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ABSTRACT

This study examined: (1) the expectations of black and white lower class first graders for their own performance in reading, arithmetic, and conduct; (2) racial differences in the relationship between parental expectations and IQ; (3) correlation between the absences and lateness of first graders with reading and arithmetic marks and with parental expectations; (4) comparisons between parents and teachers of middle class and lower class school children in estimating marks; (5) comparison between the involvement of middle and lower class parents; and (6) the match between individual parents' and children's expectations. First grade children were found to be highly optimistic about marks in reading and conduct but less optimistic about arithmetic marks. White lower class parents were found to base performance expectations on their child's IQ, but for black parents, IQ played no part in determining initial expectations. All correlations between absences and first grade reading and arithmetic marks were highly significant. Parents and teachers were found to "play it safe" in expressing expectations and awarded mostly "Bs" in estimating children's future marks. Lower class parents were found to be far less involved (as measured by response in this research) than middle class parents. There was found to be no match between individual parents' and children's expectations in any subject area in both the middle class and lower class schools studied. (GO)

The Expectations of Black and White Children in First Grade

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Students' expectations for themselves are potent determinants of academic performance, and have often been postulated as a cause of poor academic performance by minority group students in both high school and junior high school (see Cohen and her co-workers (1972,1972) and Morse, 1967). Can the same be said about younger children? If blacks have low expectations for themselves, how are these expectations developed and when? In fact, what is the natural course of development of a child's expectations for his own performance in important activities like reading and arithmetic from the time when he/she enters school? This research was designed to try to answer such questions.

Surprisingly, there are no studies which focus on academic self-concepts of younger children or on how academic self-concepts are established in the first place. Lesser (1972) says there must be important effects when "the child exhibits his elementary skills like naming letters or numbers in the presence of someone who cares about him and receives attention and admiration." But how in fact a child develops an image of himself as a competent and effective, or incompetent and ineffective person is shrouded in mystery.

Bronfenbrenner (1973) has recently called for research on children that embeds the child in a social context and that examines feedback. He also points to a need for research in naturalistic settings. The present research addresses both these matters. One long-term aim is to specify components of

a model, eventually specifying effects of context, effects of feedback and the like, in a precise quantitative manner. The data we have analyzed to date, although voluminous, are still not voluminous enough to allow many precise quantitative statements.

Subjects and Procedure

As part of a larger longitudinal study, still in progress in Baltimore, one cohort of first-graders (N=130) in an integrated school (60% black students and 50% black staff) has been followed from entrance through the end of first grade. Children's expectations for their own performance in reading, arithmetic and conduct were assessed twice during the year by asking each child to guess what he was going to get on his next report card in those subjects. Specifically children were asked to "guess what your next report card will look like. Guess what you will get in reading... in arithmetic...and in conduct." How elaborate the interviewing procedure was which accompanied this "guessing" depended on whether the child was new to the study or had been interviewed previously.

For the initial measuring of expectations, a large brightly-colored plastic sheet (approximately 2' x 3') was prepared which looked like a stylized report card. It had titles of school subjects (Arithmetic, Reading, Conduct) and squares for entering marks. This sheet was spread out on a table or sometimes on the floor. Next to the sheet were a number of piles of cardboard squares with large numerials (1, 2, 3, 4)(or letters if appropriate) inked on them.

Children were interviewed individually outside their classroom, often in a separate room nearby, and were told that "we are going to play a game--guessing what you will get on your report card." Before "playing the game,"

the child was asked if he knew what a report card was, what the numerals meant, and what "reading", "arithmetic", and "conduct" meant. Enough discussion then ensured so the interviewer felt reasonably confident the child understood what school report cards signified and how marks were coded. The child was then asked to pick a number from the pile of numerals and put it in a square next to "Reading" to "guess what you will get in reading." He was similarly asked to pick numerals to represent his guesses for arithmetic and conduct. Initial interviews for measuring expectations in reading, arithmetic and conduct were held slightly before the child received his first report card in first grade. Expectations were measured again just before the final report card was issued. (Report cards are issued 3 times in grade one, midyear, year end and half way between midyear and year end. Report card information comparable to the expectation measures was also obtained at only midyear and year end.). As the child made his guesses the interviewer unobtrusively recorded them on a small 3"x 5" card. The cards were kept out of sight and it is doubtful if any of the children were aware their guesses were being recorded.

The analysis shows that this expectation measure appears to have a fair degree of validity and reliability as indicated by re-interviews, meaningful relationships that emerge between it and other variables, and a substantial degree of test-retest agreement when guesses by the same child are matched between one session and the next. A special reliability check with a short time span (one week between test and retest) was run on a small sample of first graders from another school and it indicated a high degree of concordance between expectations elicited on the two

occasions (r=.76).

Other data were procured from parents, teachers, peers, and school records. Time does not permit a detailed description of how these further data were procured but we can mention that parents' expectations for their children were obtained by asking a parent to guess what his child would get for marks in reading, arithmetic and conduct, shortly before the first report card was issued.

These first-grade children, all lower class, had very high expectations before they received their first report cards, much higher than the marks they received (see Table 1.). (One is high and four is low for scoring both marks and expectations.) There was no difference between expectations of black or white first graders, or between boys and girls. Parents of both races held lower expectations than their children, but higher than the level justified by the child's performance as indicated by first marks.

Expectations were obtained from 77% of white children's parents and from 72% of black children's parents. White parents and black parents have comparable expectations for their first-grade children except in conduct where white parents look for a significantly better mark (1.61 vs. 2.08, $p < .01$). Note, however, that both black and white parents, on the average, expect conduct marks not far from a "B" or "2". Parents' expectations are uniformly lower than their children's expectations within both racial groups.

Before their first report card children of both races are highly optimistic about their forthcoming marks in reading and in conduct. Children of both races are noticeably less optimistic about their forthcoming marks in arithmetic. Whites estimated an arithmetic mark 0.23 units

lower than blacks (the average difference was not significant). Children's average expectations over the year are rather constant no matter what the race of the child.

Children of the two races actually attained reading marks that, on the average, were very close (3.14 vs. 3.16). On the first report card small differences (not significant) favor whites in both arithmetic (2.92 vs. 3.09) and conduct (1.77 vs. 2.03). Children's marks over the first-grade year improved more for whites than for blacks in both reading and arithmetic (for whites, 0.71 and 0.33, respectively, and for blacks 0.47 and 0.20, respectively). In conduct the changes are small (0.18 and 0.22) and close to one another.

Except for perhaps a little differential improvement in substantive area marks over the year, differences between black and white children on all the measures listed in Table 1 are negligible.

As indicated in Table 2 there are highly significant and substantial correlations between IQ and marks in both reading and arithmetic throughout grade one (ranging from -0.41 to -0.48 for the entire cohort). The consistency of these academic area correlations within both the black and white subsamples, demonstrates that teachers are fairly successful in carrying out the school's policy of marking the children in terms of their own ability. Conduct marks are significantly correlated with IQ at both midyear and year end but this relationship is largely due to the white subsample. White children display consistently larger conduct-IQ correlations than do black children (high IQ being associated with good marks). Indeed, at year end the black correlation is almost zero (-.006) while the white correlation (-0.406) is almost as large as the correlations observed for reading and arithmetic.

The correlations between children's expectations and IQ are negligible for the cohort taken as a whole. The races taken separately are rather similar also in this regard, with the exception that blacks show a significant year-end correlation between IQ and the children's reading expectations ($r=-0.300$, $p < .05$), whereas whites do not ($r=0.086$). There is no obvious explanation for this isolated finding.

There are significant but small correlations between IQ and parents' first expectations for the combined races (-.35, -.34, -.24, respectively for reading arithmetic and conduct). When the races are examined separately, white parents' expectations in all three areas are significantly and more strongly correlated with IQ (-.50, -.59, -.34) while black parents' correlations are consistently weak and nonsignificant (-.21, -.17, -.05). White lower-class parents (like white middle-class parents who had been examined in another part of this study) apparently are either attuned to the cues that indicate their child's IQ and/or more readily utilize these cues in the formation of their expectations. The children, whether white or black, and black parents seem oblivious to IQ in shaping their expectations.

White lower-class parents, to some substantial extent then, base their expectations on their child's perceived IQ. The absence of any significant correlations between IQ and black parents' expectations indicates IQ plays no part in the determination of black lower-class parents' initial expectations.

The startling difference between lower-class parents of the two races was entirely unexpected. It may have profound significance for the academic

socialization of children of the two races. In a sense this observation demonstrates that previous feedback about the child's performance has not been processed by the black parents. If both black parents and black children continue to ignore IQ in producing their academic forecasts, there may be little constructive use of feedback. On the other hand, if they begin to incorporate mark feedback into the formation of their expectations they will thereby also be incorporating something of IQ since IQ and marks are fairly consistently correlated in the working-class school.

It is interesting that white middle-class parents' expectations for reading and arithmetic (which had been obtained for another cohort as part of the overall project) are about as strongly correlated with their children's IQ scores in first grade (-0.44 and -0.50, respectively) as are the white lower-class parents' expectations. Further work, including a more detailed analysis of questionnaires answered by parents may shed light on the differences between white parents and black parents.

School records gave the total number of days each child was absent in first grade. The average number of absences for first-graders in the lower-class school, 20.8 days, is noticeably higher than that reported in the middle-class school, where for first-graders the mean number of absences was 8.8. This difference is significant both in statistical ($p < .01$) and practical terms. One can also note the interaction between sex and race--in the integrated school black girls are absent about as much as black or white boys but white girls are absent more often.

All the correlations between absences and first grade reading and arithmetic marks are highly significant. As one might expect, a high number of absences corresponds to low substantive area marks. There is

a smaller, but still significant correlation between absences and the children's initial expectations for arithmetic. Otherwise no relations appear between absences and children's expectations.

There are highly significant correlations ($p < .01$) between absences and parents'expectations in both reading and arithmetic (.32, .29). In this lower-class school parents who have low expectations apparently tend to keep (or allow) their children out of school more. Perhaps these parents feel their children are not likely to profit much from instruction, and therefore missing a day now and then is not a serious loss. This interpretation is supported by the fact that parents' conduct expectations do not correlate significantly with absenteeism. In that conduct is not "taught" in the same sense as are reading and arithmetic, holding high conduct expectations need not instill in a parent any particular incentive for the regular school attendance of his child. (This is attested to by the lack of a significant correlation between absences and conduct marks at any time in the year.)

Correlations between lateness and marks are similar to those observed between absences and marks despite the modest correlation between absences and lateness ($r = 0.246$, $p < .01$ for the entire cohort; $r = 0.401$, $p < .01$ for whites; $r = 0.203$, N.S. for blacks). Frequent lateness is significantly ($p < .01$) associated with poorer marks in reading and arithmetic throughout first grade but it bears no relationship to the children's reading and arithmetic expectations at any time in first grade. The addtional result that a large number of latenesses are associated significantly ($p < .01$) with poor midyear marks in conduct may indicate teachers view tardiness as part of children's conduct. The association is attenuated by the end of

first grade, however, so some doubt remains as to the propriety of this explanation.

The lack of significant correlations between parental expectations and lateness may reflect the greater control children exhibit in this regard (compared to absences) or it may reflect the general inability of parents to insure prompt attendance. That is, lower-class parents expressing both high and low expectations may be about equally prone to the everyday situational contingencies that produce substantial latensss. (Latenesses are "counted" in this school only when the child is 15 or more minutes late, so the average number of "lates", 11.9, would increase substantially if a more rigid standard was applied.) It should be apparent that the comparability in the size of the correlations between lateness and marks, and the correlations between absences and marks, argues against "missed time from school" as the sole reason for an impaired performance corresponding to a large number of lates. The lack of importance of either childrens' or parents' academic area expectations in this regard is somewhat disconcerting.

Our final comments are most meaningful when contrasted with comparable results for a cohort from a suburban middle-class school which is also included in the overall project. In both the middle-class and lower-class schools parents tended to "play it safe." In each of the subject areas the majority of parents forecast a "B". Teachers in the middle-class school are also "playing it safe," for they awarded mostly B's. Errors in guessing and marking are minimized by this conservative approach. Not only do parents' and teachers' marginals correspond in the middle-class school, but there is also agreement between them on a child-by-child basis.

Parents' expectations in the middle-class school generally show highly significant agreement with teachers' marks in reading, arithmetic, and conduct over both grades one and two (year-end grade one reading and year-end grade two conduct are slight exceptions). Middle-class parents do seem able to identify children who will perform poorly or very well. Furthermore, when middle-class parents' first-grade expectations are not correct, they tend to err in the direction of under-estimating. By slightly under-estimating how well his child will do, the parent voices his basic confidence in the child and yet allows a margin for himself to be pleasantly surprised.

Lower-class parents, on the other hand, tended to over-estimate their children's future grade one performance in reading and arithmetic. The overestimation came not because parents held unduly high expectations (in fact they held lower reading and arithmetic expectations than middle-class parents), but rather because much lower marks were given in the lower-class school. The shower of low reading and arithmetic marks on the first report card simply was not anticipated by the lower-class parents. The case-by-case matching between lower-class parents' expectations and their children's marks was significant only for those instances where the overall mark distributions were most lenient (and hence similar to the parents' expectation distribution), namely for year-end reading and for conduct throughout grade one. (Reading marks rose enough over first grade so that the year-end mark distribution was somewhat more comparable to the distribution of parents' expectations, even though the average reading mark remained noticeably lower than what parents had forecast.) Lower-class parents' initial expectations did not accurately forecast arithmetic

marks at any time in first grade. (Since parent's expectations were sampled only once during the first grade year, we cannot assess whether parents' expectations declined during the first-grade year. Future work will show what these parents expected at the start of grade two.)

Lower-class parents may not realize that all first-graders in the school their child attended got low marks. Later marks in first grade went up slightly and therefore agreed better with parents' initial forecasts, so each parent may have been be lulled into thinking that his child's first mark was an aberrant case rather than one instance of a general phenomenon. Certainly parents in the middle-class school are much more aware of "norms" and more vocal on matters of school policy. Teachers in the middle-class school may assign low marks with some trepidation realizing they may be called upon to justify the mark to parents and/or supervisors.

One index of parents' involvement is the response noted in this research from the two sets of parents. For the middle-class cohort 92% of the parents visited school during American Education week! Frequently both mother and father visited. In contrast, we were able to secure responses from only 81% of the working-class parents even using trained interviewers who went to the children's homes (preceded by a introductory flyer carried home by the children) and who persisted through three call-backs. When we attempted to interview working-class parents by seeing those who came to school during American Education week, our response rate was less than 10%. The fact that middle-class parents were in close touch with school, while working-class parents were not, may be part of the explanation for why middle-class parents correctly anticipate distributions of marks

their children's teachers used, while the working-class parents were unable to do so.

One final surprising result is that in no subject area in either school do individual parents' and children's expectations match significantly at the time of the first report card. In addition, middle-class parents' expectations did not match their children's expectations at any time in grade two. Children, therefore, obviously do not adopt directly their parent's expectations and apparently the home environment does not lead parents and children to form the same expectations this early in the childrens' scholastic career. This is not to say that home environments are unimportant in expectation formation, but rather that parents and children apparently attend to different aspects of their environments in forming their expectations. A relationship between parents' and children's expectations should develop over time because both sets of expectations tend to move toward the child's assigned marks.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations for First-Grade Cohort

Lower-Class School, 60% Black

	Black			White			Combined		
	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.
Parents' Expectations--Midycar									
Reading	62	2.37	0.77	43	2.28	0.85	105	2.33	0.81
Arithmetic	62	2.15	0.74	44	2.34	0.78	106	2.23	0.76
Conduct	62	2.08	0.49	44	1.61	0.62	106	1.89	0.59
Child's Expectations--Midyear									
Reading	68	1.28	0.62	43	1.26	0.49	113	1.28	0.59
Arithmetic	68	1.65	0.48	43	1.88	0.76	113	1.74	0.62
Conduct	68	1.07	0.26	43	1.07	0.26	113	1.07	0.26
Child's Expectations--Year-End									
Reading	71	1.28	0.59	47	1.32	0.76	119	1.32	0.70
Arithmetic	71	1.75	0.82	48	1.77	0.81	120	1.75	0.81
Conduct	71	1.24	0.49	48	1.23	0.56	120	1.23	0.51
Child's Mark--Midyear									
Reading[a]	43	3.16	0.84	29	3.14	0.88	72	3.15	0.85
Arithmetic	76	3.09	0.77	52	2.92	0.71	129	3.03	0.75
Conduct	76	2.03	0.61	52	1.77	0.58	129	1.93	0.62
Child's Mark--Year End									
Reading	78	2.69	0.90	49	2.43	0.84	127	2.59	0.89
Arithmetic	78	2.89	0.99	49	2.59	0.91	127	2.77	0.97
Conduct	78	1.81	0.74	49	1.59	0.71	127	1.72	0.73

[a]One teacher did not give marks in reading on the first report card.

Table 2

Correlations Between I.Q. (PMA) and Other Measures
Lower-Class School, First Grade

	Black Only		White Only		Combined Races	
	Mean = 101.4		Mean = 106.2		Mean = 103.3	
	S.D. = 12.4		S.D. = 15.1		S.D. = 13.7	
	N	r	N	r	N	r
Parents' Expectation --Midyear (T1)						
Reading	62	-0.209	43	-0.498**	105	-0.349**
Arithmetic	62	-0.174	44	-0.591**	106	-0.339**
Conduct	62	-0.049	44	-0.339*	106	-0.240*
Child's Expectation--Midyear (T1)						
Reading	65	0.042	39	-0.002	104	0.020
Arithmetic	65	-0.112	39	-0.258	104	-0.152
Conduct	65	0.091	39	-0.176	104	-0.021
Child's Expectation--Year End (T2)						
Reading	71	-0.300*	46	0.086	117	-0.109
Arithmetic	71	-0.115	47	-0.030	118	-0.078
Conduct	71	0.011	47	-0.118	118	-0.054
Child's Mark --Midyear (T1)						
Reading	43	-0.500**	28	-0.302	71	-0.411**
Arithmetic	73	-0.525**	48	-0.388**	121	-0.476**
Conduct	73	-0.157	48	-0.275	121	-0.236**
Child's Mark --Year End (T2)						
Reading	76	-0.462**	48	-0.494**	124	-0.484**
Arithmetic	76	-0.401**	48	-0.436**	124	-0.427**
Conduct	76	-0.006	48	-0.406**	124	-0.191*

* = significant at the .05 level.

** = significant at the .01 level.