

What seventh grade students want to be when they grow up, an analysis

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A few years ago, I listed some of the careers seventh grade students chose for themselves. But my friend the seventh grade teacher pointed out to me that the list hides the correlation between the jobs and the students.

The lower-performing students chose the high-glamour jobs: Professional athlete, model, rock star, actor. Some of these students may be exhibiting boundless optimism; others may simply not have thought through the question very much and just picked the first thing that popped into their head. By comparison, the higher-performing students tended toward low-glamour but highly-skilled jobs: Contract attorney, civil engineer, brain surgeon, traffic planner.

It's interesting that both groups are setting themselves up for disappointment in different ways. The big dreamers are likely to be disappointed when they find that becoming an actor involves lots of waiting tables and tiny roles trying to get your big break, or that becoming a professional athlete means you're competing against thousands of other hopefuls for only a few dozen openings. On the other hand, the harsh realists may be selling themselves short, missing out on a chance to exercise their creativity.

Or maybe it's just too soon for twelve-year-olds to be worrying about this sort of thing. Let them have their dreams for a few years longer.

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