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Literature Review on Issues and Solutions in Inner-City Schools

Many theories have been proposed to explain what needs to be done to improve inner-city schools. This review will focus on major themes regarding issues and solutions to inner-city schools that emerged repeatedly throughout the literature reviewed. The major issues and solutions addressed are mental health, parent involvement, principal involvement, the culture of violence, and aggressiveness. This paper will primarily focus on how different people can help children's school performance in the inner-city.

Many theorists agree in order for inner-city school improvement, the support of community stakeholders is necessary. Richards argues that stakeholders are needed "in order to improve schools the academic achievement of students" by supporting "inclusionary practices that are fair and equitable" (1). Anakwenze agrees that stakeholders need to support inner-city improvement, but by "mobilizing a variety of community institutions and professionals to overcome barriers to accessing mental health care services" (156). According to Richards, inclusionary practices and mental health go hand in hand. In the next paragraph are some ways that the before mentioned issues can be implemented in the schools.

Many theorists stated that inner-city school teachers, principals, and other personnel do not know how to deal with troublesome students. In inner-city schools, exclusion is mostly a result of not knowing how to deal with students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Without inclusionary programs, "the likelihood

that these students continue to perform at the lowest academic levels, and eventual drop out of school is extremely high” (Richards 2). Going off of this statement, from the theories Anakwenze makes there could be a solution. They argue that community institutions and professionals can help end these problems by helping teachers by training them on how to deal with disruptive behavior in the classroom. One pilot study found that after the implementation there were “positive effects on behavior and academic performance (Anakwenze 154). While what has been mentioned in this paragraph can be a solution, exposure to violence can also significantly affect mental health and school performance.

Many theorists have argued that violence can directly impact school performance. Anakwenze argues that long-term exposure to violence can lead to “greater aggressiveness, impulsivity, anger, and susceptibility to substance use” (150), which in turn can increase the risk of school dropout. Hogland also delves into this topic by using a child adjustment model that measures academic and social competence as well as aggressive behaviors and how it impacts the child’s academic ability. From research it was concluded that “parents who experienced high hardship showed significantly less homework assistance” and therefore “their children showed lower levels of academic and social competence and higher levels of aggressive behaviors at each wave” (Hogland 523). Devine agrees that this behavior has an impact on the student, but has a more aggressive approach to the topic of violence in inner-city schools, and sees the issue as more of a control factor.

Devine seems to argue that school control revolves around the fact that there is violence. An example of this is when teachers “maintain classroom control by

knowing that they can call security” (Devine 32). This leads me to believe that teachers in inner-city schools resort to security instead of attempting to deal with the troublesome children, even when it may not be necessary. This could be getting students in trouble unnecessarily. According to Richards, this is the most important factor to troublesome children doing poorly in school, as this is excluding them from learning in the classroom and puts them behind. It is important to go back to Anakwenze’s argument that training for teachers would be beneficial for situations like this by training the teachers on how to deal with these situations to promote inclusion. Principals can also do a lot to shape this environment.

Devine and Richards had very different opinions on how principal involvement can improve academic performance. Devine makes a harsh theory about how skipping is really the only option to improve the schools, as the kids that can “read and write” go to the ed op schools in which you have to take an admissions test to get in. Skipping is almost impossible, though, as you cannot deny someone a public education. This seems like the easy way out, but Richards suggests another alternative that principals can implement that promotes inclusion among the district.

Implementation of a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program can increase inclusion and academic performance in school districts. Instead of simply not dealing with the students with behavioral challenges, this program works to address the needs of these students by involving the principal to reframe the climate of the school. The key components to successful PBIS programming are “the development and function of a leadership team, the staff

participation and involvement, administrative support, the development of competent coaching capacity, and district level support” (Richards page). Unlike what was previously stated by Devine, this program would only work when the principal and teachers truly care about the students and want them to improve academically.

Wang also had an argument about principal involvement. It was stated that engaged principals that were “very engaged in school events, remained active in the selection and retention of the faculties, valued high academic achievement, and supported the library in the life of the school” (Wang 52). This theory can help to explain Richards study, as Richards noted that once they planned the issues, they were not as hard to deal with and there was a huge reduction in office discipline referrals. Parents also play a role in academic achievement by participating at the school-level but also by working with their children at home.

Parents play one of the largest roles in how a student will behave and perform academically. Typically, “when children are struggling academically, socially, and behaviorally, their parents showed higher prospective levels of homework assistance and home-school conferencing” (Hogland 517). While this statement is true, the situation varies among low-income families. When the child’s parents are low-income and located in the inner city, the chances of this happening are much slimmer, as low-income parents engage in fewer school-related activities. This is especially troublesome because these are the children that need the most parent involvement to thrive. Without this engagement, the child tends to be overly aggressive and perform poorly in school.

A common trend as to why parent involvement is lower in inner-city areas is because, like their children, many of them have mental illnesses that they do not know how to deal with. According to Anakwenze, the before mentioned SBHCs could help by extending their services to parents. Parents feel like they can go to these health centers because they “decrease stigma, support more comprehensive services, and increase efficiency by providing services at a location in which students and parents are available” (Anakwenze page). This also goes along with Hogland’s argument about parent involvement, and can further help low-income parents get involved with the school.

From this literature review, theories of parent involvement, teacher involvement, aggressiveness, violence, and mental health have provided many theorists with ideas about what can be done to improve inner-city schools. Some solutions suggested were school health centers available to not only students but also parents, SBIC programs that work to include all students, teacher training, and further parent and principal involvement. Some further research I would like to do is to compare statistics of the programs before and after implementation. I would also like to compare literacy rates among inner-city schools and other schools.

Works Cited

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