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. Patillo Early Childhood Research Center. I have been there for some time, but I am not able to truly understand the kind of environment the children I work with face. I often hear the stories from my professor of what it is like to work with children who have just sat in a classroom for nearly 8 hours. However, the students 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 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)

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).

Volunteer Experience

My volunteer experience was difficult at first, but eventually I adjusted to the environment and knew all the children by the end of the school year. (2014-20) I was able to help 5-10 volunteers working at the Homework Room. This meant that mid to upper-income families are able to better take advantage of the education system. Poverty can occur in all races and family types, but those who are not affected by 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 46% 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 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).

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.

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 needs, which will open new opportunities for the club to 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 a little bit of money 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 eye level and sit right next to them. Another recommendation I would offer is to improve the volunteer experience by being able 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.

REFERENCES

