

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL
ASPIRATIONAL LEVELS OF FRANCO-MANITOBAN
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Gilbert A. Legal

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ABSTRACT

To gain insight into the phenomena under study and to focus clearly the research problem, four general hypotheses were derived from stratification and socialization theory: selected social factors are related to the educational and occupational aspirational levels of Franco-Manitoban senior high school students, 1) when no statistical controls are applied; 2) when socio-economic status of family is statistically controlled; 3) when academic achievement of the students is statistically controlled; and 4) when both socio-economic status of the family and the academic achievement of the students are statistically controlled.

A review of existing literature and research revealed that the direction of the relationships stated in the general hypotheses could be predicted. The resultant research hypotheses were tested. In essence, it was hypothesized that the higher the socio-economic status of the family; and the higher the academic achievement of student; and the larger the student's community of residence; and the stronger the parental encouragement for post-high school education; and the greater the student's identification with his/her French-Canadian background; and the higher the prestige-rating of the father's occupation; and the stronger the teacher encouragement for post-high school education, and the greater the number of extra-curricular activities in which the student participates, the greater the educational aspirational level and the greater the occupational aspirational level.

The data were gathered by means of questionnaires administered to all senior high school students in the largest high school in each of the five bilingual school divisions of Manitoba. Questionnaires were completed by 541 Franco-Manitoban students.

Generally, the correlational analysis revealed findings supportive of the specific hypotheses which postulated a positive relationship between each of the selected independent variables and the educational and occupational aspirational levels of the students. More specifically, the results indicate that the socio-economic status of the family, the academic achievement of the student, his/her degree of ethnic identification and the extent to which he/she participates in extra-curricular activities are the best predictors of the students' levels of educational and occupational aspirations. The size of the student's community of residence and the strength of his parents' encouragement for post-secondary education are seen as moderately important predictors, whereas strength of teacher encouragement for post-high school education cannot be used to predict the aspirational levels of students.

The anticipated sex differences in educational and occupational aspirational levels which had been reported in past research were not evident in this study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary, relatively open-class societies, ideology and social organization help in the choosing of occupations by individuals. On the other hand, many of the structures of occupations internally tend to negate the individual's opportunity to choose freely. In addition, the sheer multiplicity of occupations tend to make for rather ineffective aspiring and choosing of occupations due to the absence of societal or occupational mechanisms for communicating to the potential aspirants the wide range of occupations that are consistent with the individual interests and abilities.

One of the most definitive and wide-spread characteristics of the occupational nature of contemporary society is the conspicuous absence of appropriate mechanisms for communicating "occupational knowledge" and equating occupations with interests and abilities. Therefore, one does not aspire systematically to 20,000 or more occupations but perhaps to a dozen or less. Lee Taylor (1968, p. 86) puts it in these terms:

"...Freedom to choose in a structure of ignorance is considerably less than real freedom."

Hypothetically, one can aspire to any occupation and theoretically one can choose any occupation for which one has the interest

and ability. But, given the very concrete limitations mentioned above and using the abundant literature available, it becomes clear that a certain number of social, psychological and other factors are highly influential in determining one's aspirational level. (Super et al., 1957).

Ginzberg (1951) suggests that there tends to be great wastage of both individual and social resources in the ways individuals reach decisions regarding occupations. Personal capacities and available educational opportunities, for example, are often misused or not used at all. Until the factors influencing occupational choice and their relative importance are known, one cannot really understand why it occurs or the means by which it can be reduced.

The present study was undertaken to investigate which of a number of different social and psychological factors are most strongly related to the educational and occupational aspirations of high school students.

Past studies concerned with educational and occupational aspirations have concentrated primarily on an examination of those factors thought to be relevant for youth living in urban and rural areas of the United States and Canada. In general, these various investigations reveal that, for both rural and urban respondents, a number of the same factors, such as sex, IQ scores, scholastic ability, parental values, family socio-economic status, size of community of residence and educational attainment of parents, consistently appear to be related to the educational and occupational aspirational levels of youth.

The present study was concerned basically with many of the same factors researched in the past, but differs notably from earlier studies with respect to the type of youth which constitutes the sample. More concretely, this study examined the relationships between certain social, personal and family-related factors and the educational and occupational aspirational levels of Franco-Manitoban senior high school students.

Definition and Significance of the Problem

The basic purpose of the present study was to determine which of a large number of variables researched in past studies and found related to educational and occupational aspirational levels of American and Canadian (especially Manitoban) youth were also related to the aspirational levels of Franco-Manitoban youth.

It will then be possible to determine the relative strength of each relationship by applying certain stringent controls by statistically keeping selected variables constant. A third logical step would be to draw up a list of the most reliable predictors--variables strongly related to the educational and occupational aspirational levels of Franco-Manitoban students even under strict variable control.

Concretely, it is an attempt to establish a hierarchy of importance among the independent variables by discovering as precisely as possible what portion of the total variation is explained by each independent variable.

A number of studies concerned with the aspirations of Manitoba high school students and the factors related to those aspirations have been completed (e.g. Forcese and Siemens, 1965; Krescy, 1970;

Kristjanson, 1967; Peach, 1970; Siemens, 1965 and Smith, 1972). Since the previous studies focused on the Interlake region of Manitoba, a small, selected suburban Winnipeg sample, central and western Manitoba, and selected single enterprise communities of Manitoba and northern Ontario, this study was an attempt to expand the present limited knowledge regarding the educational and occupational aspirations of Manitoba youth by studying more closely selected Franco-Manitoban senior high school students.

The earlier Manitoba studies generally concurred with research completed in the past two decades in the United States and Canada with respect to the relationship of various factors with the aspiration levels of high school students. The present study initially assumed that factors which correlated with students' aspiration levels elsewhere would also be related to French Manitoba's high school students, albeit the relative strengths of the relationships might be different.

As previously noted, past research indicates that certain variables tend to be related to the aspirations of high school students. If the variables related to students' aspirational levels elsewhere are related also in French Manitoba, as this study assumed they might be, then the programmes that would aid in raising the aspirations of youth and of increasing their awareness of available occupations and skills might be implemented and pursued in this Franco-Manitoban segment in the same way as they may be in the population of Manitoba in general. However, if the relationships between various factors and the aspirational level tend to disappear in this selected segment of Manitobans, conventional occupational information programmes and educational facilities may need to be altered and special programmes implemented.

Thus, if certain variables appear to be reasonably strong predictors of aspirational levels, primary consideration should be given such variables when change is contemplated in any area which directly or indirectly affects youth.

The high schools concerned in this study were jointly selected by members of the Department of Sociology and the Department of Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Education for the purpose of examining the relationships of certain independent variables and the aspirational levels of Franco-Manitoban students. One high school was selected from each of the five so-called bilingual school divisions in Manitoba. These five selected bilingual divisions (English and French) thus represent the five French-speaking areas of the province. The population may thus be defined as all registered full-time students in grades ten to twelve inclusively in the five selected high schools.

Earlier studies have examined aspects of the vocational development of youth representative of a number of environmental origins and ethnic background; however, Franco-Manitoban youth have not hitherto been studied in terms of their aspirations. In general, past studies found significant relationships between a number of social and psychological variables and the occupational and educational aspirations of youth. Since the students under study are apparently different in some respects from other students studied, the variables selected for analysis include some variables earlier found significantly related to occupational and educational aspirations, some variables which were not and some others thought particularly relevant for the youth studied.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1. Introduction

In the past, researchers, in examining a host of variables have provided abundant data. For some of these factors, or variables, there is substantial agreement that a strong relationship with aspirational level exists; for certain other variables there is general agreement that no significant relationship exists; and for still others the results are contradictory. The purpose of this chapter is to examine in some detail many of these variables actually selected in this study to determine to which of the above categories they belong and thereby formulate meaningful hypotheses.

Before presenting concretely the review of the literature, a specific point should be made clear. Whether educational or occupational aspirations take chronological precedence is conjectural. Some may aspire occupationally first and then pursue the education requisite for achieving their occupational objective; some may simply aspire educationally and select an occupation later. But, quite apart from the chronological element and indeed much more important is that a number of writers have noted the close relationship between occupational aspirations and educational aspirations. Many researchers, Asbury (1968), Slocum (1958) and Kahl (1953) have suggested that students appear to use education not in pursuit of a specific occupational objective but rather as a means of securing an occupational

level and its concomitants. Then, if educational and occupational aspirations are closely related, it is probable that both may also be related to many of the same personal and family-related factors (e.g., Forcese and Siemens, 1965; Siemens, 1965).

2. Empirical Research

An examination of the whole question of aspirational levels of youth reveals that an extensive amount of empirical research has been done in the area.

W. H. Sewell's Educational and Occupational Perspectives of Rural Youth (1963) and Career Choices of Youth in a Changing Society by L. C. Burchinal review the larger body of sociological literature relating to educational and occupational aspirations of youth. Both reviews consider the relationships between such variables as size of community of residence, socio-economic status of family, father's occupation and education, mother's education, ethnicity and the educational and occupational aspiration levels of adolescents.

In the United States, the study undertaken by Sewell (1957) investigated the relationship between a great number of variables and the educational and occupational aspirations of a statewide (Wisconsin) sample of high school youth. He found positive relationships between both the educational and occupational aspirational levels of youth and family SES, father's occupation and education, mother's education, and size of community of residence.

On the other hand, researchers such as Schwarzweller (1960), Shah (1968) and Kohn (1969) report no relationship between size of community of residence and aspirational level of youth.

A vast amount of empirical work has been done relating parental and peer influences on educational and occupational aspirational levels of youth by Kandel and Lesser (1969), Regberg and Westby (1967), Duncan, Haller and Portes (1968) and others.

In sharp contrast with the research from the United States, Canadian studies related to the educational and occupational aspirations of youth are few in number and limited in scope.

Nevertheless, a few Canadian studies deal with influence of family and personal factors upon the educational and occupational experiences or plans of youth and warrant mention. Perhaps the most comprehensive work in this area has been one by Porter, Blishen and Porter (1973). These three well-known Canadian sociologists sampled 9,000 Ontario high school students and 3,000 of their parents. The students examined were in Grades 8, 10 and 12; these being considered critical stages in the decision-making process encountered by all students. Overall, the results are fairly consistent with both American and other Canadian research in the same general theoretical area.

In this Ontario high school study the proportions of students who expected to go to university were 36 percent in Grade 8, 29 percent in Grade 10 and 34 percent in Grade 12. Of the students with high mental ability, almost half expected to go (45 percent in Grade 8, 42 percent in Grade 10 and 45 percent in Grade 12). Of the high mental ability students who were in the five-year program and thus eligible to go to university, 54 percent in Grade 10 and 58 percent in Grade 12 had these expectations. The proportions of those students in the five-year program who reported that their grades

were over 75 percent who expected to go to university was still higher (67 percent in Grade 10 and 71 percent in Grade 12). The authors

State:

"These are the students who would be most likely to be motivated to go to university; they are prepared to work hard and they have a high self-concept of ability".

(Porter, Blishen and Porter, 1973, p. 197).

In a follow-up study, conducted by the same authors in the Spring of 1973, of the Grade 12 students in the 1971 sample it was found that many students had not been realistic in their expectations when they answered the questionnaire in 1971. Specifically, at that time, only 19 percent wanted to go directly to work after leaving high school and 23 percent expected to. In fact, 48 percent actually did. Thirty-seven percent wanted to go to university and 34 percent expected to, but only 27 percent did. In short, almost half the students went to work immediately after high school, and of those students, more than half had aspired to continue to university.

Finally, with respect to social class and student educational aspirations, the proportion of students in Grade 12 who expected to go to university ranged from 60 percent of the highest class to only 24 percent of the lowest. Extremely revealing is the fact that when controlling for IQ scores the number of high social class students actually doubled the number of low social class students who expected to go to university even with the greater absolute number of students ranked as low social class. Among the students who would be eligible and would be most likely to benefit from university--the high achieving students in the five-year program--the proportions who expected to go on to university ranged from 79 percent of the higher classes to only 57 percent of the lower classes.

Another important study in Ontario was conducted by W. C. Fleming of the Ontario Department of Educational Research, author of the "Atkinson Study Reports" on Grade 13 students enrolled in public and private schools in Ontario in 1955-56. Report I (1957) stated that of the Grade 13 students enrolled in universities the following year, a disproportionately high number were found to represent smaller-sized families, families with both parents alive, where the father occupied a high status job, where parents were more highly educated and families that lived in a medium- to large-sized city.

Another significant study was conducted by Hall and MacFarlane (1962). They noted a close relationship between educational behavior, as measured by incidence of high school dropout and the occupational status levels of father. Their findings also suggest that girls adapt considerably better to the school system and had a much greater likelihood of climbing above their parents than was found to be the case for boys.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in Manitoba, during the last five to ten years a rather impressive number of research projects pertaining to the area of youth aspirations and plans have been completed: Forcese and Seimens (1965); Krescy (1970); Kristjanson (1967); Peach (1970); Prystupa (1969); Seimens (1965); Smith (1972). These studies focused on the Interlake Region of Manitoba, a small, selected suburban Winnipeg sample, central and western Manitoba and five geographically relatively isolated single enterprise communities.

In summary, it appears that certain characteristics of the family are related to the total development of the child. It has been seen that the child may inherit the father's occupation or otherwise be the recipient of the projected ambitions or interests of the parents. Parents, in their individual and collective roles, may mould the attitudes, motivations and goals of the children. Parental interest in and expectations of the child's ability and development provides impetus to the child's aspirations and his desire to achieve.

In general, empirical research suggests that the variable found to be most influential on educational and occupational aspirations of youth in the United States are also the most important in Canada.

With the general relationships in past studies noted, the literature may be reviewed according to specific variables found to be most conspicuous in other studies.

3. The Specific Variables

Sex

While most researchers have centered their attention on aspirational levels and vocational choices of males, a number have examined both sexes and found important aspirational differences between the sexes. Edlefson and Crowe (1960) suggested that as they grow older and pass from one school grade level to the next, girls increasingly prefer the occupation of housewife and fewer prefer high and middle class jobs. Boys, meanwhile, appeared to prefer higher status jobs with an increase in grade. Also Dipboye and Anderson (1959) concluded that the aspirational levels of boys and