, due to her health issues (she uses a walker, has hearing difficulties, and her voice is a little low). While helping her, I tried to convince her teacher to include her in a group, highlighting the many strengths that Areej has, but I was not successful. Later, I also learned that she had been similarly exempted from delivering all presentations on the business course she was taking.

Having known Areej for a few years, as a community service tutor (Areej had never been a registered student in any of my classes), I was fully confident that she could succeed, despite her health condition. When I tutored her, I would type out my instructions and she would whisper her response in my ear. Meanwhile, when the planned student presentations were mentioned, Areej would smile broadly, showing great excitement. Therefore, I decided to intervene again in order to ensure her involvement alongside everyone else. This time, the intervention was successful, and it was decided to involve her in the public presentations.

The day before the Presentations Day, a three-hour event where students deliver presentations on their business ideas to visitors, Areej and I began designing her project poster. I contacted her mother to keep her updated, and I was deeply touched to hear that that was Areej's first opportunity to give a presentation in her whole life as a student.

I can vividly recall the first moments of the day of the event, seeing her coming through the door of the venue, almost running ahead of her mother and sister on her walker. Areej was clearly overjoyed to participate.

Using a microphone that we had bought for her, Areej presented the theme of her project to the audience of students and visitors. I remember the attention she received from other students at her stand afterwards; some took pictures with her, inspired by her words and ideas.

Evidently, Areej's participation boosted her self-confidence dramatically, transforming her perception of what she could achieve. Three weeks later, she decided to participate in the Special Needs Debate and won third place. Moreover, last semester, Areej gave an account of these experiences in a Foundation-based

TED Talk, where she was a significant source of inspiration to all who attended and won fourth place.

Reflecting on her experiences, Areej explained how she came to participate in the Showcase Event, even though she was told that she did not need to. She described her excitement about delivering her presentation, and the encouragement she received from her family and me. She added that she had won a prize for the 'Most Stunning Poster', which left her feeling elated, ending with the thought: "If there's a will there's a way. Never give up on what you really want. I strongly believe that we all have a bright future. One day you will be able to say, 'I made it'".

Areej's story is a perfect example of how our perceptions, whether positive or negative, can impact our students' achievements and motivation. It shows that the educator's role also means walking the extra mile and encouraging students to leave their 'comfort zone' so that they can realize their aspirations. It is very humbling to think that as teachers, we can instill confidence and develop our students' self-belief.

Areej has been an inspiration to her fellow students and to me, as her community tutor. The experience has consolidated my own belief that our expectations affect our dispositions, and our positive expectations of results affect our attitudes and decisions, which inevitably bear fruit in our students.

Reference

Kelly, G. A. (1963), *A theory of personality*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Mohammad Hosam Alnahas is a university lecturer based in Doha, Qatar. His research interests include studying human motivation. Mohammad has a great passion for bringing change to the world through education by motivating people, creating opportunities for them to grow as individuals so that they not only learn for a short time, but also continue to learn throughout their lives.

