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THE SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS RECOGNITION
AND UNDERSTANDING BY PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching

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CHAPTER ONE

The school to prison pipeline (STPP) is “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public school and into juvenile and criminal justice systems” (ACLU, n.d.). According to the ACLU (n.d), students are more at risk for experiencing STPP if they attend public schools with insufficient resources, schools that enforce zero-tolerance policies that result in suspension, and expulsion, and schools where hallways are policed by school resource officers.

Schools with insufficient resources may experience aging learning materials such as text books, teachers with ineffective training, and the inability to upgrade their school to make it match today’s standards. When students learn from aging learning material, they are receiving an education that may not be correct. Students who have teachers who are not properly trained in areas such as trauma, homelessness, and food insecurity may not be able to build relationships with students that are trusting, caring, and meaningful. Throughout the school day students may have interactions with a school resource officer (SRO). While many interactions with a SRO can be passive, other encounters may be similar to how correctional officers interact with people that are incarcerated.

This capstone project addresses the question: *How can educators be better equipped with knowledge and practices to address the STPP by lessening the amount of students who fall victim to it?* There are two goals to this project. The first goal is to inform and educate educators about the STPP. The second goal is to provide educators tools that will help them combat the STPP. The following paragraphs outline why I have chosen the STPP as the topic of this capstone project.

Background

As a child, my life seemed somewhat idealistic, but what the world did not see was the trauma that I experienced. Growing up, I experienced untreated mental and alcoholism health by caretakers resulting in emotional trauma and abuse. The reality of what happened at home, created a sense of isolation. Peers did not seem to have similar experiences.

To begin with, I was cared for by my grandmother and great aunt, because my parents had at a young age and were unable to properly care for a child. My grandmother often spun stories about alleged truths of why my parents were absent. For example, I was told that my parents did not want me. The truth was that my parents were unable to care for me due to their lifestyles. For instance, my parents would enjoy parties, hang out with ill-behaved friends, and sometimes would commit crimes. Because of their lifestyle, it led them to experience incarceration. As a young child, I was unable to comprehend incarceration, but as an adult who has studied incarceration as a part of my women's studies degree, I have a better understanding of how impactful incarceration can be for the person experiencing it and those close to them.

Subsequently, I have come to better understand what it means to be incarcerated. My grandmother and great aunt have only understood a single story of what incarceration is and perpetuated this narrative to myself. After learning more about incarceration, I have learned there is more that causes incarceration beyond immorality. Incarceration can be caused due to factors such as schools that lack resources, zero tolerance policies, and school resource officers.

Connection

My connection to the school to prison pipeline (STPP) is two fold. First, I find that I connect with the STPP on a personal level. Due to the trauma I have experienced in childhood, I feel as though I am more sensitive to the STPP. The sensitivity stems from various mental health

diagnoses I have developed mixed with the personal connection of my parents experiencing incarceration. Throughout childhood, I was made to believe that there was an inherent relationship between being incarcerated and being immoral. The relationship between incarceration and immorality was so ingrained within me that I feared being in trouble. This fear stunted my ability to live freely. I did not want to do anything wrong in class, feared driving for the small chance that something catastrophic may happen, and limited my friend group so I would have a lesser chance of ending up like my parents. This fear has lasted into adulthood, although I recognize that incarceration and immortality is not an exclusive relationship.

The second connection to the STPP is my focus on incarceration for my undergraduate degree in women's studies. I had no intentions to learn about incarceration when I started college, but after taking an introductory course in Women's Studies, I found a love for learning about the inequities in the world. After committing to Women Studies as a major, I took a class titled "Engendering Justice". In this class, I learned about how the justice system impacts females. This is the class that sparked my interest in fighting the inequities in the justice system. After this Engendering Justice, I took an Inside Out class. For this class, students are fifty-percent university students and fifty-percent people that are incarcerated. I learned so much about those who experience incarceration. Eventually, I became the TA for this course. Soon, I realized that my Education major had an intersection with my Women's Studies major. The intersection of the two majors is the school to prison pipeline. Between my personal and professional connection with the school to prison pipeline, I have found an intense passion for helping educators learn about the school to prison pipeline.

Topic

I have chosen to focus on the school to prison pipeline for this capstone project. This topic focuses on the intersection of my education and women's studies majors which allows me to impact the lives of educators, so students may not have to experience a future of incarceration. The goal of this project is to help educators learn about the STPP and give them new practices to put into place

For this project, I will be creating a four part professional development program intended for educators. The professional development will include a reflection, presentation, and a practice to use in the classroom. To go along with the professional development, I will be creating a script, presentation, and audience material. The audience will get a list of resources, notes, and various other materials that could be helpful. After having participated in the PD that I have created, educators will be better equipped to recognize students that may be more at risk for becoming part of the STPP, have a greater understanding of how to assist these students so they may not have a future of incarceration, and become a voice for students. To support the creation of this capstone project, the following chapter will be a literature review to analyze the need for change in regards to the STPP.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

The school to prison pipeline (STPP) is pervasive within the American education system because of it “involving millions of young people” (Mallett, 2015, p.3). Due to the pervasiveness of the STPP, it is important that all educators are aware of it, knowledgeable about it, and able to fight against it. So, how can educators be better equipped with knowledge and practices to address the STPP by lessening the amount of students who fall victim to it? To answer the question, there must be a complete understanding of what the STPP is.

The American Civil Liberties Union (Sawyer and Wagner, n.d.) defined the school to prison pipeline as “a disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems”. There are various groups of children that may experience the school to prison pipeline, this project will focus on students of color, students with disabilities, and students living in poverty. These groups of students may experience the STPP due to a lack of resources, zero-tolerance policies, and school resource officers within their school.

Chapter two outlines the importance for educators to be aware, knowledgeable, and able to fight against the STPP. First, the background of the STPP is discussed. Next, risk factors students, such as race, ability, and socio-economic status are explored. Then, the education system and what its impact has done to be compliant with the STPP is discussed. Along with how the school system in America is compliant through lack of teacher training, location of the school, zero tolerance policies, and school resource officers. How teachers can make a positive impact will be explained. Lastly, the importance of addressing and working toward a solution regarding the STPP is addressed. Subsequently, as educators, there is the ability to make changes to practices that influence a student’s life, so looking at all that has and still does influence the