Juvenile Delinquency in the School System And Preventative Tactics

Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to look at the rate of juvenile delinquency in the school systems and discuss the ways in which the school can work on the problems. The first part of the paper will look at the statistics of juvenile delinquents and the relationship they have with the school, and the second part will look at the ways we can prevent the children from getting involved with the law and becoming juvenile delinquents.

“The relationship between school and Juvenile Delinquency was pointed out as early as 1939 when a study of the New Jersey Delinquency Commission found that of 2,021 inmates of prisons and correctional institutions in the state 2 out of every 5 had first been committed for truancy” (Seigel, Senna, p.359). The impact of the school on youth and their behaviors is much stronger than some would like to think. Some of the issues that arise about delinquency in the schools are poor academic performance, school failure and the reasons one could be failing, and students who drop out.

The youth that are deprived in their academic learning’s are more likely to behave with delinquent behavior. The failure in school is the strongest sign of future delinquent behavior. “Only 9 percent of the chronic offenders in Wolfgang’s Philadelphia cohort graduated from high school, compared with 74 percent of non-offenders. Chronic offenders also had significantly more disciplinary actions and remedial/disciplinary placements than the non-offenders” (363). In other words, the majority of the criminals that were arrested were school failures or dropouts. Their behavior while they were in
school was unacceptable and they were they group of students that were reprimanded more often than the majority of the other students.

School failure, in general, creates negative responses from their teachers, family, friends, and eventually employers. These negative responses to their schooling can have a damaging effect on their academic learning. The negative reactions can bring them into a rut that they will never be able to escape from. This rut lowers their self-esteem, sometimes to the point where they begin doing delinquent acts to make themselves feel better about who or what they are and how they are feeling.

Another idea about school failure and delinquency is (PBS) or problem behavior syndrome. This belief states that:

- Delinquents may have lower IQs that non-delinquents, a factor tat might also explain their poor academic achievement.
- Delinquent behavior has been associated with a turbulent family life, a condition that most likely leads to academic underachievement.
- Delinquency has been associated with low self-control and impulsivity, traits that also may produce school failure.
- The adolescent who both fails at school and engages in delinquency may be experiencing drug use, depression, malnutrition, abuse, and disease, all symptoms of a generally troubled lifestyle.

There are many reasons why a student could be failing in his/her classes. They can include social class/inequality, tracking, and alienation.
Social class can play a role in school failure and delinquency but it is not as strong as some of the other issues. The research of Albert Cohen in the 1950s opened the idea that “delinquency was fundamentally a phenomenon of working-class students who were poorly equipped to function in middle class schools” (364). The high number of lower-class students that are dropping out of school is still supporting Cohen’s research today. Some of these students need to drop out of school to help support their family; another reason could be that the students of low-income families are not prepared for the academic demand that is placed upon them. They are not used to the intense testing and pressure to perform well like the other students in the class. Students might not be prepared to step into a classroom averaging 25 students and feel comfortable. Low-income students might not be as well accustomed to communicating with so many people in front of them at the same time.

Tracking is used throughout the United States. Tracking is the process of “dividing students into groups according to their ability and achievement levels” (365). Almost every school has some sort of tracking procedures in place. They might not be spoken about or in writing, but they are implemented in the school systems. Some schools only track for one or two classes, others track the entire school. This tracking system has a very negative effect on the school system as a whole. Once a student is labeled, it is very difficult for them to change that label. If they are in the slow children’s classes or the dumb kid class, the chances are they will never be moved to a different track throughout their school career. “A subsequent study by Oakes found that these students received a poorer education in terms of the quality of courses, teachers, and textbooks made available to them. Moreover the negative impact of tracking affected
mostly African-Americans, Latino, and poor students” (Giddens, Dunner p.378). The children that are tracked in the lower classes have a greater tendency to misbehave in class, and have a lower participation rate in the classroom and activities. “Tracking systems keep certain students form having any hope of achieving academic success, thereby causing a lack of motivation, failure, and rebellion, all of which may foster delinquent behavior…it may instill feelings of lower self-esteem, promote school misbehavior, and lead to dropping out” (Siegel, Senna p. 366).

“Alienation had been linked to the isolation and impersonality that result form the large size of many modern public schools” (367). The students feel that the school and the teachers do not care about them in any way. This makes the children angry and upset. They begin misbehaving in class to get the attention they need. This misbehavior gets them the attention so they continue to behave this way. Eventually, it leads to delinquent acts. In the smaller school systems in our country, alienation is less likely to occur. The teachers are more aware of the student’s normal behaviors and actions. They are closer to their pupils and are capable of giving each the individual attention they desire. The teachers are more easily alerted to a drastic change in a child’s attitude or personality. In addition, they are able to address the issue before it becomes a major problem to the child and the community.

“Less than half of adult arrests have a twelfth grade education” (368). Most of the adults that are arrested have dropped out of school or were expelled from school when they were children. “Control theory suggests that any action that weakens or severs ties with conventional society helps establish a youth in a delinquent way of life; dropping out increases delinquent behaviors” (368). There are many reasons a student might want
to drop out of school. They just might not like being there and want to leave or they want or need to get a job to support themselves or their family. Some might drop out because they are pregnant or already have children. Other students are forced out of the school system. They are expelled for bad behavior or they do not go to class and are told to not come back. “Dropping out may offer few long or short-term benefits and must be avoided at all costs” (370).

Preventative measures

After looking at the seriousness of juvenile delinquency and the relationship between delinquency and the school system the preventative procedures need to be implemented into the classrooms and teaching procedures. It is the responsibility of the school administrators and the teachers to ensure the children are feeling good about themselves, their surroundings and their education. Some tactics that can be used in the schools include the elimination of tracking systems, clear and effective rules, educate parents at a young age how to be involved in their child’s education, and peer mediation programs.

The tracking systems in the schools are the first thing that needs to be changed. By removing the tracking systems in the schools, the children will be less likely to gain a name that will stick with them throughout their career at school. By removing the name that has been tattooed to their head, they will be less likely to feel depressed about who they are. “Intelligence is a kind of muscle that is developed with use. You are not born smart, you get smart” (Prothrow-Stith, Weissman, P.171). This means that all students are capable of learning the exact same thing. Some might be a little slower than the others might but that is no excuse for them to be removed form their
peers. It is the job of the teachers to ensure that all students get the same sort of
education. The adaptation process has been introduced to teachers to ensure that all of
the students are being challenged and learning what they need to know to prosper in their
education. If the teachers are implementing the adaptation procedures correctly, there is
no need for a tracking system in any school.

The rules in a school need to be clear and effective. If the students cannot
understand the rules or they see no need for the rule, then the rules are going to be
broken. When punishment is needed, it needs to be handled fairly. A student should not
be suspended for being late to class, while a student who threatened someone’s life
should not be given a warning. The rules need to take priority. If a student is punished
according to the severity of the crime, then the students will know the consequences and
be less likely to perform the act again. Punishment must also be the same for every
student. If a Caucasian student of the upper class threatens the life of a low-class African
American student, the student should receive the same consequences as the African
American student of a low-class family who threatens the upper class Caucasian student.
This issue arises in every school. The students who are considered well off are punished
less severely than the lower class students are. This act produces a rage in students that is
unbearable. The students will then rebel against the rules and the system that is in place
in the school.

Another important factor to a student’s direction on a straight and narrow path is
the education of the parents. The parents need to be informed on what they need to do to
get their children ready to go to school when they are five years old. “Parents need to be
informed that by talking, reading, playing word and math games, and training their
children to set time aside to do homework at a young age will help the children do well once they are in school” (Prothrow-Stith, Weissman, P.169). The students that know how to communicate with others are more apt to succeed in school. The parents need to have a good attitude about school and they need to reinforce this attitude with the parents. If a child is misbehaving in the classroom, the parents need to know about it immediately. There could be some underlying issues that need to be taken care of. With the parents on the same side as the educators, the children will have the attention they need and they will be discovered if there are any problems that need to be addressed.

Peer mediation can be the most effective tool in keeping the children out of delinquency’s path. “According to Batche and Knoff violence should be defined to include any conditions or acts that create a climate in which individual students and teachers feel fear or intimidation in addition to being the victims of assault, theft, or vandalism” (Roberts p. 72). Violence is the largest form of juvenile delinquency in the schools today. The students are not taught how to handle their feelings of rage and depression. The only thing they know how to do is to lash back at the person who upset them or a person is around when they are experiencing these feelings. The Peacemakers program is designed to help students resolve their problems calmly and without violence. There are certain ideas that are instilled in the students. They are taught that:

- Conflict is a normal part of human interaction.
- That when people take the time to explore their prejudices, they can learn how to get along with (and enjoy) people whose backgrounds are different.
That most disputes do not have to have a winner or a loser. Win/win is the ideal way to resolve most disputes.

That children and adults who learn how to assert themselves non-violently can avoid becoming bullies or victims.

That the self-esteem of children will be enhanced if they learn to build non-violent, non-hostile relationships with their peers.

(Prothrow-Stith, Weissman, P.173)

Peace mediator teachers come into the school and train students how to mediate problems. Once the students are trained, they mediate other student’s problems with a trained adult present. The mediation process works to make students think before they begin to fight and when they do fight, they learn how to resolve their problems peacefully. “Results indicated that conflict resolution training resulted in an 80 percent drop in the number of student/student conflicts that teachers had to manage and a 95 percent drop in the number of conflicts referred to the principal” (Roberts, P.77). With mediation on the side of the teachers, the students and teachers will feel more comfortable with their feelings and their safety at the school they attend ¾ of the year.

Issues of juvenile delinquency cannot be taken lightly. With the parents, teachers and students working together to make the school a safe and effective place, the dropout rate and delinquency rate will decrease. If all of the children feel they have a purpose at the school and feel they are needed, they will not turn to violent or delinquent behavior to get the results and attention they need and deserve. The school has a lot to do with the delinquency rate of the students that go there. If the schools can satisfy the needs of the children, then the delinquency rate will drop in juveniles. If we can decrease the rate of
juvenile delinquents, the rate of adult offenders will also drop in the future. All people should be striving for this goal, not just the school teachers and administrators.

References


