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Growing Up in Scotland: Predictors of Parental Aspirations for their Children's Education

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14 SES 09 B, Family Education and Parenting - Parental Involvement in Perspective IV

Parallel Paper Session

Time: 2012-09-20

11:00-12:30

Room: ESI 2 - Aula 5

Chair: Ewelina Rydzewska

Contribution

Growing Up in Scotland: Predictors of Parental Aspirations for their Children's Education

The role of parents in the education of children is widely acknowledged. As a result, most European countries have developed strategies to encourage parental participation. A key element of involvement that has received some attention is parental aspirations. This examines the level of education that parents would like their children to attain (Spera, Wentzel & Matto, 2009). Various studies suggest that parental aspirations play a significant role in a child's academic success, and is potentially the most crucial component of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2007). For instance, parental aspirations has been linked to children's academic goals, persistence in school, intellectual accomplishment, and children's own academic aspirations (see e.g., Areepattamannil, 2010; Bronstein et al., 2005; Jeynes 2007; Wigfield, 1995). One suggestion is that, aspirations drive parental decisions and creates a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (e.g., Wentzel, 1998).

Examination of the literature however shows that only limited attention has been devoted to understanding what determines parental aspirations (Spera et al., 2009). The scant evidence suggests that parental aspirations may be influenced by discrete factors such as the parents own education, perception of school related factors, and a child's academic performance (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001; Spera et al., 2009), although this evidence is sometimes contradictory (e.g., Kirk et al., 2011). Additionally, current studies on aspirations have not proposed any coherent theoretical model in explaining the determinants of parental aspirations. Further, studies aimed at understanding the influences on parental aspirations have been focused on parents with older children. An interesting issue for the current study is the aspirations of parents whose children are much younger and have just started school. This is because children's earliest experiences are thought

to have a significant influence on their future education success. As a result, parental decisions - which may result from their aspirations for the child at a young age - may have significant repercussions for a child's future education. The current study therefore aims to explore two research questions:

- a) what factors predict parental aspirations for their children's education? and
- (b) how do these factors interact in providing a coherent explanation for parental aspirations?

It can be argued that understanding determinants of parental aspirations when children are still young could lead to early interventions that give all children a head start. Findings may provide suggestion for how schools can work with parents in the bid to raise pupil's achievement and break the cycle of poverty between parents and their children.

Method

The current study was undertaken using the Growing Up in Scotland Survey (GUS). GUS is a national longitudinal survey of children aimed at collecting information on a range of topics related to children's development. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique of all eligible children within the cohort year. Data from the Sweep 4 Child Cohort survey was used for the study. The Sweep 4 survey was obtained by interviewing the child's main carer (mostly the child's mother). A sample size of 2200, representing a 90% response rate was obtained. The cohort children were aged between 5-6 years.

The dependent variable, parental aspirations, was measured asking participants how far in school, further or higher education they would you like their child to go? Response ranged from 1 (Standard Grades) to 5 (Finishing a Masters, PhD, medical, or other advanced degree). The independent variables were parental and child variables. Parental variables considered for the current study include: age, family type, education, socio-economic status, involvement in the child's education and parenting style. Child characteristics include: gender, birth order, attitudes to school, health, psychological and behavioural difficulties.

Expected Outcomes

Preliminary analysis using regression suggests that both parental and child variables have a significant influence on parental aspirations. Significant parental variables include household employment, socio-economic status, education and parenting style. On the whole, parents from households where at least one parent is employed, and those with high socioeconomic and educational backgrounds tend to have higher aspirations for their children. Further, parents who were protective of their children tended to have higher aspirations. Significant child variables include the child's birth order, conduct problems and whether or not the child has Additional Support Needs. More specifically, being high in the family birth order is associated with higher parental aspirations. Further, parents tend to have lower aspirations for children with conduct problems and Additional Support Needs. The final paper will explore the relationships between these factors by proposing a model to explain parental aspirations. Implications of the findings in relation to raising pupil's achievement will also be explored.

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