4.5 Labelling and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Schools: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Where a question refers to Item D, use both the Item and your own knowledge of labelling theory in your answer.

Item D: Ryan's first term at Elmswood High

A hypothetical scenario written for this exercise, for students to apply labelling theory and the self-fulfilling prophecy to.

Ryan joins Year 9 at Elmswood High partway through the school year. On his first day, his form tutor notices that he arrives without the correct school planner and seems distracted during the register. Over the next few weeks, several teachers begin describing Ryan as 'a bit of a troublemaker' in the staff room, even though he has not actually broken any major school rules. Ryan is moved into a lower set for English after a teacher reports that he 'doesn't seem interested'. By the end of term, Ryan himself has started telling his friends that he 'isn't really a school person', and he stops volunteering answers in lessons.

1 Using Item D and your knowledge of the self-fulfilling prophecy, explain why Ryan's achievement might decline even though he has broken no major rules.

(Total for Question 1 is 6 marks)

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2 Explain two reasons why first impressions might particularly influence a teacher's early judgement of a new pupil.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

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3 Teacher expectations, based on a label, can influence how a pupil is treated.

(a) Explain what sociologists mean by 'teacher expectations' influencing achievement. **(2)**

(b) Explain how teacher expectations are linked to, but different from, cultural capital. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

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4 Sociologists studying education use the term 'labelling' to describe a particular process.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

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5 State one criticism that is often made of labelling theory as an explanation of achievement.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

6 Using Item D and your knowledge of the stages of labelling identified by Hargreaves, explain how these stages might apply to Ryan's experience.

(Total for Question 6 is 6 marks)

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Mark scheme · 4.5 Labelling and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Schools: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

correctly applies the self-fulfilling prophecy concept to Item D, e.g. Ryan is treated as a troublemaker despite not actually behaving badly, which is a prediction not based on real evidence **B1**

explains how this prediction changes treatment, e.g. teachers' lowered expectations lead to Ryan being placed in a lower set for English **B1**

explains the effect on opportunity, e.g. a lower set may offer a less challenging curriculum, giving Ryan fewer opportunities to demonstrate or develop his actual ability **B1**

explains the effect on Ryan's own behaviour, e.g. Ryan no longer volunteering answers reduces his own genuine engagement with lessons **B1**

development, e.g. this creates a cycle where reduced engagement then appears to confirm the original, inaccurate label, even though it was the label itself that caused the change **B1**

clear, accurate use of self-fulfilling prophecy terminology throughout **B1**

Answer: An inaccurate prediction (Ryan as a 'troublemaker') led to different treatment (a lower English set), reducing his opportunities and his own engagement (no longer volunteering answers), which can then appear to confirm the original label, even though the label itself caused the change, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Question 2

identifies one reason, e.g. a teacher has very limited information about a new pupil, so visible signals such as appearance, uniform or speech stand out **B1**

brief development of that reason **B1**

identifies a second, different reason, e.g. teachers face time pressures in a busy classroom, which can lead to quick generalisations rather than getting to know each pupil individually at first **B1**

brief development of that reason **B1**

Answer: First impressions matter partly because a teacher initially has very limited information about a new pupil, so visible signals (appearance, speech) stand out, and partly because time pressures in a busy classroom can lead to quick generalisations rather than getting to know each pupil individually.

Question 3

(a) identifies teacher expectations as a teacher's belief about how well a pupil is likely to do, based on a label or earlier impression (oe) **B1**

(a) development, e.g. these expectations can shape how much encouragement, attention or challenging work a pupil is actually given **B1**

(a) Answer: Teacher expectations are a teacher's belief about how well a pupil is likely to do, based on a label or impression, which can shape how much encouragement or challenging work the pupil is actually given.

(b) identifies a link, e.g. pupils with more cultural capital may be more likely to be seen as closer to the 'ideal pupil', raising teacher expectations of them **B1**

(b) identifies the difference, e.g. cultural capital is about a pupil's own home-based resources, while teacher expectations are about how a teacher perceives and then treats a pupil, whatever their actual resources **B1**

(b) Answer: Pupils with more cultural capital may be more likely to be seen as closer to the 'ideal pupil', raising teacher expectations of them; but cultural capital is a pupil's own home-based resource, while teacher expectations are about how a teacher perceives and treats a pupil, which can be inaccurate.

Question 4

attaching a definition or judgement to a person based on a characteristic, such as behaviour, appearance or background, rather than simply their actual ability (oe) **B1**

development, e.g. once applied, a label can affect how a pupil is treated by teachers and other pupils **B1**

Answer: Attaching a judgement to a pupil based on a characteristic such as behaviour or appearance, rather than actual ability; once applied, a label can affect how the pupil is treated.

Question 5

identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it can be too deterministic, assuming a pupil will always live up (or down) to a label, when in reality some pupils reject or resist labels **B1**

brief development, e.g. or that it is difficult to prove a label actually caused a change in achievement, rather than simply reflecting a pupil's existing behaviour **B1**

Answer: Critics argue labelling theory can be too deterministic, since some pupils reject or resist labels, and it is difficult to prove a label caused a change in achievement rather than simply reflecting existing behaviour.

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Question 6

correctly applies the speculative-hypothesis stage to Item D, e.g. the form tutor's early impression (no planner, distracted) forms an initial, tentative judgement of Ryan	**B1**
correctly applies the elaboration stage, e.g. teachers begin describing Ryan as a 'troublemaker' in the staff room, spreading and reinforcing the early impression despite no major rule-breaking	**B1**
correctly applies the stabilising/fixed-label stage, e.g. being moved to a lower set for English shows the label has become built into how the school formally treats Ryan	**B1**
links to internalisation, e.g. Ryan telling his friends he 'isn't really a school person' shows the label has become part of how Ryan sees himself	**B1**
further development, e.g. Ryan no longer volunteering answers shows him acting in line with the label, illustrating the process moving from labelling towards a self-fulfilling prophecy	**B1**
clear, accurate use of labelling terminology throughout (e.g. speculative hypothesis, elaboration, self-fulfilling prophecy)	**B1**

Answer: The form tutor's early impression is a speculative hypothesis, elaborated as other teachers repeat the 'troublemaker' description; the move to a lower set stabilises the label institutionally, and Ryan's own comment that he 'isn't really a school person', followed by his silence in lessons, shows him internalising and acting in line with the label.

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