

ABSTRACT

The Aspirations of Youth and the Education System
in a Developing Society: The Tobago Case

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This thesis posits a social psychological view of aspiration formation and draws attention to the importance of significant others, such as parents, teachers and peers in an individual's aspiration formation process. The view presented is that aspirations are partly formed and modified in social interaction, in the home as well as in the classroom and involves a complex interplay of psychological as well as social determinants.

Responses from 365 students from the fifth and sixth forms of secondary schools in Tobago were analysed to determine how social-psychological and structural variables such as academic self-concept, achievement, sex, encouragement, social class, school status and School Climate affected occupational aspirations. Information on other types of aspirations was gained from the essays of the students. Five variables were identified as significant, achievement, sex, social class, school status and school climate. High achievers, students from upper and middle-class homes, and from high status schools and from schools with favourable school climates, declared high level of occupational aspirations and boys have higher aspirations than girls. While there were no

marked differences between schools or gender with other types of aspirations, results indicate that schools in Tobago are having a great impact on the student's occupational aspirations and so effective programmes of professional orientation could perhaps be developed which may help in increasing the levels of low aspirants.

In the introduction of the thesis, the reason for the choice of topics is presented along with a brief review of Tobago's economic, political, social and education history. This is followed by a review of the relevant literature on aspirations and related concepts.

Chapter three, looks at the theories and conceptual explanations that have been used to delineate the variables used in the study in an effort to locate some of the influences that might contribute to the formation of occupational aspirations. The hypotheses and variables used are presented and variables are operationally defined and measured.

Next, the methodology of the paper is discussed step by step as well as the type of, and reasons for, the statistical measurements used. Pilot survey findings are discussed.

Chapter 5 states the statistical methods used to analyse the data. The results of the study are presented in Chapter 6 with a discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter

7 includes a discussion of the theoretical and substantive implications of the study, with the limitations experienced in the implementation of the thesis, and the comments made to conclude the exercise. In this section, an attempt was made to show possible ways in which findings could be used to help fashion aspirations of other youths, in a more conscious manner, towards the development goals of Tobago.