



GSOC.ED5 Labelling and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Schools

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

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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 Howard Becker's research on labelling in schools examined teachers' image of what?

- ☐ A) The 'ideal pupil'
- ☐ B) The 'ideal parent'
- ☐ C) The 'ideal curriculum'
- ☐ D) The 'ideal exam'

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 Howard Becker interviewed teachers in Chicago high schools about their image of the 'ideal pupil'.

(a) Explain what Becker's research found about teachers' image of the 'ideal pupil'. (2)

(b) Explain why Becker's findings are relevant to social class. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The researchers Rosenthal and Jacobson carried out a well-known study, published as *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968).

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 Rosenthal and Jacobson's study is closely linked to the sociological concept of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

6 The sociologist David Hargreaves (with Hester and Mellor) identified stages by which teachers can build up a label for a new pupil.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

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

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one criticism that is often made specifically of the Rosenthal and Jacobson study.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Look again at Item D. Over Ryan's first term, teachers form an impression of him, describe him as a 'troublemaker', move him to a lower set, and Ryan begins to see himself as 'not really a school person'.

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 9 is 6 marks)

10 Look again at Item D. Ryan has not actually broken any major school rules, yet his engagement and set placement have both declined by the end of term.

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 10 is 6 marks)

11 Sociologists also use the term 'master status' when discussing labelling.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 Labels can be negative or positive, and can affect a pupil's set placement as well as their self-image.

(a) Explain one way being placed in a lower set might reinforce a negative label. (2)

(b) Explain one way a positive label might benefit a pupil. (2)

(Total for Question 12 is 4 marks)

13 State one way a school might try to reduce the negative effects of labelling on pupils.

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

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

(Total for Question 14 is 4 marks)

15 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 15 is 4 marks)

16 Explain one reason why a self-fulfilling prophecy might be particularly powerful in the earliest weeks of a new school year or a new school.

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

17 Explain how the concepts of 'labelling' and the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' are related but different.

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ED5 Labelling and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Schools

Question 1

- **B1** A (the 'ideal pupil')
- **Answer: A**

Question 2

- **B1** 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
- **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 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that Becker interviewed Chicago high school teachers about the characteristics of their 'ideal pupil'
- (a) **B1** finding, e.g. he found teachers tended to judge pupils partly on appearance, speech and behaviour, not only on ability or effort
- (a) **Answer: Becker interviewed Chicago high school teachers and found they tended to judge pupils partly on appearance, speech and behaviour, not only on their ability or effort.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that the characteristics teachers valued were often closer to middle-class norms of appearance, speech and behaviour
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. meaning working-class pupils could be judged further from the 'ideal pupil' image, regardless of their true ability
- (b) **Answer: The characteristics teachers valued were often closer to middle-class norms, so working-class pupils could be judged further from the 'ideal pupil' image regardless of their actual ability.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies that the researchers told teachers certain pupils, actually selected at random, had been identified as likely to make rapid academic progress ('spurters')
- **B1** identifies teachers were not told the selection was random and believed the information reflected real test results
- **B1** finding, e.g. the study found these randomly selected pupils showed greater improvement over the following year than other pupils
- **B1** development, e.g. the researchers argued teachers' raised expectations led to different treatment of these pupils, helping to bring about the improvement, a self-fulfilling prophecy
- **Answer: Rosenthal and Jacobson told teachers that randomly selected pupils were likely 'spurters'; those pupils went on to show greater improvement, which the researchers attributed to teachers' raised expectations changing how they treated the pupils, a self-fulfilling prophecy.**

Question 5

- **B1** a prediction that comes true partly because it was made, e.g. because people act differently as a result of believing it (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. applied to education, a pupil labelled as bright or as a troublemaker may begin to act in line with that label
- **Answer: A prediction that comes true partly because it was made, because people act differently as a result of believing it; in education, a pupil labelled as bright or a troublemaker may begin to act in line with that label.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies teachers form an initial 'speculative' hypothesis about a new pupil, based on early impressions such as appearance or behaviour
- **B1** identifies teachers then test this hypothesis against the pupil's future behaviour, looking for evidence that fits
- **B1** identifies that over time the hypothesis becomes 'elaborated' as more supporting evidence is noticed and remembered
- **B1** development, e.g. eventually the label may become fixed and stable, shaping how the teacher, and even the pupil, comes to see them
- **Answer: Hargreaves identified stages of labelling: teachers form a speculative early hypothesis about a new pupil, test it against later behaviour, elaborate it as supporting evidence is noticed, and the label can eventually become fixed, shaping how the pupil is seen and comes to see themselves.**

Question 7

- **B1** 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
- **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.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. later researchers have questioned aspects of its methods and found it difficult to fully replicate the original results
- **B1** development, e.g. so some sociologists treat it as a valuable illustration of the self-fulfilling prophecy concept, rather than final proof of exactly how strong the effect always is
- **Answer: Later researchers have questioned aspects of Rosenthal and Jacobson's methods and found it hard to fully replicate the results, so many sociologists treat it as an illustration of the self-fulfilling prophecy concept rather than final proof of its exact strength.**

Question 9

- **B1** 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)
- **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.**

Question 10

- **B1** 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
- **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 11

- **B1** the label that comes to dominate how a person is seen by others, overriding their other characteristics (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. a pupil might come to be seen mainly as 'the troublemaker' rather than as an individual with many other qualities
- **Answer: The label that comes to dominate how a person is seen by others, overriding their other characteristics; a pupil might come to be seen mainly as 'the troublemaker' rather than as an individual with many other qualities.**

Question 12

- (a) **B1** identifies e.g. being placed in a lower set can signal low expectations to both the pupil and their teachers
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. which may become self-fulfilling, further lowering achievement
- (a) **Answer: Being placed in a lower set can signal low expectations to the pupil and their teachers alike, which may become self-fulfilling and further lower achievement.**
- (b) **B1** identifies e.g. a pupil labelled as bright may be given more encouragement, attention or challenging opportunities by teachers
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. increasing confidence and further raising achievement, a positive self-fulfilling prophecy
- (b) **Answer: A pupil labelled as bright may receive more encouragement and challenging opportunities from teachers, which can increase confidence and further raise achievement, a positive self-fulfilling prophecy.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a genuine measure, e.g. training staff to be aware of unconscious bias, using mixed-ability teaching, or a formal 'fresh start' policy when a pupil changes class or year group
- **B1** brief accurate development
- **Answer: Training staff to be aware of unconscious bias, so that early impressions are questioned rather than automatically acted on, can help reduce the negative effects of labelling.**

Question 14

- **B1** 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
- **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 15

- (a) **B1** 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)
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. these expectations can shape how much encouragement, attention or challenging work a pupil is actually given
- **(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) **B1** 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
- (b) **B1** 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
- **(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 16

- **B1** identifies a relevant reason, e.g. pupils and teachers are meeting for the first time, so first impressions set the tone that may then last for years
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: In the earliest weeks, pupils and teachers are meeting for the first time, so first impressions can set a tone that may then last for years, giving early labels particular power.**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies labelling as the initial act of categorising a pupil based on a characteristic such as behaviour, appearance or background
- **B1** identifies the self-fulfilling prophecy as the later process by which that label can go on to influence a pupil's actual behaviour and outcomes
- **B1** development, e.g. labelling can happen without a self-fulfilling prophecy occurring, if the pupil and teachers do not act differently because of the label
- **B1** further development, e.g. so a self-fulfilling prophecy always depends on a prior label, but a label does not always lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy
- **Answer: Labelling is the initial act of categorising a pupil; the self-fulfilling prophecy is the later process by which that label can go on to shape behaviour and outcomes. A label does not always lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, but a self-fulfilling prophecy always depends on a prior label.**