

Case Study Research

Urban Education-Perspectives from University Students in a Multicultural Education Course

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The study focuses on the responses from sophomore and juniors in college who are human development majors. A literature review of selected works from various authors on similar issues was used to explain the author intention and to achieve the concrete clarification of the topic. Particular clarification was made toward the school curriculum and policy. The conclusion suggested that as the human development students discussed their urban education viewpoints, the students recommended the way forward toward proving the effectiveness in making urban education more vibrant, challenging, and beneficial in the school.

Keywords: Urban Education-Perspectives, Multicultural Education Course, Curriculum, Policies.

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses responses from sophomore and juniors in college who are human development majors. These students address the questions relating to improvements that should be made in urban education. The students all attended urban centered schools and these are their viewpoints. This article proposes that urban schools face increasing concentrations of poverty, increasing immigrant population and high diversity issues related to ethnicity and language.

The students felt the following would prove extremely effective in making urban education more vibrant, challenging, and beneficial: (1) hiring teachers who care; (2) introducing challenging educational methodologies for the students and (3) making learning more interactive and exciting.

When discussing hiring teachers that care, the students without fail correlated caring teachers as those who exude a passion in their teaching. The students experienced mostly women teachers in elementary school who were nurturing, who applauded students when they deserved it, and who gave them a pat on the back when needed. However, this environment changed drastically, once the students were enrolled in high school. Uncaring teachers became the norm. According

to them, the location of the urban schools and its environment can promote a negative or positive effect on those attending the school. The negative effect relates to crime, drugs, and other discouraging elements in urban communities. Whereas, a positive effect relates to caring family members, community persons or teachers who are protective of students and who give them hope, academic challenges and encouragement, and other tools that give them confidence to focus on education.

As the students continued their discussion, they expressed that introducing students to diverse methodologies such as integrating the multiple intelligences approach where teachers can build on a student's strengths while respecting the diverse learning styles of each student to develop an appropriate method or methods that could accommodate them. In addition, the idea of having a variety of assessments, particularly authentic assessments such as portfolios that demonstrate growth in skills and other assessments over a period of time would be very beneficial to showing how and what skills the students are learning.

These educational methods would make learning more interactive and exciting because of respecting the individual learning styles of students and incorporating methods of teaching that would include

students in the learning process and the assessment techniques that would be used for their evaluation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Luther W. Seabrook (1997) the emphasis is on the deficits that interfere with schooling. The focus on the devastating effects of poverty may lead to the belief that poor children are so disadvantaged that nothing can be done to help them. However, Holmes (2006) believed that using positive role models would shift the irresponsible and destructive behaviors such as drugs and violence that are often found in poverty-stricken environments to more positive influences. The feeling is affluent parents do this by moving to areas where the schools are marked by positive student groups, whereas urban parents cannot do this and they are stuck in their environments. In addition to selecting role models who have demonstrated talent in music, athletics, mathematics, and science, some additional ideas that would help move urban schools into a positive direction that were discussed: creating groups large enough so that peer pressure exist with membership that affords a sense of belonging could be indicated by a name, t-shirts, logos, giving extra privileges and celebrating and advertising students' successes.

Eleanor Armour-Thomas (1989) conducted a study for the New York City Board of Education relating poverty, poor achievement, and teacher preparation in elementary and middle schools. In her research, she found that exceptionally high-achieving schools which were overwhelmingly poor and minority with a demographically similar group of low-achieving schools. The study concluded that about 90 percent of the reading and math score variance was linked to the following school characteristics: 1) strong instructional and assessment focus; 2) strong instructional and organizational leadership, 3) high teacher morale, 4) more than five years of teacher's experience at the same school, 5) professional knowledge beyond the master's degree, 6) years of general educational experience and years of experience in the New York City school system and 7) tenured teachers' appointments.

The research study demonstrated that student characteristics such as family and community did not predetermine student performance. It found school characteristics were critically important and that the complex ingredients of effective education were high expectations, engaging materials, modern equipment, a demanding curriculum, an orderly environment, strong leadership, and clear goals correlated to an effective education level. It found also that the training, experience and education of a child's teacher may be the most important ingredient of all.

Hill (1994) researched what kind of school teachers want. Teachers described needing much more

orderly, focused and collaborative working environments than they currently encounter. Principals, superintendents, school board members and teacher union leaders claim that they could be more effective if they had less interference from others. All agree that they would prefer a system that valued professional initiative. The idea of governing schools must change. Although there are various reform efforts such as school choice, privatization, and systemic reforms. None of these reform efforts offers a complete alternative to the existing governance system. Hill feels the commitment to governing public schools is more systemic reforms that try to "align" different parts of public education such as mandated goals, tests, curriculum frameworks, and teacher certification methods instead of eliminating the political and contractual constraints that create fragmented, unresponsive schools in the first place.

CURRICULUM

Some schools in the District of Columbia offer before and after care services and require teachers to help students with their homework. However, students felt all schools should offer these services in their programs and feel that their implementation could be the beginning of students excelling in school, completing homework and improving test scores.

Some students feel that they become bored in the classroom because some teachers do not challenge them. As a result, boredom for students could result in bad behavior issues being exhibited in the classroom. Some teachers try to meet their students' needs while others stick to the script and continue teaching to the set doctrine.

Students would like more administrative support for teachers to develop a curriculum program that can be free of bias towards cultures that they may not understand. They feel that there must be a respectful understanding of any differences, challenges or other issues in order that effective teaching can be accomplished. The curriculum must meet the needs of the diverse learners and be sensitive to daily life issues such as: violence, pregnancy, bullying, self-identity and immigrant related issues.

POLICIES

The students expressed concerns with regards to school policies. They would like the following policies to be implemented in all schools.

- Teachers and other staff must consist of a diverse group of individuals, in order for them to relate to the students and for the students can relate to them as well.
- Teachers must make every effort to build trustworthy

and honest relationships with their students in order to understand them and support them.

- Teachers and other staff must embrace all children of different cultures and background.
- Teachers and other staff must Include all children in the curriculum, using Multiple Intelligences and build on students' strengths.
- Teachers must build strong relationships among parents/families and children.
- Teachers must stop underestimating urban schools and separating low income and minority children and their families.
- Teachers and administrators must change policies to support students and their families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Teachers and administrators must develop and implement a better quality of life and an environment that is free of bias.
- Administrators must put into practice the school mission; involve families, students, and teachers.
- Administrators must incorporate the school values daily, which are important to have a welcoming and inviting school environment.
- Administrators must provide training for teachers to create partnerships with families, businesses, educational and cultural institutions to create new exciting learning experiences.
- Administrators must create inclusive classrooms and schools for wheelchair accessibility and elevators for those children who have some mobility need.
- Administrators must provide their schools with more personnel to support students and their families; social workers, counselors, psychologist etc.
- Administrators must provide families with access to information in the language they feel more comfortable; this can be accomplished through interpreters or language line access.

These policy changes need to be made to improve the lives of children through yearly academic orientations, professional development trainings, economic support, clarifying expectations, setting goals and expectations and developing an inclusive curriculum that meets the diverse needs of the students in our classrooms.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

As the human development students discussed their urban education viewpoints, the students felt the following would prove extremely effective in making urban education more vibrant, challenging, and beneficial: (1) hiring teachers who care; (2) introducing various educational methods for the students and (3) making learning more interactive and exciting.

The researchers have indicated that positive role models for students and school characteristics such as effective education with high expectations, engaging materials, modern equipment, a demanding curriculum, an orderly environment, strong leadership, and clear goals correlated to an effective education level. In addition, the researchers found that the training, experience and education of a child's teacher may be the most important ingredient of all.

Lastly researchers found, in terms of governing urban schools, teachers expressed a need for a much more orderly, focused and collaborative working environments than they currently encounter. Principals, superintendents, school board members and teacher union leaders claim that they could be more effective if they had less interference from others. All agree that they would prefer a system that valued professional initiative and the idea of governing schools must change.

Students would like more administrative support for teachers to develop a curriculum program that can be free of bias towards cultures. The curriculum must meet the needs of the diverse learners and be sensitive to daily life issues.

Students created a comprehensive list of policies for teachers and administrators that are the keys to making urban education successful for all children and families in the school community.

In evaluating the students' responses and the researchers' recommendations, they are both in agreement that to develop an effective urban education program, one would need a challenging curriculum and training, experience and education of the child's teacher is a critical component.

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