1.

a. I’ve had college aspirations for as long as I can remember. Both my parents were college graduates and frequently spoke about their time in college, which put me under the impression that college is a necessary step in life, a sort of rite of passage that everyone must go through in order to become an adult.

b. While I’ve always had abstract notions that I would one day study at college, the option of entering university didn’t become a realistic option until high school. I underwent primary and lower secondary education at an integrated elementary, junior and senior high school, and upper secondary education at an academically low tier local high school. Because of this, elevation within the academic hierarchy was never something I considered seriously. When I was attending my first school, I had no intention of leaving it until after graduating, which meant that I did not bother to think about applying to higher ranking schools and competing for academic attainment. I did end up leaving before high school, but the leave was abrupt and I had no time to consider competing to transfer to a high achieving school. Instead I found myself at a low tier school with low overall academic performance and close to no academic aspirations or expectations for their students. Once I entered, I was shaped by the norm within that school and began to lose hope in the prospect of entering university, and instead adjusted to the probable reality that I would attend some kind of professional school and find a job. This is why the formation of solid college expectations was delayed in my case, and it wasn’t until the end of junior year, when I started to outperform other students and yield high results on national exams that I began to seriously consider moving on to college.

2. Individual Level: Individually, I was influenced most by a few of the teachers at my high school. They saw what I was capable of and started encouraging me to aim for admissions into high ranking universities. Once my teachers formed high expectations for my future academic attainment, my parents also started to hold in high regard my academic abilities and prompted me to apply for top tier universities in Japan. Online communities and success stories of people in familiar conditions that I found on the internet also influenced me and induced me to form college expectations.

Aggregate Level: At an aggregate level, I believe the general societal attitude in Japan that emphasizes the importance of academic attainment helped the creation and ossification of college expectations within me. Also, once I began studying towards entrance exams, I discovered multiple online communities where standards for academic attainment were high, further normalizing college education in my eyes.

3. I myself am an example of someone who has cooled down their educational expectations. I was encouraged by my teachers to aim for Tokyo University, and given my academic performance, my teachers’ expectations for this endeavor to succeed hardened, and with them my own expectations hardened as well. I am from a middle SES family but was a male with high merit, which meant that expectations for my academic success were very high. In my case, what cooled me down was failing the test and witnessing people around me who appeared to be far more intelligent.

In my particular case, I believe a progressive instructional approach that disregards competition and excellence and promotes freedom and academic pursuits for the sake of individual pleasure would’ve warmed me up and given me the will and courage to tenaciously keep pursuing my goal. Instead of intimidating me with high competition and emphasizing my own inferiority against others, such a curriculum would’ve made it possible for me to pursue academics for myself as an activity of enjoyment.

4. I have a male friend from a low SES family and low merit who cooled out of his educational expectations and began to pursue a career in acting instead. The reason for his cooling out was that the culture of his school deemed admissions into high level (or even average level) universities as an impossibility, and he was advised against pursuing high educational attainment by his peers, teachers, and family. In my opinion, traditional policies emphasizing academic excellence and holding high standards and expectations for students to meet would’ve re-warmed up his educational expectations.