



The Effects of Poverty: Children and Education

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Abstract

At the Boys and Girls Club of Nacogdoches, it is obvious that poverty is well known to the children, as this program aims to help low-income families. The concept addressed in the following presentation is the affect poverty has on a child and their education. Through academic literature and personal experience, the author was able to explain how poverty can affect a child's development, academic performance, and behavior. Lastly, recommendations will be made on how the Boys and Girls Club can improve parent and school involvement, as well as improve the volunteer experience.

Introduction/Literature Review

For my volunteer hours, I chose to work at the Boys and Girls Club of Nacogdoches. I chose to work at this location because as a future educator, I need to be aware of the appearance of all socioeconomic statuses. I currently work as a Teacher Assistant at the Janice A. Pattillo Early Childhood Research Center, where most students, if not all, come from mid to upper-middle class homes. At the ECRC (Early Childhood Research Center), the facilities are new and the resources are abundant. However, that is not the case when it comes to the Boys and Girls Club. These children do not have the same support system or socioeconomic status as those who attend school at the ECRC. It was important to me that I know the face of both wealth and poverty so that I may adjust my classroom to both.

The concept that I researched was the effect of poverty on a child and their education. I chose this concept because the presence of poverty in the Boys and Girls Club of Nacogdoches was heavy. It was clear to see that every child in that building was affected by poverty in some way, whether that be a stressful environment at home, the absence of parent figures, an inability to focus, a lack of necessities, etc. According to Ross A. Thompson in his academic journal, *Stress and Child Development*, the neurobiology of a child is largely affected by the environment in which they are raised. Therefore, stressful environments caused by poverty directly affect the child's health, social abilities, and their ability to succeed in their education and then later on in life (Thompson, 2014). After seeing Thompson's research first-hand in the children I worked with, I decided that I would look further into the matter.

Volunteer Experience

My volunteer experience was difficult at first, but eventually I adjusted to the environment and location. The Boys and Girls Club is not far from the Stephen F. Austin State University campus, so transportation was never an issue, but what was troublesome to me was the physical appearance of the Boys and Girls Club building. The carpets looked aged and stained, as well as the peeling paint on the wall. It was obvious that this building had not had much remodeling done since it opened in 1994. I was disheartened when I saw the building because I know how great this program is, but it simply does not get enough government funding to offer healthy environments for the children. My job was to work in the Homework Room. This meant that I would sit down with any child who needed help with their homework and work with them until it was complete.

Usually, I was helped children with math or reading. On most days, I worked with one child at a time, but in all I would help 1-2 children by the end of my volunteer shift. The Homework Room typically had 10-20 students who needed help, but there would only be 5-10 volunteers working at a time. The children at the club were energetic and unfocused, which is to expect from children who have just sat in a classroom for nearly 8 hours. However, the students were never disrespectful or rude to me. They were always grateful for the help and wanted to be best friends. Sometimes, when a child could not focus, I would make deals with them. I would tell them that if we did one problem they could have a little break and then we would start on the next problem. One time, I even promised a child that between problems, I would tell her a joke. The children responded positively to this, as it gave them the chance to complete their homework as well as release some energy.

Analysis of Experience

While volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club, I saw how poverty affects a child and their education first hand. For example, one day while volunteering, I was helping a young boy with his reading homework. He had to read the book his teacher had sent home with him for the week. After struggling to read to his book, I asked him what grade he was in, to which he replied first grade. I was shocked to hear this because his reading level was that of a kindergartener at the beginning to middle of the school year. He struggled with simple words and phonics that are usually grasped towards the end of pre-k and worked on throughout kindergarten. This example ties in with the concept I have chosen because reports such as those in Helen F. Ladd's (2012), *Presidential Address: Education and Poverty: Confronting the Evidence*, have shown that there is a relationship between poverty and low academic performances in math and reading. In one of the graphs presented in Ladd's article, it shows that there is a large academic achievement gap between children from low-income families and children of high-income families. Ladd (2012) even states that 40% of the gap recorded is from reading scores. This may be due to the fact that mid to upper-income families are able to better take advantage of the education system. This means that mid to upper-income families can assure that their children are put in schools with better opportunities and learning environments that may not be in the school district they live in, while low-income families cannot afford to put their children in prestigious schools or those with high performance rates. (Ladd, 2012).

Another example of seeing the affects poverty has on a child and their education at the Boys and Girls Club was that while the children were never disrespectful towards me, they did have behavioral issues towards other children. It was common to hear children speaking to each other in ways to assert their dominance over each other. It was as if they were showing who the strongest, hardest/ toughest, and most grown up child was. In some cases, this would lead to children threatening to fight each other. This violent behavioral issue can be directly connected to poverty. In the academic journal, *Do Parenting and the Home Environment, Maternal Depression, Neighborhood, and Chronic Poverty Affect Child Behavioral Problems Differently in Different Racial-Ethnic Groups?*, a series of studies were conducted to determine whether or not parenting methods, home environment, maternal depression, neighborhood, and poverty affected the behavior of children. The studies included White, African-American, and Latino families, as well as extended family households and single parent households. The results of the studies conducted concluded that poverty in fact affects a child's behavior because it also affects their living environment, as well as their development (Pachter, Auinger, Palmer, & Weitzman, 2006). Because of the evidence found in Pachter, Auinger, Palmer, and Weitzman's studies, it is reasonable to assume that the violent and assertive behavior presented by the children of the Boys and Girls Club is directly connected to their socioeconomic statuses.

My experiences agree exactly with the academic literature I have read because in every study conducted or research presented, I saw it first-hand at the Boys and Girls Club. The Boys and Girls Club is an after-school care program aimed at low-income students whose parents are unable to pick them up from school, usually because they work past the end of the school day and cannot afford personal after-school care, such as nannies or babysitters. Therefore, the children of the Boys and Girls Club are from low-income families. Being in a place that is majority children who live in poverty, it is easy to see the effects of their socioeconomic statuses play out in social and academic situations., whether that be behavioral or low academic performance.

Recommendations

Two recommendations regarding increased involvement with parents and the school system at the Boys and Girls Club are to have monthly weekend events that encourage parents and children to spend time together, as well as meet the staff. It is important that parents know who their children are with between the time they leave school and when the parent is able to pick up their student. Not only will parents be able to meet the staff, but the staff will be able to meet the parents and understand each child's background, that way the club can offer help for families who are in need. Lastly, events that offer free food to families will help those who struggle to afford food due to low-income. It is obvious that the funds for the club are low, so putting aside money monthly from the funds given would have to happen to make this recommendation work. For school involvement with the club, I recommend a system be set up where a teacher from one of the surrounding schools come once a month to offer tutoring for their subject. For instance, a math teacher from one school could come to the Boys and Girls Club one month and then the next month a reading teacher from another school could come. This would allow students to have extra opportunities to ask questions about concepts they do not understand, as well as show them that their teachers care about their academic success by coming and helping them outside of school.

A recommendation I would offer to improve the volunteer experience is to create a space that is easier to help the students with their homework. The Homework Room did not have enough seating for both the students and volunteers. There were a few times that I was forced to sit on the floor so that a student could sit at a desk. This made it difficult to offer help because I could not see the child's paper without standing and towering over the child. I feel that the students are more comfortable when we are able to sit at their eyelevel and sit right next to them. Another recommendation I would offer to improve the volunteer experience is to control the environment more. It was overwhelming and distracting to have children running everywhere and staff members running from room to room shouting a child's name. I believe that this may have contributed to the students' inability to concentrate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my volunteer experience was beneficial to me as a future educator. I was able to see and interact with children from low-income homes. I was even able to conduct further research on how the poverty these children live in affects their education. It is proven that poverty directly affects a child's development, academic performance, and behavior, which then negatively affect their overall education. Poverty can occur in all races and family types, but those who are not affected by poverty have the upper-hand when it comes to education. However, there are programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club, that offer help to low-income families. It is important to support these programs and organizations because they just might be the only support a student gets to help them overcome the struggles that come from his/her socioeconomic status and obtain a higher education.

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