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When the concept of level of aspiration is applied to inner-city youths, the effects of past discriminatory practices on their perceptions can be seen. Research data regarding this concept were gathered through work in the Developmental Career Guidance Project. The instruments utilized were the Career Guidance Surveys. They were administered to students in grades kindergarten through 12 in 1965, 1966, 1967, and 1968. Results to date suggest that lower-class children are considerably more realistic in their view of work and occupational concepts than they have been credited with. The authors say that the educational system may be reflective of the larger society, dedicated to the production of successful middle-class Caucasians at the expense of the lower-socio-economic Negroes. The lower socio-economic environment is seen as limiting the aspirations and perception levels of children. The school must be acutely aware of the environmental factors involved in the child's life. Although the interpretations, implications, and trends of the study do not lend themselves as yet to positive conclusions, they point to the desirability of more research in the areas of not only conceptions of occupation and aspiration, but also the role of education in the development of a complete and harmoniously functional society. (Author:IM)

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Level of Aspiration as a Factor in Inner-City Career Guidance

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The literature in the area of career guidance for urban youth, disadvantaged youth, inner-city youth, and needy Negro youth is not characterized by a great number of either useful or helpful concepts and constructs in regard to developing rationales for programs. The construct of level of aspiration would seem to be both useful and helpful in this regard. Although level of aspiration is hardly new, having been initially coined by Lewin (15), it is a construct that can help one to both understand and aid inner-city youth. In the sense in which the term will be used in this presentation, level of aspiration refers not only to the setting of goals but the individual's willingness to pursue these goals. In other words, level of aspiration, then, is not what an individual actually achieves, for the individual who may set particular educational or occupational goals for himself and then fails to work toward them would seem to be exhibiting a low level of aspiration. This, would, further, suggest that there is a cause-effect relationship between level of aspiration and level of achievement and that level of aspiration is a dynamic motivating force. With inner-city or minority youth, level of aspiration is often influenced by heredity and environment. In regard to minority youth, this refers to what has been termed the "self-fulfilling prophecy." This can be illustrated by a situation in which a youth would be told, "You cannot succeed, you will not succeed in a particular task or a particular occupation or in a subject area or in school." The youth then will often accept this and accept a lower level goal or occupation. On the other hand, an individual who when told that he might not be able to achieve a particular goal but accepts

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this as a challenge and then redoubles his effort and achieves that goal would be exhibiting a high level of aspiration. This is not to say that one's social inheritance, personality, and aptitudes do not also have an important effect on the individual's career development for they do set limits. However, it must be clearly understood that in the writer's eyes these limits are set much more by environmental factors than by physical inheritance.

Further, level of aspiration is tied closely to one's perception of his world and especially to one's perception of self. Wylie has brought out, in regard to the relationship of level of aspiration to self-concept, that conclusions that can be reached are not clear (22). However, her review of research would lead to the conclusion that self-over estimation is probably as common as self under-estimation. The difference in regard to effect on behavior, in all probability, is as McClelland has brought out regarding setting goals and then not carrying them through (16). So often counselors and guidance workers in this regard feel they have achieved their goal by helping an individual to verbalize a goal which is more acceptable to the counselor or guidance worker, e.g.: "Don't you want to be successful someday, Johnnie?" "Well, yes Mr. Jones. I guess I would like to be successful." "Fine, I know you will now buckle down to study." Following, the counselor or guidance worker then feels he has achieved his purpose. Unfortunately, the person with a low level of aspiration often might verbalize a desire to achieve but then will not take the intermediate steps to succeed because he will have doubts, conscious or unconscious, that he can succeed. This, again, would seem to be often true of minority youth. Consequently, then, the aspirations of inner-city youth and

suburban youth on a superficial or strictly verbal basis would seem to be similar. In other words, youth in both environments would state that they would desire to achieve similar goals. The person with a low level of aspiration, however, will, because of a lack of real belief and/or faith that he will achieve, not be able to add the crucial element of effort to his ability to then be able to succeed.

McClelland has concluded that a higher level of aspiration is one that develops in an environment where individuals are encouraged to achieve goals independently and thus developing independence at an early age (16). So, an individual's perception of his own future and, following, his ability to perceive himself as a possible success in a certain area of environment would have a crucial effect on his career development. This is so because, if an individual is unable to see himself as a white-collar, professional, technical or skilled worker he will be unable to pursue the intermediate steps necessary to achieve these occupational levels no matter how much he may verbalize this desire. In a sentence, the individual cannot develop to a greater extent than that to which he aspires--and this level of aspiration is affected by his own individual cultural, familial, and group inheritance. However, the sub-culture and one's surroundings cannot be rated as having a complete effect on the individual's career development. Level of aspiration also reflects one's motivating needs and underlying personality organization. The recognition one achieves as he develops and the amount of energy one devotes to achieving better on a certain level or other would also be of importance.

Current studies in the field dealing with aspiration are more numerous than one might initially suppose. It is worth noting, however, that much



material related to the field of aspirational studies has been done using samples of middle class youth, or those youths who are aspiring to or are already in college: Dyne's research with Sociology students in college concerning levels of aspiration (7); Gilinsky's study of self-estimate and aspiration using college students with no previous background in Psychology (8); Holt's work on aspiration with undergraduates as it related to achievement and/or defense behavior (12). While the above mentioned studies do offer relevant data concerning aspiration, none of them deal with either inner-city youth or minority youth.

The following studies cited were conducted using high school youth as samples: Gist and Bennett in their study of Negro youth noted that highest levels of aspiration scored by Negroes when compared to whites, were Negro girls--the general results, however, not being clear-cut (9).

The studies of Holloway and Berreman were designed to test the hypothesis that all students share the general cultural value of high achievement (11). The authors found instead that white middle class occupational aspirations were significantly higher than those of white and Negro lower-classes. Also, that plans varied in accordance with class position with lower-class pupils planning below those of the middle-class in both the educational and occupational areas.

These findings were in contradiction of Stephenson's research. He concluded that aspirations do not differ between classes, only that plans in lower-class groups were significantly lower than their aspirations, substantiating McClelland's position (20).

Antonovsky compared middle-class youngsters of two races (Negro and Caucasian)

with those of lower-class, as to occupational aspirations, class, and ethnic membership (1). He also included Puerto-Rican youths in his study to determine whether or not a socio-economic situation similar to that of Negroes, but with a very different history and cultural experience, presented a different picture. The author's findings pointed out that the middle-class Negro and Puerto-Rican youngsters, coming from a poorer socio-economic background, had lower aspirations than middle-class whites. However, the response pattern was not predominately apathetic as Antonovsky had expected. The percentages in each group by class giving 'high' responses on aspiration and expectation items were, white-middle, 72 percent; lower, 56 percent; while Negro-middle was 84 percent and lower, 65 percent.

Bloom, Whiteman, and Deutsch, working under the assumption that it is relevant to evaluate both race and social class as separate factors determining social environment, claimed that the problem in many previous studies had been the inability to carry out such an evaluation because sample designs had often confounded race and class (6).

The findings of these researchers showed a trend reflected by Negro children in that their verbalized occupational aspirations were significantly higher than those of the Caucasian children in the study.

Sewell, Haller, and Straus tested the general hypothesis that levels of educational and occupational aspiration of youth of both sexes are associated with the social status of their families when the effects of intelligence are controlled. The results lend support to the sociological claim that values specific to different status positions are important influencers (18).

The high level of educational and vocational aspiration expressed by some

lower-class children has been characterized by Ausubel and Ausubel as involving only the appearance rather than the substance of aiming high. In their view, the lower-class child does not perceive the eventual reward of striving and self-denial as actually attainable and fails to acquire the trait components of the middle-class delayed-gratification patterns (2).

The major impressions gathered from Simmons was that the stereotype of the elementary child as being "ignorant" and "fantasy-ridden" in their thinking about occupations should be seriously questioned and that these children may be far more prepared to receive occupational information than has been assumed previously (19).

Nelson found that a grade to grade ranking of jobs by elementary school children was sufficiently similar to his aforementioned findings to justify questioning the assumption that children in the third and fifth grades are in a fantasy stage in vocational development. However, he added that occupational study might profitably be expanded in the elementary school curriculum, resulting in the creation of concepts prior to a thorough internalization of sex typing and socioeconomic typing of occupations by individuals.

Nelson's study also pointed out that upper-socioeconomic groups scored significantly higher than the lower-socioeconomic groups in titling and describing for all jobs on which significant differences appeared (17).

Weinstein's study in occupational stratification pointed out that the attitudes, values, and modes of perception among the status groups are so related to the development process that as age increases, the disparity between the status groups also increases (20).

A summary of the above studies would indicate that there is considerable variance in the results that have thus far been obtained. Questions can be raised

concerning both the methods employed and validity of results that have been obtained. The practice of having children and adolescents rank occupations can be--and has been--seriously questioned. Further, the acceptance of verbalized aspirations of inner-city and minority youth by many investigators is involved since it has been shown that there are significant differences between ideal and real aspirations.

When one applies the concept of level of aspiration to inner-city youth, one can see the effects of past discriminatory practices on their perceptions. Far too often, the member of a minority group, because of his experience and background, has a distorted perception of what the present-day world has to offer and with good reason. Not only have non-whites in general had an unemployment rate over 100 percent higher than their white counterparts, but this difference has been apparent in all occupational groups as well, white-collar as well as blue-collar. Consequently, the non-white youngster often sees the world as being without opportunity for him, and therefore reasons, "why bother preparing himself for such a world?" To cite an illustration: The U.S. Post Office in Detroit was for years known as "the graveyard of the educated Negro," since so many Negro employees had attained baccalaureate and higher degrees.

In Detroit, we began to gather research data regarding this concept through work in the Developmental Career Guidance Project in 1964. The instruments utilized were titled the Career Guidance Surveys.

The CG Surveys, Levels I, II and III have been administered to students in grades K-12 in the six elementary, two junior high schools and the senior high school of the project in 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1968.

The Level I survey consists of ten sets of 8 x 11 photographs. Each set of pictures represents four levels of occupational prestige as indicated in the North-Hatt Study of prestige ranking occupations. This approach by the National



Opinion Research Center obtained ratings for 96 occupations by asking its subjects to place each occupation in one of five grades according to its "general standing" compared with all other occupations.

The Level I survey was designed to ascertain children's perceptions of various levels of occupations in order to see if it would be possible to gain any valid indication of children's perceptions of occupations at various levels. It is important to note that the presentations that were made at Level I were also made in the Level II and Level III surveys. (In the higher level surveys, these were made in verbal fashion.)

The system used in designing these surveys was to divide the North-Hatt list into quartiles and then select occupations from each quartile that it was deemed students in the project area might be familiar with.

A. Scientist	B. Accountant	C. Mail Carrier	D. Taxi-driver
E. Banker	F. Teacher	G. Barber	H. Soda Clerk
I. Engineer	J. Musician	K. Clerk	L. Janitor
M. Minister	N. Radio Announcer	O. Garage Mechanic	P. Shoe Shiner
Q. Lawyer	R. Electrician	S. Machine Operator	T. Waiter (lower class)

Each occupation is repeated once in a different context during the course of the presentation (at all three levels).

Thus, the method of organization in the surveys is as follows:

1. A B C D
2. E F G H
3. I J K L
4. M N O P

5. Q R S A
6. T C F I
7. D G J M
8. P S B E
9. H K N T
10. L O R Q

Thus, it can be seen that each occupation is not only repeated in a different context but also appears in a different placement of order in the presentation.

A further note: In the two presentations, we attempted to allow for racial differences by (1) presenting both a Caucasian and Negro in the two presentations made of a particular occupation, or (2) presenting an integrated situation, or (3) allowing the subject to be somewhat ambiguous (e.g., the taxi driver cannot be seen well, the mail-carrier is light-complected, the soda clerk is somewhat ambiguous).

In terms of North-Hatt quartiles, the presentation is as follows:

North-Hatt quartile	I	A	E	I	M	Q
North-Hatt quartile	II	B	F	J	N	R
North-Hatt quartile	III	C	G	K	O	S
North-Hatt quartile	IV	D	H	I	P	T

The directions for the administration of the Level I questionnaire were developed with the help of Miss Ellen Stephens, a guidance consultant in the project and Dr. William Van Hoose of Wayne State University.

The surveys were administered at the outset of a program designed to affect educational-occupational aspiration through emphasis on career guidance in grades 1 through 12. The program itself is described elsewhere (14). Following, the

surveys have been administered yearly to students in the program as well as to a group of students matched with those in the experimental population on both socioeconomic and school achievement variables.

Students in the experimental schools have been exposed to a broad program of activities designed to raise aspirational level. These activities include individual and small group counseling, field trips, use of role-models, work with parents and community, and modification of curricular experiences. The program itself is described elsewhere (14).

## EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL SCHOOL RESULTS OF PRE AND POST TEST

## ADMINISTRATION OF THE CAREER GUIDANCE SURVEY, LEVEL I

Grades K-3

N's Noted

## NORC Level of Aspiration Quartile

	N			I			II			III			IV		
	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967
**E <sub>1</sub>	298	270	238	28%	31%	31%	25%	27%	39%	22%	24%	23%	25%	20%	17%
C <sub>1</sub>	165	152	133	28	29	25	26	23	22	22	23	26	24	25	27
E <sub>2</sub>	365	325	291	25	26	27	22	23	21	25	24	23	28	26	29
C <sub>2</sub>	330	313	303	25	26	24	21	23	24	24	22	24	30	29	28
**E <sub>3</sub>	320	310	303	24	27	28	23	28	29	25	24	23	28	22	20
C <sub>3</sub>	255	243	225	28	28	25	24	22	25	22	23	23	26	27	27
**Total Exp.	983	905	832	26	28	29	23	27	27	23	24	23	28	21	21
Total Control	750	708	661	26	27	24	23	23	24	23	23	25	28	27	27

Thus, the results show that the experimental school populations did experience a significant rise in their levels of aspiration than the control schools. The results at the first quartile were inconclusive after one year, but significant differences emerged after two years. The results at the fourth quartile, and on several occasions, at the fourth and second quartiles, indicate that the students in the experimental schools did, indeed, hold higher levels of aspiration after the experiment than they did previously. Indeed, in instances throughout the eleventh grades, the level of aspiration of students in control schools went down. Thus, perhaps the greatest contribution of the Development Career Guidance Project has been in helping combat the deteriorating process that so often occurs in regard to the aspiration and, following, the achievement of inner-city youth.

\*\*Difference significant at .01 level.



## EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL SCHOOL RESULTS ON PRE AND POST TEST

## ADMINISTRATION OF THE CAREER GUIDANCE SURVEY, LEVEL II

Grades 4-6

N's Noted

## NORC Level of Aspiration Quartile

	N			I			II			III			IV		
	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967	1965	1966	1967
**E <sub>1</sub>	232	220	205	28%	29%	31%	29%	35%	31%	24%	21%	22%	19%	15%	16%
C <sub>1</sub>	197	172	159	30	30	29	27	27	26	25	26	22	18	17	23
*E <sub>2</sub>	215	210	188	24	26	21	24	23	28	24	26	27	28	25	24
**C <sub>2</sub>	280	264	254	27	25	25	30	25	26	23	23	20	20	27	29
*E <sub>3</sub>	415	411	383	30	32	32	25	27	29	24	22	20	21	19	19
*C <sub>3</sub>	290	275	233	30	28	27	26	27	26	24	26	23	20	19	24
**Total Exp.	862	841	776	29	29	30	25	28	30	25	24	22	21	19	18
**Total Control	767	711	646	29	27	27	28	27	26	23	23	22	20	23	25

Thus, the results of the Level II survey seem to parallel, in several regards, the results, of the Level I survey. There has been more growth in regard to occupational aspiration among the students in the experimental schools than those in the control schools. This growth leads to the conclusion that a comprehensive guidance program can help compensate for the effects of factors such as socio-economic environment and familial values. The importance of this conclusion is underlined by the Coleman report: "Of all the variables measured in the (Equality of Educational Opportunity) survey, the attitudes of student interest in school, self-concept and sense of environmental control show the strongest relations to achievement (5)." One test of this conclusion that concerned the Developmental Career Guidance staff whether or not changes in perception would be

\* Difference significant at .05, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Two Sample Test  
(Large Sample two-tailed test)

\*\*Difference significant at .01 level.

accompanied by changes in behavior. The following preliminary data indicate that they are in the following important areas:

		Drop Out Rate	Plan to Enter College	Plan to Enter Other School	Plan to Obtain Employment	Jobs Promised	Other	N
Experimental School	January 1965	49%	36(11%)	37(12%)	220(68%)	40(12%)	26 (8%)	319 <sup>1</sup>
	January 1968	30%	57(33%) <sup>2</sup>	34(20%)	78(45%)	45(26%)	2 (1%)	171
	June 1968	36%	126(41%)	21(7%)	150(49%)	99(32%)	13 (5%)	308
Total Detroit Graduates	January 1965 <sup>3</sup>		723(28%)	226( 9%)	1419(55%)	319(23%)	212 (8%)	2580
Control School	January 1965	45%	7(10%)	11(16%)	41(58%)	8(11%)	12 (17%)	71
	January 1968	45%	18(20%)	11(13%)	53(61%)	10( 9%)	5 (6%)	88
	June 1968	41%	66(24%)	28(10%)	163(59%)	11( 4%)	8 (3%)	276

<sup>1</sup> These figures represent the graduating classes from two high schools from which the experimental school population was drawn.

<sup>2</sup> This figure represents not plans, but actual acceptances to colleges and universities.

<sup>3</sup> Comparable data on all January graduates will not be available until the Fall of 1968.

Preliminary indications are that school achievement as well is being affected:

Composite Achievement Test \*Stanine Changes 1965-1967

	<u>Experimental</u>	<u>Control</u>
Grade 4B to 6B	-.06	-.78
Grade 6B to 8B	+.38	-.10
Grade 8B to 10B	-.01	-.61

These data indicate that, as the aspiration levels of students' rise, there can possibly be an effect on school achievement. It must be emphasized that these are preliminary data and that more complete data will be forthcoming. The longitudinal differences in achievement test scores shown above, however, are not significant.

\* Iowa Basic Skills and Sequential Tests of Academic Progress

The CG Survey, Level III, was administered to all students in grades 7-10 in the experimental and control schools. Although the reading level of this survey was rather high, the directions and method of administration attempted to compensate for this. The survey consists of 85 items and uses a separate answer sheet. The survey uses the multiple choice format as well as a number of Likert-type items designed to, first, gain some information concerning student attitudes and secondly, their perceptions of help received in school, from whom this was received, and their perceptions of certain school personnel (counselors, teachers, principals, and certain individuals in their environment.) The multiple choice items also attempted to gain identifying information concerning age, grade, sex, residence, siblings, mother's occupation, fathers's occupation, mother and father's education, length of residence in Detroit, future plans, achievement, and work experience. In addition, the same items presented in the Level I and II surveys were repeated. (A complete presentation of data is to be found in The Developmental Career Guidance Project: The First Year, obtainable from the Wayne State University Library.)

The results indicate considerable progress in regard to affecting student perceptions and behavior. The results indicate:

1. The level of aspiration of students in experimental schools did increase significantly more than of students in control schools.
2. Students in experimental schools did seem to show more growth in regard to occupational knowledge and planning than students in control schools.
3. The students in experimental schools did seem to re-examine their value structure significantly more than students in control schools.
4. Students in experimental schools did show a more acceptable attitude towards counselors at the end of the project's first year of operation than did students in control schools. Interestingly, there did not seem to be a significant change in perception of school.
5. Students in experimental schools did perceive a greater need for professional help at the end of the project's first year than previously.

The evidence gathered seems to support the findings of Simmons, that perhaps the stereotype of the Negro lower-elementary child as ignorant and fantasy-ridden in their thinking about occupations is no more than a myth and should be seriously questioned. Further, this study tends to confirm the findings of other researchers, notably Deutsch and Antonovsky, in that the lower-class child is not necessarily less developed in his thinking about work and the need to work than the Caucasian middle-class child. Certainly it seems implied that lower-class children at this early age are considerably more realistic in their view of work and occupational concepts than they have been credited with. If so, a more serious question may be implied. That would be the role of our educational system in reinforcing the conceptions and aspirations of children after their initial experience with the school. For it would seem that our educational system is reflective of the larger society which controls it and is dedicated to the production of successful middle-class Caucasians at the expense of lower-socioeconomic Negroes for that lower-socioeconomic environment limits the aspiration and perception level of children. More specifically that the environment tends to limit the aspiration and perceptions of the Negro child.

It appears that Negro children experience a deterioration in their conceptions of self and aspirations of what they can become. If this is true, an important point for consideration is what can the school do to eliminate this factor--- promoting instead, a higher aspirational level?

It would seem that not only is the strengthening of self-concept important, but the school must be acutely aware of the environmental factors involved in the child's life. He can do little to combat what he sees around him, for example,



that job opportunities are limited or that he sees a minimal number of Negroes working in prestigious occupations or in a business ownership capacity. However, if he is able to develop a healthy concept of himself he may be able to disregard much of what he observes and aspire in spite of the limiting factors. As we noted elsewhere, "The child's attitude towards himself, moreover, will influence his perception of tasks confronting him as well as his perception of the future (14)."

Finally it must be noted that although the interpretations, implications, and trends of this study do not lend themselves to positive conclusions as yet, they certainly point to the desirability of further and more extensive research in the areas of not only conceptions of occupation and aspiration, but also the role of education in the development of a complete and harmoniously functional society.

In far too many school situations the guidance program has either not been given the opportunity to truly evolve into an activity that affects all aspects of the school or has been restricted to servicing a small segment of the student population. The Coleman report emphasizes that, "pupil attitude factor which appears to have a stronger relationship to achievement than do all the 'school' factors together is the extent to which an individual feels that he has some control over his destiny (5)."

Although the Developmental Guidance Project has been concentrating on servicing disadvantaged youth, the project staff feels strongly that the foregoing conclusion applies to all youth in all school situations. The tremendous waste of human resources attested to by the high college drop-out rate is silent testimonial to the validity of this feeling. All youth need the opportunity to appraise

themselves, to consider possible future alternatives, to gain meaningful information concerning their world, and to make plans for themselves. With disadvantaged youth the problem is, of course, more critical for their "margin for error" is much less. With them there are fewer familial and community resources to help compensate for the failure of the educational system to effect the guidance function.

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