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Abstract

**Career Aspirations And Expectations Of Fifth Form
Students At A Senior Comprehensive
School**

Jeniffer Anne Mohammed

This is a qualitative study which looked at the nature of career aspirations and expectations of fifth form students at a senior comprehensive school. The rationale concerned the apparent paradox that students on the verge of leaving school seemed uninterested in school work or the educational qualifications necessary for the world of work. It seemed therefore that how students interpreted their situation might illumine this problem.

The main methodological tool was ethnography, utilising phenomenological interviewing. The unique role of the researcher, a participant at the site, was also critically examined. The use of qualitative strategies was justified in relation to the nature of the problem. The method of ethnography was shown to be commensurable with the peculiarities involved in human science research.

An ethnographic report using verbatim extracts of participants' own language is presented. The cultural world of beliefs was found to

dominate their thinking about education and careers. The salience of beliefs in their lifeworld prompted the elaboration of theoretical constructs seeking to explain the ethnographic data. Archer's (1988) theory of culture and agency was employed to explain how persons can hold and resolve a constraining contradiction in their lives.

In order to explore other possibilities that could equally or better explain the data, the thesis then returned to the focus - an exhaustive review of the literature on school effects - and a re-opening of the case. This second interpretation of the ethnography, using Mead's concept of the 'social self', was found to delve more deeply into the world of agency than the previous analysis.

The study is significant in that it demonstrates the need for both macro and micro theoretical insights to explain the complex of students' beliefs and actions and, at the same time it offers a theoretical methodological means of transcending the sociological problem of displacement of scope.