Alameda County JJC's Allocation of Educational Resources And Incarcerated Students Academic Achievement

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In What Ways Does Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center's Allocation of Educational Resources Affect Incarcerated Students' Academic Achievement?

Introduction

Juvenile detention centers are a rehabilitation service for troubled youth who have committed infractions of the law, focused on redirecting lives and discouraging recidivism. This paper begins with the assumption that the allocation of educational resources and incarcerated students' academic achievement would be prioritized inside of juvenile halls. This assumption was made because of the transformational power education holds in redirecting lives (Brazzel et al; Cecil et al.). Research around a possible correlation between the allocation of educational resources and students' academic achievement has been researched on a macro-level (federal, state, and district levels), as well as on a micro-level (distribution of educational and human resources between schools and classrooms once at district level) within public, private, and charter schools, but there has been little research within juvenile court schools.

It has been found that schools with demographics made up of disadvantaged youth were disproportionately disadvantaged compared to schools attended by advantaged students (Bowles & Levin). School districts have been found to be segregated internally by racial or socioeconomic class categorization, with disadvantaged schools having similar demographics to juvenile court schools–primarily black and brown students (Andrew & Goettel; Monk; Wilson). Scholars have found that the differences in the quality of schooling (measured by teacher quality, class size, and student characteristics) accounted for between one third and two thirds of the variation in students' test scores (Ferguson; Sala et al.). However, this research hasn't deeply explored the educational environment inside of juvenile court systems and incarcerated students academic achievement.

While working as a tutor for incarcerated students inside of Alameda County's Juvenile Justice Hall, I spent a semester collecting ethnographic data. I found that the allocation of educational resources inside Alameda County Juvenile Justice Hall shows a lack of priority towards its incarcerated students' academic achievement by making classroom resources inaccessible, lacking adult infrastructure, enforcing implausible time limits, and by having inconsistent adult responses. This paper aims to demonstrate how not providing adequate support, structure, or resources for classes can negatively impact incarcerated students academic achievement.

Literature Review

To frame my research, I explored past studies of educational resource allocation and student academic achievement, which has centered primarily around disadvantaged schools. I believe that there are similarities in the disadvantages that under-resourced district schools face when compared with the disadvantages that juvenile court schools face.

Educational Resources

I discovered that many scholarly studies centered around finding a better balance between the level of attention given to resource allocation practices at macro, micro, and institutional levels of decision making, as well as the dynamic effect that decisions on each level have. Scholars have found a disconnect between decisions at these different levels of administration, where requests at a micro-level may have no influence/effect on whether there will be a macro-level change. That is, if department X asks for a faculty line it may have no influence/effect on whether the president/cabinet member requires the institution to do Y searches in the following academic year (Rizvi & Jacobsen).

It has been found that technology is extremely useful in classroom settings in terms of the resources they give teachers when it comes to curriculum, educational software, and teacher professional development (Kurdziolek). Socio-physical resource richness is a concept which refers to the combination of socioeconomic resources such as financial, social, and educational assets, and physical resources such as tangible assets or materials that can be used for various purposes, and the importance of both within schools (Kurdziolek).

Racial Advantages/Disadvantages In Educational Systems

The population of Alameda County JJC is predominantly Black and Hispanic disabled males with educational disadvantages. To frame my research, I looked into what current research was available regarding allocation of educational resources to historically marginalized groups with educational disadvantages in school measured by variables such as race, literacy level, and disability.

Racial and ethnic identities are negotiated in school and classroom contexts and that these contexts can support or fail to support the extent to which youth see school as a part of or in opposition to their racial and ethnic identities (Jones & McLaughlin). This is reflected in black and brown students disproportionately being impacted by racist and ableist practices within educational systems which refer to these youth as 'troubled' and 'disabled'. This negatively impacts students' engagement rather as well as learning, with black and brown students disproportionately being removed from classroom environments for disruptive behavior.

There are many known historical disparities and injustices within the educational system that disproportionately affect African American and Brown students, therefore educational liberation for African American and Brown students is categorized in terms of high academic

achievement and encourages community involvement, empowerment, cultural relevance, intersectionality, and above all it emphasizes liberation through knowledge (Puga).

Incarcerated Students Academic Achievement + Education Inside Juvenile Halls

Grade equivalent scores suggest that inmates under the age of 24 were reading at the beginning to middle of fifth grade in all reading subareas, and inmates ages 25 to 39 were reading at the middle seventh grade level (Shippen et al.) Hispanic inmates were found to have significantly lower reading comprehension levels due to language barriers, emphasizing the need for effective reading instruction inside of juvenile detention centers (Shippen et al).

A study inside of Juvenile Detention centers in California found that the teachers took a libratory and humanistic approach to teaching in an attempt to make students more engaged in classroom content (Flores). Another study found that incarcerated youths with higher levels of educational achievement are more likely to return to school after release, and those youths who returned to and attended school regularly were less likely to be rearrested within 12 and 24 months (Blomberg et al.) . Moreover, among youths who were rearrested, those youth who attended school regularly following release were arrested for significantly less serious offenses compared to youths who did not attend school or attended less regularly (Blomberg et al).

The broad impact of the lowered academic achievement among incarcerated youth due to the limited education inside juvenile court schools negatively impacts the economic, political, and social opportunities available to people in these communities (Brazzell et al). Education can change thinking, encourage prosocial behavior, increase employment, and reduce recidivism (Brazzel et al; Cecil et al). Scholars discovered that education's power to transform lives in both tangible and intangible ways makes it one of the most valuable and effective tools we may have

for helping people rebuild their lives after incarceration, as well as for combating crime and reducing criminal justice costs.

Methodology

Data Collection

Through Incarceration to College, I spent 20 hours a week for 12 weeks inside of Alameda County Juvenile Justice hall observing the educational environment inside of the juvenile court school with special attention to the allocation of educational resources, as well as the incarcerated students' academic achievement. Alameda County JJC is a juvenile detention center housing over 358 minors with an age cap of 25. Their website describes how incarcerated students "have the opportunity to earn transferable college credits via online courses through a partnership with Merritt College."

Upon entering the facility, everybody must walk through a metal detector. The entrance level of the building is occupied by court rooms, whereas the third floor of the building is where the youth are detained, and the bottom level is administrative offices. All visitors are required to wear a VIP badge or a 1 day visitor badge to be allowed in with the detained youth. I spent most of my time in the juvenile hall tutoring students in Unit 5 which houses around 25 youth, primarily African American and Hispanic males, but I also spent a considerable amount of time inside Unit 1 and Alameda County JJC's Step-Down Camp Wilmont Sweeney, which consist of the same demographics. The youth in Unit 5 are primarily younger, and most of them attended high school level classes provided by the Juvenile Court School Teachers (JCSTs) during the time when I tutored my students. Unit 1 is for secure-track SB 823, which is the DJJ realignment, typically reserved for more severe offenses and older youth. The youth are ages 18-25. Camp Wilmont Sweeney is the Step-Down reentry Camp to Unit 1, where youth get transferred to

finish their sentences before they're released. All of the youth have the option to enroll in online college courses through a partnership with Merritt College in subjects including but not limited to business, ethnic studies, psychology, and statistics, but I primarily tutored students who needed help with statistics.

To inform my study I collected field notes that focused on difficulties that I encountered when completing required coursework with my students. I also focused on observations of infrastructural and educational environmental issues as well as academic achievement from the different African American and Hispanic students that I tutored.

Analysis

I used interpretative phenomenological analysis to examine the resource allocation inside the JJC from the micro-level difficulties I encountered when working with the youth to complete the coursework to determine whether I believe there to be a causational relationship between educational resource allocation within the JJC and the incarcerated students' academic achievement. I will focus on the following deficits that I observed: missing required materials, implausible time limits, lack of adult infrastructure, and inconsistent adult responses.

Findings

Inadequate Educational Environment for Incarcerated Students

I primarily tutored students who were enrolled in an entirely online statistics course. When I worked with these students inside of the Units there were only two things that I taught them. The first was how to read the formulas and understand what the symbols are referring to in the equations, and the second was how to navigate their TI-84 calculator. Both of these problems would have been solved given the students had adequate access to teacher instruction.This online course didn't offer any lesson-plans or teacher instruction, instead it only provided incarcerated

students with a website to complete their homework assignments with. This website provided students with homework assignments and allowed them to view an example of how to complete questions they didn't understand, as well as ask for help completing problems which would provide them with a walkthrough tutorial of how to complete the problem. However, neither the examples nor the walkthroughs would explain to the students how to use the technology. The students were also unable to access YouTube or any such website which would provide them with a tutorial, nor were they allowed to access the search engine to google how to use their TI-84 calculator.

However, when I visited the Step-Down Camp Sweeney, I encountered a larger issue. I only tutored inside of Camp Sweeney once a week, and when I began working with the statistics student in Camp Sweeney it was already week 10 of 14 of the course. This student didn't have access to a physical calculator, and yet he was expected to complete an entirely online statistics course while incarcerated.

The youth inside of the Units were given extremely implausible time limits to complete their assignments. The youth in Unit 5 were attending high school classes provided by the JCSTs while being cross-enrolled in an average of 3 online college courses. However, these students were not given access to the computer lab except when JCS class wasn't in session–and when they were allowed inside of the computer lab it was alone, not with tutors. When the students were allowed to work with tutors, we had to use 1 probation laptop that we shared among 10 tutors who work with over 30 students. In total, students in unit 5 were allowed around 5 hours per week to complete all of their assignments. Inside of Unit 1, the students were allowed slightly more flexible access to computers, having 1 hour time-slots a day for each student to be

in the computer lab, however it was the same laptop situation when they weren't allowed in the computer lab.

It's notable to add that each time I entered the JJC there would be youth playing video games (Call of Duty, Minecraft, a GTA knockoff, etc) or watching TV shows and movies (I observed them watching shameless uninterrupted for multiple episodes, however 'normally' they're required to turn off inappropriate content).

While conducting my research I also observed a deficit in adult and classroom infrastructure in terms of programming planning, as well as inconsistent Juvenile Probation Officer (JPO) responses. I was left with no students to tutor on multiple occasions when I entered the JJC. There were varying causes for these instances, such as overlapping programming when the JPOs scheduled Physical Education and weight training at the same time that tutors had been designated to come in. In terms of inconsistent JPO responses, there were multiple instances where JPOs had been asked by youth to bend the rules for educational circumstances. In some instances they would, such as when a student would request for us to work inside the JCST's classroom while in session to use the desktop computer when the probation laptop was unavailable. The JPOs allowed us on 3 different occasions. However, examples of them not allowing it are when a student would ask to finish a timed exam during the staff break (10:00am-10:30am which requires youth to be locked in their cells and everybody to leave the housing units) and they wouldn't allow it–even though the computer lab locks the same as the cells.

Academic Achievement

In terms of academic achievement, the students that I work with represent a small portion of the youth enrolled in college courses at Alameda County JJC who utilize the tutoring services

provided by Incarceration to College. There are only 2-3 students inside of the JJC who regularly request tutoring services, and they show high levels of academic achievement. One student entered the JJC as a 10th grade drop out student, and is graduating this semester with his AA from Merritt College and transferring to a 4-year university. Another student is achieving all A's and was able to transfer from Unit 1 to Camp Sweeney.

However, the larger percentage of youth incarcerated at Alameda County JJC are not showing high levels of academic achievement. A majority of the students are unmotivated, disengaged in class, fail to turn in assignments, skip classes, and eventually drop out.

Discussion and Conclusion

These findings provide examples of an inadequate educational environment in which Alameda County JJC is not providing adequate support, structure, or resources for classes and demonstrates how it can negatively impact incarcerated students' academic achievement. Students who are already educationally disadvantaged are being expected to adequately complete college coursework while navigating educational barriers and disadvantages that students should not have to overcome, such as inaccessibility to required class materials, implausible time limits, lack of adult infrastructure, and inconsistent adult responses. The students that I worked with are already outside of the norm by requesting help and utilizing the help provided to them, but the rest of the incarcerated students are left navigating these struggles alone. The students left to navigate these struggles alone are left unmotivated and disengaged. They withdraw from classes, fail to turn in their assignments, and eventually they drop out.

Recommendations

To alleviate these issues there needs to be priority given to the allocation of educational resources inside of Juvenile Detention Centers on a macro-level (federal, state, and district levels), as well

as on a micro-level (distribution of educational and human resources between JJCs once received). These students have lower literacy rates which makes them more likely to disengage from educational opportunities, but the environment of the JJC should be supporting these students in encouraging them to take advantage of these opportunities and redirect their lives.

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