Post-Study Reflective Essay

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Prior to learning the material of this course, my perceptions of school violence were basic. As I discussed in my pre-study essay, I said school violence can range from fist fights to massive school shootings. I mainly stated the more physical acts of school violence but also noted that verbal bullying could also be thought of as school violence as well. I also mentioned how the media frames school violence stories in similar ways and that is how I came to my understanding of it. However, in my original perception of school violence, I stated how I was frustrated with no one providing an answer. Throughout the readings and material explained in this course, I have a much more informed opinion of school violence.

As I previously mentioned, I now think I have a much better understanding of what school violence is. My increased knowledge of this topic comes from the material provided in “Violence Among Students and School Staff” by Brooks as well as my own research. Brooks says that as drug use increases among young people, violent and aggressive behaviors will also increase (Brooks, 2017). Not all students who bully or perform other acts of school violence are on drugs, but this could be the case for certain instances and could help explain the violent behavior in some students. Moreover, Brooks also mentions that,

Students in sixth grade who exhibited lowered academic achievement and were drug users, showed no growth in academic achievement as they became older… The more academically successful the student is at a younger age, the less likely he or she is to use drugs and be associated with those who use (Brooks, 2017, p. 80).

I found this quote to be noteworthy because it connects drugs, academic achievement and implies the number of violent acts these students would commit. Brooks is saying that students who already were not performing well in school started performing worse once they started using drugs. He goes onto say that students who were performing well tended to stay away from other students who were using drugs. Therefore, he is implying that students who do not perform well academically in school are more likely to use drugs and their performance will worsen and these students are more likely to commit acts of school violence. With this in mind, I began thinking about acts of school violence I have heard of and it tends to be from students or people that Brooks describes. It is rarer to hear about a school shooting that happens from an all A student that everyone gets along with. Something like this could happen but Brooks makes logical points about why typically low performing, drug using students commit these acts.

In reading literature about school violence, I came to understand that recognizing the antecedents of school violence is one of the most important parts of prevention but also the most difficult. One way to prevent acts of school violence is for teachers to recognize suspicious behaviors of students and get them the help they need before the act is committed. However, that is a lot easier said than done. Teachers have many students in their classes at one time and it can be hard to pay attention to each student’s individual behaviors and deem whether it is suspicious or not. Brooks also mentions this by saying how parental behavior, home life, intellect, money, family history of aggression and so on are not controlled by the students themselves and it can be difficult for the teacher to learn these things about all of their students (Brooks, 2017). With all of the requirements a teacher already has, it is asking a lot of them to learn background knowledge on all of their students. On the other hand, Brooks does say that teachers should be implementing practices that remove aggressive behavior (Brooks, 2017). In other words, even though teachers cannot control students home environments, teachers should still be doing activities in the classroom to reduce aggressive or threatening behavior.

Being transparent and open to students should help bring about more positive outcomes but some teachers do not know how to implement these activities or might not see the reason to do so. According to VanZoeren and Weisz, teachers’ individual characteristics were the strongest indicator of whether they would intervene or not (VanZoeren & Weisz, 2018). This is implying that whether teachers recognized suspicious behavior and were motivated to act upon it was completely dependent on their personality, which could lead to misjudgments. VanZoeren and Weisz also went onto say that there needs to be more programs that promote empathic reactions by teachers and the school community (VanZoeren & Weisz, 2018). The more knowledge a teacher can gain from students’ personal lives and on prevention programs, increases the likelihood of preventing acts of school violence.

Throughout all of the research and literature I have read regarding school violence, I think the answers are there. I believe by implementing some of the practices mentioned that more effective school violence programs can be created. In order to create more efficient programs there needs to be a focus on teacher and student relationships and teachers gaining the knowledge they need to recognize abnormal behaviors among students. This knowledge should be more readily available or required for teachers to read in order to be proactive when it comes to school violence.

In conclusion, after learning more about school violence I feel as though my initial knowledge has been expanded. Prior to reading Brooks book and doing my own research, I had a very basic understanding of school violence. I now know more of the specific details about school violence and understand it can take many forms. I also learned that there is no magic solution from just one person or organization. The solution to school violence is complex and most likely entails several components. All in all, I feel as though I have a much more educated opinion of what school violence actually is.

Works Cited Page

Brooks, S. M. (2017). *Violence among students and school staff.* North Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

VanZoeren, S., & N. Weisz, A. (2018). Teachers’ Perceived Likelihood of Intervening in Bullying Situations: Individual Characteristics and Institutional Environments. *Journal of School Violence*, *17*(2), 258–269. https://doi- org.proxy.longwood.edu/10.1080/15388220.2017.1315307