

Impact of race and poverty on educational opportunities



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Literature Review

1. Introduction

There have been abundant studies conducted on how race and poverty can affect the educational opportunities of students (Cashin, 2014; Brisport, 2013; Hallinan, 2010; Milner, 2013; Moses, 2011). By researching and studying the variables of race and poverty within an educational setting I hope to be able to further contribute to the knowledge base of how race and poverty can affect educational opportunities of students in our society today. This literature review will help contribute knowledge to the field of educational geography to further enhance the research and studies currently being done on race and poverty and the effect that both of these variables have on educational opportunities. Butler and Hamnett, (2007) stated that there is a strong connection between race and educational opportunity with a major inequality being noted between blacks and whites and Jackson et al., (2013) would agree that the connection between race and educational opportunity exists especially between blacks and whites. Jackson et al., (2013) noted in their article that at the college level black students have larger student loan amounts and have a higher risk of loan default than white students. Both articles note socioeconomic status as the main reason for the existence of the inequality between black students and white students. I would tend to agree that the socioeconomic standing of a student will affect their educational opportunities. I know from experience and observation that most black students do come from families that have a lower social standing than most white students. It is sad that our society puts so much emphasis on race and income to determine the worth of a person

when in reality neither should have a bearing on what a student is able to do with their life.

Holloway et al., (2010) states that there are two techniques that can be used to examine educational geography. The two techniques are “inward-looking” and “outward-looking” geographies. The inward-looking technique is used to examine the spatial variation in education or where the educational space is located. The other technique is the outward-looking which uses spatial variations to study more than just the location of the educational space but it also looks at social, economic and political variables as well. It was also stated by Holloway et al., (2010) that our spatial lens needs to be broadened when we decide what an educational space is. It is important that when geographers look at and study educational spaces that the focus needs to be broadened to include any place where learning can take place and also to include social variables such as economic and political into their studies. An educational space can be located in other places outside of a formal educational institution or school. Students can learn outside of a classroom as well and this learning needs to be incorporated into the study of educational geography just as much as the learning that takes place inside of a school classroom. What a child learns within society can affect them just as much as what they learn within a classroom.

Holloway et al., (2010) states in their journal article that educational attainment fundamentally shapes students' future life chances. I would have to disagree with this statement. I believe that it takes more than just an education in order for a student to be able to be successful in life. It also takes a positive environment for the child to grow up in. I am a firm believer

that where a child lives and what environment a child grows up in can make all the difference in the world to the child's future and how successful the child is. If the environment the child grows up in provides a positive and rich learning environment that the child can thrive in then I think that the child can be successful regardless of social standing within the community of their family. However, Butler and Hamnett, (2007) would disagree with me. Within their article they state that education alone is the key to long term economic growth and reducing social inequality. Whereas Cashin, (2014) would agree with me as she noted in her article where research suggests that where a person lives can directly affect not only the person's social status but economic status as well. Holloway et al., (2010) also noted that the focus needs to be put on the connections between home and school and how sociospatial practices can shape students. Geographers within the field of educational geography need to also take a closer look more at the sociospatial practices and not just the physical building where the educational learning takes place. They need to also look at the connections between the student's home life, school and society to be able to see the complete picture and how race and poverty can affect a student just as much as where their education is obtained.

2. Race

In our society today we say that we are not a racist society and that everyone is seen as equal, that we welcome diversity. But is that really true today? Segregation may not be as prominent or as enforced as it once was historically but it still quietly exists in our society today. This quiet segregation is what is causing race to affect the educational opportunities of

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students today. It was argued by Brisport, (2013) that opportunity leads to success and success to power but to gain power you have to be a part of a select group of the current power holders who are the majority race. In an effort to keep the minority races from getting power the majority race denies opportunity through the educational system. (Brisport, 2013) Whereas Moses, (2011) argues against Brisport in one part of her article and states that a student's race does not necessarily influence the student's educational opportunities and that other factors such as internal or cultural factors may actually keep students from achieving their full potential. Moses then turns around later in the same article and contradicts what she had previously stated aligning her statements more with Brisport's by stating that race and ethnicity continue to play a significant role in American society. Both authors bring to light arguments that could both be seen as valid even though they contradict one another. I can see Brisport's point of how students are denied the opportunity for success and power through the denial of a proper education because of their race. However, I can also see Moses point where educational opportunities are influenced by factors other than race and that race alone does not hinder educational opportunities. Student's that are living in bad home situations, in poverty level homes or in a culture that does not value education could have their educational opportunities affected by these outside factors and it have nothing to do with their race at all.

Change is inevitable for our society in the future as more and more immigrants come to the United States to try to make a better life for themselves and their children. Our society will almost be forced to become

more accepting of the minority race within the educational system and embrace diversity. Brisport, (2013) would agree as she notes in her journal article that the number of minority students in the public school system is growing and is predicted to become larger than the number of white students by the year 2023. It was noted by Cashin, (2014) that the use of place rather than race within diversity programming in education would help move past racial resentment. Diversity within educational opportunities for the students of our society is on the horizon and we need to prepare the upcoming future generations of students for this inevitable change.

3. Poverty

When we think of poverty and how it affects educational opportunities we tend to think only of the students income and poverty level. As noted by Hallinan et al., (2010) the fairness of educational opportunity is threatened not only by gaps in student achievement by race and student poverty but, by school poverty as well. We then need to also turn our attention to the poverty level of the schools that the students are attending as well to fully understand how educational opportunities are affected by poverty in general on both the student level as well as the school level. Milner, (2013) argues that schools have very little influence on the achievement of students and their educational opportunities. Whereas Hallinan et al., (2010) argues against Milner in their article by stating that the poverty level of a school can affect the achievement level of the students. Schools that have a low level of poverty show better improvement in educational opportunities than schools that have high poverty levels. The case for this is further strengthened by Hallinan et al., (2010) with the statistics that poor sixth graders in middle

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class schools were 20 months ahead of poor sixth graders in a high poverty school. Milner, (2013) does admit in his article after arguing that schools have little influence on educational opportunities that resources can be limited in a high poverty schools and this in turn could affect the educational opportunity of the students.

Diversity is becoming more and more common place within our society. As noted previously, immigration was included within the variable of race that was looked at within this review. We can also note within this review that the variable of poverty does include an immigration factor as well. The labor market segmentation theories introduced by Everett et al., (2011) can help to understand how immigrants attain education by looking at their various involvements in the primary and secondary labor markets. Within the secondary labor market is the lower paying labor intensive jobs. With immigrants having limited chances to improve their lives from the secondary labor market to the primary labor market the secondary market attracts immigrants with a lower educational level. The limited chance of improvement also discourages immigrants from obtaining educational opportunities to further their education (Everett et al., 2011). While talking about immigration and how it affects educational opportunities Cashin (2014) argued that there is an immigrant tie to the level of poverty a student experiences. Within her article she notes that Latino students attend schools where two-thirds of the peers are poor as compared to white students who attend schools where sixty percent of the peers are not poor. She also notes that exposure to extensive poverty is normal for most Latinos while the opposite is true for most whites (Cashin, 2014). Since poverty levels have

been shown to affect your educational opportunities by Anderson, (2014) then no wonder immigrants do not try to obtain educational opportunities and end up settling for the lower paying jobs that they can obtain with a lower level education and make no effort to obtain any educational opportunities.

Poverty is real and experienced by children every day even though we as a society tend to think only of adults living in poverty. As stated by Anderson, (2014) every child deserves the opportunity to learn. The statistics that are presented by Anderson, (2014) within his article are shocking and surprising to me. These statistics include “ 22 percent of all children are living in poverty; 28 percent of Black children live in poverty; 25 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty; 4 percent of children live in extreme poverty; 21 percent of households with children are food insecure and 32 percent of children live with a parent with unstable employment” (Anderson, 2014). With these kinds of statistics it is amazing that children can learn and do have educational opportunities. Especially since it has been found that many studies show a correlation between poverty, housing and educational opportunities and that disadvantaged students or students living in poverty do show to have poor academic performance (Anderson, 2014). While revisiting the research on how living in a poverty level income home affects a student’s educational opportunities it was also shown by Anderson, (2014) that income levels can affect a student’s education and also their cognitive development.

4. Conclusion

Within this review I have shown examples of research that state where race and poverty can affect the educational opportunities of students as well as examples of research that state that race and poverty have no bearing on the educational opportunities of students. I found it surprising in the various research articles that I reviewed that statements were made that race and poverty have no bearing on educational opportunities of the students within our society today. I feel like race, poverty and other factors such as cultural, economic and political all play a part in affecting the educational opportunities of students within our society today. Within this review I have also shown how educational geography can play a role in the educational opportunities of students in our society. In looking at the various research in the field of educational geography and how educational opportunities can be affected I found that the two themes of race and poverty reoccurred time and time again as factors that can have an effect on a student's educational opportunities.

When looking at race and how it affects educational opportunities of students I found a variety of opinions within the research. On one side of the research the race of a student is seen as a power tool and that opportunity can lead to success and success then to power, but only if you are of the right race. The majority race then uses the educational opportunities of the students to deny this attainment of success and power to the minority because of their race (Brisport, 2013). It also showed in the research that ethnicity and race continue to be a significant factor in American society today. On the other hand there is research that shows that a student's race does not necessarily affect the student's educational opportunities, but

rather other factors such as internal and cultural factors may actually keep students from obtaining their full educational opportunities (Moses, 2011). It was also seen in the research that diversity within educational opportunities of students is growing. The number of minority students was shown to be predicted to increase and become larger than the number of white students by the year 2023 (Brisport, 2013). It was also interesting to note that within the research the use of place rather than race within diversity programs in education could help societies move past racial resentment (Cashin, 2014). Based on the reviews of the literature that I conducted on how race affects educational opportunities, to the best of my knowledge, the studies did not take into account the student's home environment when looking at factors that affect educational opportunities. In order to fully understand the factors that affect educational opportunities of students today more needs to be considered than just the factors of race and poverty. Other socioeconomic factors such as cultural values, living environments and sociospatial practices all need to be considered.

While researching poverty and how it can affect educational opportunities I noticed that the opinions within the research vary. It was interesting to note within the research that not only student poverty levels but school poverty levels as well can affect the educational opportunities of the students (Hallinan et al., 2010). One argument made within the research states that schools have little influence on the achievement of students (Milner, 2013). An opposing argument was made that states the poverty level of a school can affect the achievement level of the students and that schools that have a low level of poverty show more improvement than schools that have high

poverty that was backed up with statistical information (Hallinan et al., 2010). Milner, (2013) does go on to state later in his article that a limit in resources in high poverty schools can affect the educational opportunity of the students. While looking at poverty and how it affects the educational opportunities the labor market segmentation theories were introduced by Everett et al., (2011) to help understand how immigrants are discouraged from educational opportunities. Latino students were noted by Cashin, (2014) to attend schools where their peers are poor as compared to the white students who attend schools where most of their peers are not poor and that most Latinos are exposed to extensive poverty. Since it was shown that the poverty level of a school can affect the students educational opportunities then this information presented by Cashin, (2014) within her article would show that Latino students are at a disadvantage when it comes to educational opportunities. The staggering statistics provided by Anderson, (2014) on the poverty level of children shows how poverty levels can affect a student's academic performance and their educational opportunities. After reviewing the literature on how poverty affects educational opportunities, to the best of my knowledge, the literature did not take into account the poverty levels of past generations within the family to see if there is a trend of poverty from one generation to the next. A way to further the research on this topic would be to see if there is a trend of poverty from one generation to the next and if a trend is present to see if there is a way to break that trend to ensure that the future generation would have a better opportunity to obtain a higher income level and better educational opportunities.

Resources

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