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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to ascertain changes in the aspirations of rural youth in Ohio as they matured during their high school years and entered college or the work force. A Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ) was developed to measure the following variables: (1) sources of influence on curriculum decisions; (2) changes in desired and expected careers; (3) gender differences in expected salary, plans for further education, and level of aspirations; and (4) relationship of high school curriculum to aspirations. The instrument was administered to the same 191 subjects in 1985 and in 1988. In 1985 these youths, while in high school, had ranked the top four sources of influence on curriculum and career decisions as: self, parents, friends, and counselors. In 1988, the youth who had graduated listed self, mother and father, friends, and teachers as the top influencers. The data indicate that overall, aspirations tended to increase with increasing maturity of students. Expected occupation and salary became higher in the 1988 than in the 1985 data. The two-year college became a less popular choice and the four-year college became more popular in the 1988 than in the 1985 data. Females expected lower salaries than males and were more likely to attend college. High job aspirations were held by 43 percent of the students in the academic curriculum and none of the students in the vocational curriculum. Implications for schools include involving parents in educational and career planning, encouraging females to set higher salary goals, and encouraging vocational students to prepare for college. (KS)

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Comparison Between the 1985 and the 1988 Career Plans of the Same Rural Youth in Ohio

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Aspirations are important because they guide what students learn in school, how they prepare for adult life, and what they eventually accomplish. Educators can better plan their policies and practices if they understand current youth aspirations (Walberg, 1989, p.1).

Aspirations have two distinctive aspects. First, they are future oriented. They can only be satisfied at some future time. This distinguishes them from immediate gratifications. Secondly, aspirations are motivators. They are goals individuals are willing to invest time, effort or money in to attain. This distinguishes them from idle day-dreams and wishes (Sherwood, 1989, pp. 61-62).

One line of inquiry for the study of aspirations has sought to account for individual differences in the goals or objects of aspirations. This line of inquiry has been based upon Lewin's field theory which treats aspirations as the choosing of goals within a field (Lewin, 1951). This field (psychological environment) is comprised of an individual's personal values and his or her judgments concerning the comparative likelihood of achieving various, valued ends. An individual tends to choose opportunities that are most likely to lead to desired outcomes and away from unwanted ones (Sherwood, 1989, p. 61).

Bandura's social learning theory implies that learning and related behavior are viewed as resulting from three sets of interacting influences: (a) background or given

influences such as gender, ethnicity, and ability; (b) psychological or personal self-concept factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and previous experiences; and (c) environmental or social factors in society that affect the individual (Bandura, 1978).

Aspirations of Rural Students

Aspirations have been shown to be among the most significant determinants of eventual attainment (Gottfredson, 1981). Among the first studies comparing the aspirations and expectations of rural and urban students were those conducted by Lipset (1955) and Sewell and Orenstein (1965). These studies concluded that rural youth had lower aspirations than urban youth and as a result they could not compete effectively for urban jobs. More recently Lee (1984) pointed out that rural workers were well behind their urban counterparts in vocational development. There is a growing body of literature that suggests that rural youth have lower levels of academic and vocational aspirations than their counterparts in suburban and urban areas (Cobb, McIntire, and Pratt, 1989, p. 11).

Background Factors and Aspirations

Guidance personnel need to be aware of the potential influence of race, sex, and socioeconomic status on the career development of students (McNair and Brown, 1983). Gender, for example, has been found to be substantially associated with the area of advanced study students expected to pursue while in college (Odell, 1988). Odell recommended that guid-

ance counselors in rural schools provide leadership to teachers and administrators in reducing sex stereotyping, and that information about men and women in nontraditional roles be included in all high school courses.

Yang (1981) reported that the decision of youth to enter college was strongly influenced by the expectations of parents. Lee (1984) advised that "parents, regardless of their racial background, need to be fully aware of their influence on the aspirations and expectations of young men and women" (p. 33). Kotrlik and Harrison (1989) concluded that students perceive that their parents influence their career choice more than any other person, and the mother is more influential than the father. Evans and Herr (1978, p. 122) identified the factor of low aspirations of parents for their children as modifiable to a certain extent by schools.

High school curriculum has shown moderate association with expectations for advanced education and the occupational areas to be pursued (Odell, 1988). McCracken, Barcinas, and Wims (1990) reported differences among students in academic, general, and vocational curricula in the background characteristics of ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), grade point average, educational level of mother, and parental expectations for advanced education; in the occupational aspirations of SES of desired and expected job, and income expectations; and in educational aspirations relating to plans

for advanced education. Jyung (1989) found strong correlations between curriculum of enrollment and both education and vocational aspirations for tenth and twelfth graders.

The Problem

The career education literature advocated early tentative career choice, believing it added to student motivation. The choice was to be kept tentative, with options kept open. Experimentation and change was to be encouraged. The constant reassessment of career choices was to be built into the system (Hoyt, Evans, Mackin, and Mangum, 1972, p. 15). By following the same students over a period of time, the extent to which changes in aspirations occur can be observed. What changes occur in educational and occupational aspirations? What people influence the career and educational choices students make? What differences in aspirations might be due to differences in background factors? Do students who enrolled in different high school curricula have differing aspirations? Questions such as these provided the basis for a panel study of rural Ohio students.

Purpose and Objectives

An underlying purpose for this research was to respond to a need to understand the impact of changing rural communities on the aspirations of youth. This panel study was conducted to ascertain changes in the aspirations of rural youth in Ohio as they matured during their high school years and entered college or the work force. Specific objectives were to answer the following research questions: (a) what are the sources of influence on rural youth as they make curriculum decisions in a three-year period of time, (b) what changes occur in a three-year period of time in desired and expected careers of rural youth, (c) how is gender related to expected

salary, plans for further education, and level of aspirations, and (d) how is the high school curriculum related to aspirations?

Methods and Data Source

Design

This was a panel study. Panel studies may be used to follow the same group of subjects over a period of time. They enable examination of changes or trends. These changes may be due to maturation of respondents or to changes in the environment. This panel study was a descriptive survey in that the major purpose was to describe the sample at two points in time on the variables of interest, which were identified in the objectives. Relationships among variables were also explored.

Instrumentation

A Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ) was developed to measure the variables in the research questions. The content validity was established by a panel of experts consisting of university faculty, school administrators, and former high school teachers. The instruments were pilot tested in a school that was not included in the sample for the study. An average test-retest coefficient of .84 was obtained across questionnaire items. The same instrument was used to gather data in 1985 and again in 1988.

Data Source

The sampling frame for rural schools included those Ohio schools located in a county outside a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Schools had fewer than 125 students per class and were located in a county with less than 40,000 population, and offered agriculture as a high school subject. There were 52 schools in the population.

In the Spring and Fall of 1985 data were gathered from four randomly selected rural schools representing four different geographical regions in Ohio. The SIQ was administered to all of the tenth- and twelfth-grade students in each of the schools. Complete data were obtained for 425 subjects. In 1988, attempts were made to obtain permanent addresses for the 425 youth. Addresses were obtained for 352 individuals. Useable responses were obtained, after two mailings and telephone followup procedures, for 191 subjects (54 percent of the 352 for which addresses were available). All comparisons made between the 1985 and 1988 data were for the same 191 subjects. Comparisons between 1988 respondents and non-respondents were performed on the 1985 data. Respondents were more likely to be female, in the academic high school curriculum, and have a higher grade point average than non-respondents. The 1985 tenth graders were nearing graduation or just out of high school and the 1985 twelfth graders had been out of high school for three years at the time of the 1988 study.

Procedures to Reduce Errors

The authors were cognizant of the five types of errors normally associated with this type of research. Appropriate steps were taken to minimize them. Measurement error was controlled by establishing content validity and reliability of the measuring instrument. Based upon the sample size, sampling error was estimated based on a 95 percent probability of sampling estimates being within plus or minus 5.2 percent of the data for the population. Frame error was negligible since the listing of the population of Ohio rural schools was verified as meeting the selection criteria. Since random sampling procedures were used to select the schools and all students

in the tenth- and twelfth-grade classes in 1985 were sampled, selection error was not a problem. There was non-response error. Its nature was reported and documented.

Data Analysis

Information was summarized using frequencies, percentages, and statistics describing central tendency and dispersion. Relationships utilized correlational techniques. Coefficients were evaluated using an alpha level of .05.

Results

The findings from data gathered in 1985 for this group of students reported that rural schools in Ohio were emphasizing preparation for college attendance, enrolling students from families with low SES, having students with much higher educational and occupational aspirations than that which their parents had attained, having students with unrealistic expectations for salary, and having students whose aspirations were influenced by their parents' expectations for them (Odell, 1986).

Sources of Influence

In 1985 these youth, while in high school, had ranked the top four sources of influence on curriculum and career decisions as: self, parents, friends, and counselors. In 1988, the youth who had graduated listed self, mother and father, friends, and teachers as the top influencers. The youth who were twelfth graders and still in school in 1988 listed self, friends, father and mother, and counselors. The educational attainment of the mother was related to educational plans of their children. A Cramer's V of .32 was obtained between the educational attainment of the mother and plans of twelfth graders to attend college. Only 43.5 percent of the students

having mothers with a high school education planned to attend college, but 100 percent of the students having mothers with a college or advanced degree planned to attend college. All of the students with mothers having a college or advanced degree planned to attend a four-year college or university. Most college-bound students with mothers having only a high school education chose either a two-year college (43.5 percent) or a four-year college or university (41.3 percent).

Changes in Desired and Expected Careers

Duncan Prestige Ratings as described by Stevens and Cho (1985) were used to score desired and expected occupational goals. Statistically significant differences were found between 1985 and 1988 data for both desired and expected career scores, and between desired and expected career scores for 1985 data. The difference between desired and expected career scores for the 1988 data was not statistically significant. In 1985, the rural young people desired careers with slightly higher prestige scores (46.0) than they expected to attain (43.5). They had higher expectations in 1988 (46.9) than in 1985 (43.5). Their desired career also had a higher score in 1988 (47.4) than in 1985 (46.0). Their expected career in 1988 (46.9) was more in line with their desired career (47.4).

Higher salaries were expected in their chosen careers in 1988 than in 1985. In 1988, 37.4 percent expected first-year incomes above \$25,000; however, in 1985 only 16.7 percent of these same young people expected first-year incomes above \$25,000.

In 1985, 39 percent of these youth intended to attend a two-year college. In 1988, only 5 percent had attended or planned to attend a two-year college. In contrast, only 10 percent

planned to go to a four-year university in 1985, but 48 percent were attending or planned to attend one in 1988.

In 1985, more than 50 percent of the youth were unsure if they could achieve their expected occupations. In 1988, over 50 percent of the graduated youth were also unsure of whether they could achieve their expected occupations, but only 27 percent of the youth still in high school were unsure of achieving them.

Gender and Salary, Education, and Aspirations

There was a significant relationship between gender and salary expectations (Cramer's $V=.46$). Females expected lower salaries than males. Only 9.1 percent of the females expected a first-year salary in their chosen career to be above \$25,000; however, 51.0 percent of the males expected a first-year salary above \$25,000.

Females were more likely (86.4 percent) than males (68.9 percent) to attend college. Among high school alumni, 95.1 percent of the females and 88.9 percent of the males who attended college did so immediately after high school. Among 1988 high school seniors, 68.2 percent of the females and 53.3 percent of the males planned to enter college immediately following high school.

Males and females did not differ in Duncan Prestige Rating score on either desired or expected careers.

Curriculum and Aspirations

There was a statistically significant relationship between curriculum and aspirations (Cramer's $V=.37$) for senior students still in high school. High job aspirations on the Duncan Prestige Rating scale were held by 43 percent of the students in the academic curriculum and none of the students in the vocational curriculum. Low job aspirations were held

by 31 percent of the students in the vocational curriculum and 14 percent of the students in the academic curriculum. Medium job aspirations were held by 43 percent of the students in the academic curriculum and 69 percent of the students in the vocational curriculum. There was not a significant relationship between curriculum and job aspiration level for youth who had graduated from high school.

The high school curriculum followed by students was related to their educational plans. Nearly all (97.2 percent) of the students in the academic curriculum were likely to attend college; however, 46 percent of the students in the vocational curriculum were also likely to attend college. A four-year college or university was the choice of 71.2 percent of the academic program students. Students in the vocational program chose either a four-year college or university (24.0 percent) or a two-year college (20.0 percent). Senior students in the academic program planned to attend college immediately after high school (83.3 percent), but only 30.8 percent of the vocational program students planned to begin college immediately. Among graduates, 93.5 percent of those who went to college did so immediately after high school.

Discussion of Results

Sources of Influence

School personnel appear to have less influence on student career and curriculum choices than parents and friends. The influence of school personnel appears to decline as students mature. Friends seemed to have had more influence on curriculum and career decisions in 1988 than 1985 for youth still in school and less influence on youth who had graduated.

Parents should be involved in educational and career planning with their children. They have a major influence on their children's decisions. Schools need to maintain communication with parents about options so intelligent input can be given to youth by their parents.

Friends and peers also seem to influence the educational and career decisions of youth. Efforts should be made to build up the self image and confidence of youth so that they can make decisions about careers without relying too heavily on others.

Because the educational level of the mother appears to be related to educational plans of students, schools should make a special effort to encourage students from homes where mothers possess less than a college degree to set high aspirations.

Changes in Desired and Expected Careers

Overall aspirations tended to increase with increasing maturity. Salary expectations also seemed to increase with increasing maturity. Expected occupations also became more in line with desired careers. The two-year college became a less popular choice and the four-year university a more popular choice for students as they matured. It appears that students should be encouraged to set high aspirations. Expectations seem to come more in line with aspirations as students mature. This seems to be a result of higher expectations rather than decreased aspirations.

High school seniors appear to be more confident of fulfilling their aspirations than graduates or students who are sophomores.

Gender and Salary, Education, and Aspirations

Even though females aspire to careers that are equivalent to males, and even though they are more likely to attend college than males, they

expect lower salaries. Females should be encouraged to set higher salary goals.

When aspirations and qualifications appear equal, salary expectations remain lower for females than males. This may be partially due to females choosing occupations that are sex stereotypic, and thus traditionally offering a lower salary than conventionally male occupations.

Curriculum and Aspirations

The curriculum followed in high school was associated with the level of job aspirations of students. Those youth in the academic curriculum had much higher aspirations than those in the vocational curriculum. Once students left high school, however, the difference in level of job aspirations between those who completed the academic and vocational curricula was less.

Students in the vocational curriculum were much less likely to attend college than students in the academic curriculum. However, nearly one-half of the students in the vocational curriculum planned to attend college.

It appears that students in the vocational curriculum should also be encouraged to prepare for college attendance. Schools should develop options for students to complete both vocational education and college preparatory requirements. Many students change their aspirations relating to college and career during high school.

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