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THE EFFECT OF ART, COMMUNITY, AND RELATIONSHIPS ON URBAN YOUTH

Kelly Thomas

Southeastern University - Lakeland

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THE EFFECT OF ART, COMMUNITY, AND RELATIONSHIPS
ON URBAN YOUTH

by

Kelly Faith Thomas

Submitted to the Honors Program Committee

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who have been a source of relentless encouragement for me as I pursued the completion of my thesis. Thank you for calling me up numerous times just to check on “how that paper was coming.” Mainly, thank you for being proud and celebrating with me.

ABSTRACT

This thesis gathers the research necessary to understand the impact art, a healthy community, and nurturing relationships can have on the life of an inner city child. The many factors that serve as the foundation of a certain lifestyle can be the very factors that make or break a child's opportunity for success. The inner city child may lack a healthy community, intentional relationships, and an effective system to release frustrations. Art has been utilized time and time again to direct the urban population towards healthy forms of self expression. Previous examples of successful art programs will be surveyed as well as a possible steps and elements to add for further improvement to these intervention programs. Throughout the entirety of research, the elements that have catered to the downfall of urban youth have shown to be the elements that can also contribute to their personal growth and success, when healthier alternatives are given. A tainted community is not nearly as beneficial as one that encourages troubled youth to succeed. An abusive relationship is not effective for fulfilling a being's need for love; however, when the relationship is nurturing and individualized, there can be great outcomes for the impacted child. Lastly, art has been proven as a highly effective intervention strategy to help relieve tension and promote healthy forms of expression and coping.

Key Words: inner-city youth, urban youth, title 1, art education, art therapy, underprivileged, troubled youth, expressive art

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Methodology.....	10
Review of Literature.....	11
What is Happening in the Inner-City Right Now?.....	11
Life of an inner-city kid.....	11
The students are to blame.....	16
Art and the Inner-City Child.....	23
When Art Programs Are Undermined.....	32
Where is the money?.....	32
Where is the support?.....	33
The Dynamic Duo.....	34
Intentional relationships.....	35
Healthy community... ..	38
Adding art.....	42
Conclusion.....	43

The Effect of Art, Community, and Relationships on Urban Youth

Introduction

When told to visualize “urban youth” or an “inner-city child” what may come to mind is a slouching student, dressed in shambles, on a city street corner. Many Americans may be confronted with some trouble when trying to relate to the lifestyle of an underprivileged child; violence, gangs, drugs, abuse, and unclear direction on how to escape it all-this is the lifestyle of the urban youth. There is trouble at home and a search for belonging in all the wrong places. Students are flunking out of classes, or at best trying hard but not dreaming big enough or striving hard enough to succeed. Teachers constantly interact with inner-city youth, whether it is passing by them unknowingly on the street or by teaching them in the classroom. The pain is evident, and the need for awareness and intervention is even clearer.

Under current circumstances, troubled youth are being thrown into a strict system of academic reforms with little focus on the whole being of the troubled child. Students are being told to listen in class, when they cannot even hear over the growl in their stomachs. The troubled youth are being scolded for acting out in class when they grew up without someone to show them how to behave appropriately. As a result, inner-city kids may seem cold and careless in the classroom. They lack an outlet for their deep hurt (Fanelli & Klippel, 2001). They lack a loving relationship to steer them towards wholeness. They lack a nurturing community to spur them on towards better life choices. They lack knowledge of a bigger purpose for which to work.

Through reviewing the effect of art, relationships, and community on the whole being of the inner-city student, this thesis will lay the groundwork for the important elements to include when launching an afterschool art program. This suggestion will pull together various literary claims to provide a possible aid for the broken inner-city youth. Research and empirical observations have been made on the role each factor (relationships, community, and art) plays in the remolding of a troubled child.

Artistic expression has been credited with the ability to cater to the well-being of the whole inner-city child: socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and cognitively. Observations have been made in art programs that have reported a dramatic difference in the self-esteem of the troubled students. Programs such as *Arts Horizons* (based out of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) have given specific examples of success stories through art intervention in a student's life (Fanelli & Klippel, 2001). Such programs are designed to provide a source of purpose and creative output. Troubled youths have greatly benefited from participation in art projects, such as mural art or the creation of Pop Video tapes (small film remakes of certain pop music videos) (Hart, 2013; Jones, 1986). All different mediums can be utilized to impact the individual student socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and academically. This thesis will focus on expressive art as a whole, for it expands the audience of interest. The more variety of art offered, the more it is likely to captivate a variety of children. Further exploration of this topic will be guided by this question: is art an effective way to relieve the hurt of inner-city children and start their healing process?

An individual's self-esteem and academic success are also related to the status of the relationship between the student and his or her guardians. It is felt that the roles of

the parents and their expectations, whether high or low, are correlated to their student's academic success (Li & Lal, 2007). When there is an absence of a parental figure, as is common among the inner-city population, there are behavioral, emotional, and social dilemmas that follow. On occasion another individual will try to step in for the lack of parental support and community. In one specific example, a principal in New York was given the title 'Daddy' due to his fatherly character and love for the individual students (Li & Lal, 2007). While there have been children that have accepted the life laid out before them and in turn have walked down a destructive path, some children have defied all norms and low expectations and continued on towards a successful life. This inconsistency begs the question-what effect does parental (or guardian) abandonment have on the outcome of a child and how can mentorship save children from self-inflicted destruction?

In addition to the influential factors discussed, other studies have shown that the support of a nurturing community can challenge a student and show them alternative life paths. An inner-city kid's community may be defined as the neighborhood they reside in or the people that commonly surround them in their home environment. The nature of this community can be the cause for low self-efficacy, low motivation, anxiety, depression, and even poor academic performance. One community assessed, and one that has been shown to have high beneficial impacts for the urban population, is the church. Church involvement is able to make a significant transformation in the inner-city kid. Factors such as stress, family stability, and basic functioning were all under the influence of the church (Cook, 2000). An individual's identity and quality of life are

embraced and reformed within the church walls. There have been numerous accounts of the church's influence on unchurched.

The influence of a healthy community and of a loving mentor are of vast importance when desiring to impact the whole-being of a troubled child. Once it is deeply understood how the factors of community, mentorship, and art affect the lives of the inner-city student, the information can be used to revolutionize the after school art programs for the underprivileged population. One must first seek to understand and then, being well-informed, action can take place. Can an afterschool art program create an environment that offers change and growth for the inner-city schools through art, relationships, and community? In order to dive into a possible solution, there must be newly acquired knowledge on current events and the lifestyle of troubled youth; the effects of art, relationships, and community will shed light on the necessary elements to build up a strong and ground-breaking intervention program. The following literature review will seek to answer the following research questions:

- What is the current state of children in the inner-city?
- What are the effects of art on the inner-city child?
- What effect do parental relationships and mentorships have on the outcome of a child?
- Is art an effective way to create the healthy community necessary to build up changed individuals?

Methodology

Through existing research and articles on the current state of the inner-city child and the effect of relationships, community, and art on this population, an understanding on affective interventions will be reached. The terms “inner-city child”, “urban youth”, “troubled youth”, and “disadvantaged youth” will be used interchangeably to refer to young adolescents that are under the suppression of low resource lifestyles. Particular attention will be given to research on the effects of art on the inner-city child. Upon the conclusion of the literature review, it is hoped that the reader would have gained a well rounded understanding of the life style of the urban youths and the factors that contribute to their unfortunate circumstance and outcomes. If there is a possible goal of starting a new intervention program for this population, the information to follow will leave you well equipped. Some of the articles under review are recorded cases of art-centered organizations that sought to impact low-economic students of the rural cities, as well as articles in support of other routes of mediation for troubled youth. Despite the type of remedial approach explained, the main themes of relationships, community, and self expression practices remain. Biases amongst the articles surveyed will be monitored and exposed to maintain the validity of the case being made for effective elements of intermediation programs.

Review of Literature

Teaching practices, such as the traditional (memorization and lectures) approach, have been used as a default method to teaching; however, there are new methods of reaching the struggling student through arts intervention, implemented in and out of the classroom. In addition to art programs, intentional relationships provide support for the troubled individual. Real accounts of caring relationships between a mentor and a troubled child have proven a relationship's ability to break through the common hard exterior of the urban child. A community plays the role of a village that works together to raise an individual up, especially when there is confusion and a lack of direction elsewhere. In addition, when the community is influenced by Christianity the impact is said to be radical and consistent. The research to follow will provide an overview of current systems in place to aid inner-city youth. The research review will also provide an effective way of enhancing a troubled youth's whole-being through the arts, loving relationships, and a healthy community.

What is Happening in the Inner City Right Now?

Life of an inner-city kid. The inner city youth is a population of adolescents that live in low socioeconomic areas. These kids are immersed in an environment that can quickly send them down a path filled with violence and hardship (Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2001). Due to the inner-city youth's exposure to violence, more and more adolescents within that environment are settling for what they are accustomed to and simply fall into a pattern of quick solutions that are not always advantageous to their future. In the words of Donald Gensler, an inner-city muralist who paints to portray inner city stories and provide hope, "If ghetto is all you see, then that's the mentality you're

going to have” (O’Connell, 2008, p. 20). Many adolescents participate in self-destruction and violence through participation in drugs, gangs, and violence - pathways that they have seen friends and family close to them walk down.

In Vanessa Camilleri’s book “Healing the Inner City Child: Creative Arts Therapies with At-risk Youth” she expresses that, “...for inner city youth, worlds that are out of control are magnified many fold. Their stressors exist on several simultaneous levels: societal, including racism, poverty and violence; environmental, including poor options in housing, education, healthcare and employment; and domestic, including poor parenting, familial conflict, and child abuse” (Climenko, 2009, p. 86). Statistics are staggering, as they point to the high percentage of young people within the inner-city that witness events that majority of people outside of these perimeters would never encounter. A study was conducted that highlighted young boys between the ages of 6 and 10 in New York who had encountered a variety of violent acts (Miller & Wasserman, 1999). Out of the results, one of the statistics indicated that 25% of the studied population had witnessed a murder. Among inner-city youth, one out of four young boys are exposed to, and sometimes desensitized to, a destructive action such as murder (Miller & Wasserman, 1999). However, there are precautionary measures that contribute to protecting these children from violence exposure and the after effects of such trauma (Sheidow, et al., 2001). These factors include things such as healthy family dynamics, a nurturing community, an enriching educational experience, and a safe way to process and cope with environmental stressors.

A human being has a basic set of comforts that are oftentimes unknowingly delivered and overlooked. Many people who possess something are not deeply aware of

the effect if it were to not be there; for example, for someone who has a large supportive family there may not be a deep understanding of what would happen if that support system were to not be present. There may be a lack in conscious awareness of the effects the neighborhood (social organization) and the family functioning has on a being's personal choices and outcome; however, those are the very factors that influence whether a troubled youth pursues the street life or forfeits that lifestyle to pursue a life of success (Sheidow et al., 2001) (Sauma, 2008). Broken family dynamics and rough surrounding neighborhoods are parts of *their* daily interactions. Social organization and family functioning have a correlation that can play into the violence exposure of a child; it may be daring to assume that family functioning and the neighborhood environment could be the biggest cause of a child being exposed to many evils and, in turn, leave them acting in a destructive way. Inner-city children are aware of their surroundings and oftentimes are a product of the place they were raised. According to Richters and Martinez (1993), where the child lives matters. From the study conducted in this article it is noticed, "...that violence exposure is related to poor family functioning, but only in communities that are very impoverished (inner city) and that have social networks that are providing support and concern" (Sheidow et al., 2001, p. 356). When there is a home environment that is low on financial resources, there may be little incentive for a student to complete the small tasks of classwork; to them, bigger things weigh on their minds. The lack of motivation and academic achievement may be due to the preoccupation of the child's mind with where his or her next meal will come from or even disbelief that their hard work will make a difference in the end. When there is no prevalent example of success in a person's life, there may be little belief in the reality of dreams coming true, especially

when hopelessness has been the only thing seen in every corner of their life (Delk, 2016). Positive self-efficacy is not guaranteed and is hard to come by, especially when their home-environment makes the urban children familiar with lacking. There is a vicious cycle that an inner-city family might be caught in. The social organization of the neighborhood may affect the family functions within it, and in turn, affect the children; or, a poor functioning family could enter into a neighborhood and create a poor social organization. It is hard to decipher which is the precursor. Nevertheless, there is no denying that there is some impact from family functioning and neighborhood social organization; just like Sheidow (2001) says, “Clearly, there are extremely high levels of violence exposure across neighborhood and family types [within the inner-city], and such exposure is likely to have serious deleterious effects” (p. 357).

There is a perpetual cycle of unfortunate circumstances, leading to heartbroken children, followed by possible mental and emotional disorders, and ending with slipping back into the same toxic environment due to hopelessness. In the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, murals are painted around the city to portray the message that is prevalent and important to the surrounding community (O’Connell, 2008). The voice of the surrounding community is loud since they have a major role in the brainstorming of what will be painted on a certain city wall. A point of interest was found within the predominant themes on these particular murals. “They deal with issues of racism, economic disparity, and violence...” (O’Connell, 2008, p. 20); these common themes in the murals can provide clues into what the commonalities are among these low income neighborhoods. The main premises of these pieces of artwork were heart break for the conditions that they suffer under. Violence, poverty, and racism are not daily battles for

many people; but for the entire disadvantaged population, it is their common denominator.

When at-risk children are familiar with an environment of low expectations and destruction, they are bound to follow along with the status quo and, also, in turn expect less. Nancy, a teacher to a predominately Hispanic, inner-city population of students, discovered the realities of these students' circumstances (Saldaña, 1997). "Living the day-to-day and hand-to-mouth, coupled with feelings of entrapment, tension, and perceptions that they are 'lesser than,' reinforce the limitations of what they own, who they are, and what they can become in the world" (Saldaña, 1997, p. 29). These children have limitations on their capabilities based on what they see around them and what they have been told is possible. Underprivileged students have a stereotype linked to them; the attachment with this stereotype is a low motivational mindset. Students that have little expected of them will, usually, choose the path most traveled by in order to ensure a familiar outcome and avoid unfamiliar failure in the real-world (Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004). Their security is found in walking down a known path so that, even if it leads to darkness or failure, it is an outcome that they are familiar with through personal witness. They may think that because people in their urban culture have walked through it before, they can as well-even if it is not a path of success. According to Sauma (2008), "the options they see as adults are clear to them: become a drug dealer, a tramp, or a poor worker" (p. 34), even though they may not be favorable towards anyone of those options in particular. Students do not desire to walk down those pathways, yet they see no other choice. The possibilities of their future are limited to a mindset that has not ventured out to see what the unfamiliar world has to offer. Vulnerability is not preferred - it is often

avoided. It is vulnerable to step out into something unfamiliar when there is a risk for disaster and to be seen as a failure because of it. Dweck (2004) explains that the low concept of this population limits performance. Consequently, their failure to succeed and step out of their norms is not solely their doing; it is a combination of environmental products that severely diminish thoughts of or action towards greater potential.

Imagine being the inner-city student. Imagine walking down a path out of default, because you have never seen anything else, nor have you been urged onto dreaming beyond the familiar. Urban youth are indisputably sentenced to a life of violence, gang culture, destruction, low expectations, and cold resilience. They have to withstand the pressure of daily hardships that many people would go a lifetime without encountering (Delk, 2016; Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004; Sheidow, et al., 2001; Richters & Martinez, 1993). Commonly, the only time they escape their lifestyle is when entering the schools. Though it is an “escape” from the street life, there are a whole new set of obstacles to overcome within this academic environment.

The students are to blame. Troubled students are seeking a place to exist without heavy pressure. When they are in their home, in the inner city, they deal with the pressure of handling broken circumstances; and when in the classroom they are expected to turn off their outside struggles and excel in all academic standards. When they are in their society they may deal with the pressures of their harsh environment, or be faced with the hurdles of overcoming the low expectations that have been set before them. Their school environment is one of the only places where they are outside of their toxic home atmosphere. Students are placed in a building where their minds and hearts have the opportunity to grow. However, at times, there is a gap between the expectations for a

school to be a safe haven for students to thrive in and the reality that it is more of a building striving to catch students up.

This population attends a school that is characterized by the low amount of resources available to its students (Rothstein, 2004). Title 1 is a federally funded program that helps support and enhance the education of the disadvantaged youth. Title 1 schools utilize resources such as free-and-reduced lunch and federal dollars to provide foundational needs for the urban youth's education. These inner-city schools deal with an achievement gap that is prevalent due to the population in attendance at the school as well as the low amount of resources available to help these students succeed. Students in low socioeconomic (SES) areas do not have a foundation of education from their home, community, or even their school; this delay puts them at a disadvantage in the school system (Bempechat & Ginsberg, 1989).

A student may exemplify troublesome behavior patterns; nevertheless, great efforts should be made to help them rise out of it. Oftentimes, there is deep hurt behind every out-burst, harsh word, and attitude. Emily Stegall, professor for the Department of Education at Southeastern University, once stated in a lecture for her Classroom Management class, "Misbehavior is simply communication." Emily Stegall would agree that a child acting out in class should simply be a red flag saying that the student is needing help (E. Stegall, personal communication, February 10th, 2017). A cry for help met with no response produces no result. The students' behavior and academic achievement in class can also have a lot to do with the peers around them (Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, & Marcotte, 2013). A child in a nonurban environment deals with peer pressure, however for a student in an urban environment the pressure is intensified.

“This peer pressure to remain academically complacent may be more prominent in inner-city schools than schools located in suburban neighborhoods or that are privately funded as reflected in lower rankings on standardized testing requirements” (Delk, 2017, p. 4). Giving into this peer pressure sets them behind on academics. They also miss out on acquiring the self-efficacy that comes from academic achievement (Delk, 2017). Many of the factors contributing to academic delay have to do with pressure from their environment. Are they to blame because of factors out of their control mixed with a maturity that has yet to reach its peak?

In order to cater to the deficiencies within their personal lifestyle, a school must become aware and proactive in their approach to aid the troubled urban population. Urban youth need a supportive school system to lead them towards success. Findings suggest that when teachers use their time wisely and create personal relationships with the students, they create a more effective learning environment (Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1998). Teddlie, Kirbie, and Stringfield (1998) found that the effective schools had more effective teachers (more interactive and used time efficiently) than the schools categorized as ineffective. The effective teachers treated their students as clients and maintained a school atmosphere that revolved around academics. It should be added that the necessity for engaging academics is also of high importance. When a student is actively engaged, that means that the information now has meaning to them; once the students can make meaning they are more likely to remember and recall information. Chandra Foote (2005) draws attention to the many ways instructors can contribute to the quality instruction of urban schools. In order to create effective student-centered teaching, relationships with students must be cultivated (Foote, 2005). Beyond the

relationship between teacher and student is the relationship between the administration and the school. Leaders in the school should be highly involved in students' lives and create an emphasis on academics (Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1989). This priority shift towards instruction, academics, and better teachers should improve urban schools. In a previous attempt to focus on academics, there was an uprising of teacher-oriented instruction in urban schools, that reduced the authenticity of instruction and information (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Instruction should be based upon background knowledge to "glue new information to old" (Lent, 2012, p. 30). Still, instruction did not cater to students' own personal experiences. In general, when students did not feel like they were cared for, they started to veer away from compliant behavior in the classroom. This increases the difficulty of the teachers' responsibility to help students succeed. The effectiveness of a classroom is classified by student behavior, motivation, and their view of the classroom atmosphere; the classroom atmosphere is affected by the quality of teacher and school leadership involvement (Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1998). There is a prominent cycle to take notice of: if the administration does not care for the school many of the teachers, in turn, do not care for the classroom, finally causing the students to have a negative view of learning in the school.

The achievement gap in urban schools is not solely the students' doing (Foote, 2005). There are many factors of a successful school, ten of which are specifically discussed through Teddlie, Kirby, and Stringfield's (1989) writings. *The Challenge and Potential of High-Need Urban Education* (2005) proposes the absence of preparedness, materials, a welcoming environment, and a quality character as the roots of an ineffective school. At times, the school buildings themselves do not boost the students' motivation

towards achievement. “Many of the school buildings themselves, with their drab and peeling paint, make it difficult for students to be positive about their futures” (“The Difference Painting Can Make”, 2008).

Urban youth need an effective school system in order to enhance the possibilities of their future; however, the current status of urban communities is not supportive of any educational advancements that they may make. Urban environments have engrained in students to have a low self-esteem and low hopes for their future. These deficiencies in self-esteem become prevalent as they interact with learning in the classroom. Students create educational goals within two main categories: learning and performance (Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004). Low performance goals show signs of low self-efficacy as students seek to validate their ability through their personal achievement. So, if their performance is at a low quality, then their beliefs about their ability to perform is at a low quality as well. Learning goals focus on how to get better in a certain area (Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004). Yet, as explained previously, this is a vulnerable path to veer down. The possibility of being seen as a failure oftentimes redirects them towards a path of familiarity. “For example, stereotype-threatened individuals tend to choose tasks that ensure success, experience more performance pressure and anxiety, and underperform in the face of challenge” (Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004, p. 52). Therefore, their performance goals label their abilities and potential based on their accomplishments. Students with a troubled background need step-by-step guidance on how to push past failure and seek success. The focus on academics helps the students create a habit of making learning goals; thus, pushing past failure and worries and onto accomplishment (Dweck, Mangels, & Good, 2004).

At Martinez School, a school located in an urban area in the Southwest United States, students' worries expand far beyond that of an adult in a middle-income area elsewhere. "According to teachers at Martinez School, the only meals some children in this neighborhood eat are the free school breakfasts, lunches, and after-school snacks. For the most impoverished residents in this neighborhood, survival becomes a way of life and a series of actions that can ultimately shape their worldview" (Saldaña, 1997, p. 29). So, as may be understandable, these students struggle with maintaining focus amidst their ever present struggle for survival. The challenge presented to local school systems, therefore, is to make them care and become better because of the education they receive. Unfortunately, there are times where significant assistance is absent. Considering the findings of Maslow from his studies on the human's hierarchy of needs, a person has a very difficult time focusing on "growth needs" when their "deficient needs" have yet to be met (Noltemeyer, Bush, Paton, & Bergen, 2012). To clarify, a person's growth needs are things such as academics and a person's deficiency needs are feelings for things such as safety and belonging. Students in the United States, specifically, have experienced a vast range of deficiencies in basic needs being met. Noltemeyer, Bush, Paton, and Bergen (2012) explain the effects of this:

An expansive body of literature has proposed a positive relationship between unmet basic needs (e.g., poverty) and detrimental academic outcomes for children in schools. In fact, one influential theory suggests that children's ability to be motivated by "growth needs" (e.g., academic achievement) first requires satisfaction of "deficiency needs" (e.g., physiological needs, safety needs, and

love/belonging needs). Unfortunately, many children attending school in the United States experience a high level of one or more deficiency needs (p. 1862). As of late, there has been growing rates of deficiency in the areas of employment, food availability, and poverty (Noltemeyer, et al., 2012). These serve as barriers between the student's mind and its preparedness to learn and grow in the classroom. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs proceed from foundational (basic) needs to self-fulfillment needs as follows: psychological needs (food, clothing, sleep, etc.), safety needs, belonging and love needs (friends and close relationships), esteem needs (feeling accomplished), and self-actualization (morality, problem-solving, creativity, etc) (Maslow, 1943). Once one of the basic needs, the needs at the base of the pyramid, is met then an individual is able to advance to the next level of needs on the pyramid. Based on which level of need the student is on, their motivation to learn varies greatly. If there is uncertainty about the fulfillment of their basic needs, it will be difficult for their minds to focus on the necessity of subject material. The study by Noltemeyer, et. al. (2012), "...provides some support for Maslow's assertion that growth needs such as academic progress may be positively related to improvements in deficiency needs such as safety and love/belonging" (p. 1866). To achieve academic progress, and even an academic awareness, there must be movement to meet their foundational needs. Schools have been making some steps to help provide basic needs for underprivileged children, through things such as free and reduced lunch. While this is beneficial, their troubled lives at home still take a toll on their mental processing during school hours. Schools are still expected to meet the standards set out for them by the school board, with all students expected to succeed.

However, the African American population that suffers with the limitations of the inner city, continue to have limited access to a quality education. It is optimistic to dream about the elements necessary to create a beautiful environment for the troubled students to thrive, however this begs the question-what is the reality of such alteration? The logistics of that are lengthy, sticky, and costly. There have been many reforms applied to create the system in place now and the reversal of tainted segments of the system will not happen overnight. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains the suppression of an inner-city child: "Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools, the quest of quality education remains an elusive dream for the African American community" (p. 9). The availability of a school system as a resource for escaping the limitations of their lifestyle is not always reliable. Blatantly, good schools are sometimes hard to find. When schools are not making a sufficient impact on the inner-city child, changes should be made or alternatives should be available. A possible solution may be to create a supportive way to meet the kids there they are at - to provide a supplemental experience to their schooling that will benefit the way they operate in and out of the classroom.

Art and the Inner-City Child

A troubled student's academic knowledge is important; however, in order to mold them to be a strong member of society it is necessary to focus on their whole being. A supplemental resource to provide relief may be the necessary ingredient to enhance a student's self-efficacy and success. As previously discussed, the hurting students may focus more on their incapability rather than their capability. However, the use of a positive youth development (PYD) intervention program has been proven to have a

significant impact on the underprivileged child and their self-efficacy (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). The effects of traditional intervention systems, fused with PYD principles (competence, connection, character, confidence, compassion, and contribution), have proven to be impactful apart from the arts (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). Yet, when incorporating expressive arts, it adds another element of power to the intervention system. “Expressive art” is defined by Forrest-Bank (2016) as, “the use of art disciplines including visual art, music, dance, writing and drama, for self-discovery or change” (p. 431). Incorporating art is the use of various mediums to break down internal walls, promote self-expression, and enhance individual self-efficacy. Art can relieve a troubled soul as a whole. As the American Art Therapy Association (2002) explains, art involves a creative process, not often tapped into by this culture that heals and enhances life. Young urban citizens deal with trauma, stressors, and mental conditions that range far out of their control. However, art boosts the adolescent’s coping capabilities for their environment and also boosts their self-awareness; doing so gives these children the leverage to step out of the violent, everyday cycle (American Art Therapy Association, 2002).

The study of a positive youth development program implanted into several low socioeconomic neighborhoods brings to light the extent of influence from expressive art (Forrest-Bank, Nicotera & Bassett, 2016). In this youth development program, expressive art is offered as a means to achieve positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes. While after school programs at large are surveyed in this study, art programs have excelled in their usage of positive youth development (PYD) and community engagement (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016).

Camilleri (2007) is a music therapist who believes in the powerful combination of therapy and creativity, especially for those suffering under the circumstances of a low socioeconomic lifestyle. She works with a population of students in New York City and has seen great results spring from her efforts. “Our contemporary world is chaotic, threatening and out of control—art serves as a vehicle to order it” (Climenko, 2009, p. 86). Art lays out a variety of activities that lead to stronger work ethic and self-expression (Reeve, 2009). Emphasis is placed on the word “variety”; this is because art is not simply painting or theatre, it can be anything from building a sculpture to the expressive stroke of a paintbrush. The Oxford dictionary (2017) defines the arts as any branch of creative expression, and more specifically as, “The expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.” The artistic forms of expression that the hurting children will produce are the vehicle by which they communicate emotions and deep-seeded hurt. The arts are not done to coax students into thinking within the same boundaries and mindset as everyone else before them-if that were the case, it wouldn’t be art. Art gives students the freedom to process their life experiences through their own lens and their own medium. Once they are able to process the realities of their life and the path they are walking down, they are able to cope and respond with ease and clarity. Especially since art is also a vehicle for celebrating diversity (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). Art is not implemented to rid children of their individuality and cultural diversity. To clarify, the goal is not to strip kids of their culture; quite the contrary, it is to understand their culture through providing them a space and a means to process the negatives of their environment.

Speaking specifically about music therapy, there has been substantial guidance given to the students who struggle with attention deficits through musical expression (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). For the inner-city student, extreme and costly interventions cannot be afforded, nor will they in most cases, be sought out by low-resourced parental figures. So, the use of a traditional human therapy has provided a route of social, behavioral, and academic progression. Wolfe and Noguchi (2009) conducted an experiment that tested comprehension of a read-aloud story in a Kindergarten class. The results showed that when there was a musical element within the story, such as a song or lyrics, the students were more engaged and were able to maintain consistent attention (Wolfe & Noguchi, 2009).

Although the following study is surveyed from Korea, there is an underlying theme that goes beyond culture: for children who have suffered from depressive symptoms the performing arts have been a significant therapeutic resource. A group of students who dealt with depressive symptoms were placed in a twelve week period of dance therapy (Jeong, Hong, Lee, Park, Kim & Sub, 2005). Within this period of time the neurohormones, measured against the control group, had noticeable improvements. A similar study was done for inner city fourth graders with the artistic expression found in theater (Kisiel, Blaustein, Spinazzola, Schmidt, Zucker & van der Kolk, 2006). Aggressive behavior declined and healthy social behavior increased, all while boosting their academic achievement.

Artists for Humanity (AFH), an organization based out of Boston and designed to pay troubled youth for their creative expression, provides a great example of having a mission to minister to the whole of an at-risk individual (Rodgerson & Wilson, 2005).

The organization's outlook is that having an art education can increase the achievements and self-esteem of an individual. They have been successfully partnered with after school programs for over a decade, creating a celebratory spirit for diversity and the arts. The students are paired with local artists for an extended apprenticeship during which they volunteer, grow in their art form, and learn responsibility (Rodgerson & Wilson, 2005). The organization believes that there is a direct linkage between a student's view of their self-worth and their academic achievement, so the programming is designed to build up their confidence. During the program, student's get one-on-one mentoring as well as constructive criticism on their work, to give them the opportunity to grow.

Beyond uplifting a troubled child, art can be used to unveil the deep hurt within. As written previously, a troubled child may use destructive ways to communicate their deep-seeded feelings and frustrations. Zamdmer (1994) would jump in to say that art is a form of communication that can allow a hurt being to express through a healthy language; in this case the "language" is the medium through which one communicates. Specifically, Zamdmer (1994) explains that, "making art, what Eliot Eisner called 'the act of arting,' is a form of communication, like writing and speaking, in that it involved externalizing human thought through a language" (Zamdmer, 1994, p 4). When hurt is uncovered and conveyed, the deep healing process begins. In concurrence with Rodgerson and Wilson (2005), Fanelli and Klippel (2001) believe in the deep restorative power of art for the inner-city youth. As art uproots the hurt, there are ways to cope with and mend the wounds. Fanelli and Klippel (2001) use Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences to explain that the more variation there is in learning the more the individual will grow. The healthier routes the student has the option of taking towards the same

goal, the more likely they are to reach it. This involves the freedom to embrace an individual's strengths and utilizing those to help them learn and grow.

Art Horizon is a program that focuses on bringing the arts to schools to implement as a remedial approach for this specific at-risk population. Many of the substantial effects stem from allowing inner-city kids to engage in art activities to improve social and learning behaviors. Much good comes from opening up the deepest parts of oneself, explains Fanelli and Klippel (2001). Substance is added to students' character when there are dynamic learning processes and opportunities for self-expression in their life. Their "intrapersonal well," an understanding and acceptance of oneself, a term coined by Fanelli, is revealed through art and can therefore be mended and built up. The art projects within this particular program, Art Horizons, required hard work from the students. Hard work challenges their familiarity with giving up. So, despite the low expectations given to them in the past, the inner-city students rose to the occasion and went above and beyond in the loving environment of the Art Horizon program. Once the success on the other end is experienced, the sensation of overcoming an obstacle has an addictive nature. This is especially true when there is encouragement to build up believed potential. Students can construct their intrapersonal well to be stronger through the completion of tasks. With immense efforts, the factors that made a difference within this example were art, relationships, and encouragement (Fanelli & Klippel, 2001).

In addition to the projects integrated in the Art Horizon program, murals have often been used to aid mental health patients in rehabilitation processes. Hart (2013) gives an overview of The Porch Light Initiative where artists are connected with local health patients to train them to paint a mural. Through painting, patients learn to release

the deep torment of their own emotional being. While there is no solid research to back up the great growth behind this initiative, it is in the making and the volume of the patients' improvement that has the power to speak for itself (Hart, 2013).

Elaine Bell Kaplan, the author of *We live in the Shadow: Inner City Kids Tell Their Stories through Photographs*, would agree with the philosophy of Hart (2013), being that they both see the value in art for the inner-city youth's restoration. Another transformative art form, photography, is used to express the stories of the inner-city child and to grant them the voice they never knew they had. There are unknown depths in the reality of a low-socioeconomic lifestyle, and photography allows those subjects to cope. Mark Dunford (2014) reviews Kaplan's book and concludes that allowing a camera to capture the good and bad moments of life sheds light on the previously ignored and denounced. Awareness paves a pathway to overcoming the odds.

The beauty of artistic expression is amplified against the background of the urban city streets and culture. The conditions and context in which the art is created enriches the voice and message the piece has to share (O'Connell, 2008). Whether it is a child expressing personal inner hurt through first-hand experience, or it is an interpretation from a professional artist, there is beauty in vulnerable creative works that tell the cold hard truths of life. Art shares the depth of emotion; sharing these emotions brings freedom. There is even a freedom and celebration towards diversity and culture.

Not only does creating art bring relief to an inner-city child, but *observing* works of creative expression and collecting meaning from the pieces can produce deep healing. The observers of the pieces find community and understanding in the pieces of art that are vulnerable and depict reality. Jane Golden of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Project

(MAP) describes art as lifesaving (O'Connell, 2008). It not only subsides pain and life's frustrations, but it gives an escape and a freedom from it. Jane Golden states that, "murals can play a catalytic role in healing the wounds of the city" (O'Connell, 2008, p 19). With the MAP, while the inner city does not get to play a role in painting the actual mural, they play a huge role in the brainstorming of what will actually go on the wall. Once the mural is finished the mural is dedicated to the community and is turned over to them to maintain and upkeep (O'Connell, 2008).

A common theme in all of these art programs and projects are the overall benefit for the child experiencing suppressing life circumstances. Where an inner-city child is told that they are a victim to their circumstances, they are given freedom from the burdens of life and are supplied with tools to overcome and express frustrations and hurt in a healthy way. Lisa Ferry noticed a big difference in the students that participated in her study on the intentional use of visual art journal kits and saw a decrease in anxiety and stress as the study went on as well as growth, "...in their self-confidence/self-esteem" (Ferry, 2016, p. 71). This kind of growth in an inner-city kid increases the strength of character as well as their likelihood of stepping outside of their normal environment to find success in the classroom and beyond.

Lisa Ferry (2016) is an art educator in Pennsylvania and she decided to conduct an experiment with hopes of finding a positive route towards anxiety/stress relief for her students. She had encountered a high number of students afflicted by anxiety and stress and decided to implement postmodern principle-based strategies (Ferry, 2016). These strategies include appropriation, gazing, hybridity, juxtaposition, layering, recontextualization, representing, and text and image. Ferry (2016) utilized these

strategies in her classroom; she had students practice each strategy in a visual art journal kit. These kits contain a variety of art tools that are meaningless before they are combined to express a theme significant to the student. Magazine clippings and scraps of paper were used to create personalized works of art. One of the projects involved the students looking closely at the artistic styles of a certain artist (like Barbara Kruger) and creating similar-styled art work. Students created an image through many different mediums, centered on a social issue or topic that they feel passionate about. Students brainstormed words (in doing so, increasing social skills) to include on their art piece to increase the impact of the message the students hoped to portray (Ferry, 2016). Students released and expressed weighty topics. The benefits of projects like these are evident as Ferry speaks of her confidence, "...that the students benefitted from the postmodern principle-based strategies, not only by alleviating their anxiety/stress, but also giving all the students a voice, freedom of choice, and building their self-confidence" (Ferry, 2016, p. 71). The students now have accessible tools to sort through and utilize to manage their symptoms, which they are now able to control. This article brings up the point that controlled art is not as effective as art given for students to freely interact with. "By doing the postmodern principle-based projects in my art curriculum, I discovered that students enjoyed the freedom of choice and were able to create their own voice to issues that are important to them" (Ferry, 2016, p. 72).

Within the school system, arts have had a history of being high on the priority list for a student's academics, but on the opposing side some art programs have been undermined and kicked to the curb (Ruppert, 2006). The notion that art is effective in helping troubled youth is backed by research. There have been numerous accounts of art

raising the effectiveness of instruction and therefore boosting the academic outcome of students (Zamdmer, 1994).

When Art Programs Are Undermined

It has been discussed about the importance of a safe haven, like a school, and art to shape troubled youth. The value in these things are not world renown. In the past, art in the schools was of high value. In the No Child Left Behind Act the arts were on the same level of importance as reading, math, science, and social studies (Ruppert, 2006). This could be due, in part, to the observable effectiveness of art to a child's academic success. There have been a multitude of circumstances where art programs, whether in the school system or in an after-school program, get the short end of the stick. Oftentimes finances will be withdrawn from their program or morale in support of their program will die down. Both of these encouraging and supportive factors promote the quality and well-being of the program; without it the program may cease to exist.

Where is the money? In a dance therapy program in Louisiana, young inner city children were reaping the benefits of a healthy art therapy program that was determined to help students express feelings and engage in joyful activities (Camilleri, 2007). Unfortunately, when hurricane Katrina hit the area in 2005, all funding for the program ceased. When funding is pulled it is as if a lifeline is pulled. The art therapy program was no longer in business, and with it a large group of inner city children were without a place to experience healing (Climenko, 2009).

Art is a method for healing and self-expression; healing and expression are what most administration and teachers aim for. Ironically, the very method that is a possible route for healing is the one that is not prioritized within some schools. Eliminating a

possible route of emotional release does not advance the cause of healing and success for students. “The reduction of arts programs as a result of budgetary constraints and the uncoupling of arts programs from the Common Core restricts the methods by which ethnically diverse students who attend these schools are allowed to use creativity and expression in the process of learning” (Delk, 2017, p 2-3).

Budget cuts reveal to all what the administrators deem to be of importance to a student’s success. “...Art education is frequently perceived as being minimally valuable in the context of budget cuts and increased emphasis on standardized testing” (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016, p. 431; Ruppert, 2006). This is a consistent pattern. When funding is low, there are certain subjects that do not seem to be as vital as others. The debate is, what is categorized as vital? Based on our reviewed evidence, there is a dire need for a reliable subject to relieve the students from environmental stress; unfortunately, the proven route to accomplish such goals is often the last to be funded and supported.

Where is the support? Oftentimes when a school is undergoing change or challenging circumstances, the art department is the first to take a hit. Ironically, as you just discovered, this is the very program that can have the most impact on the whole being of a troubled student.

No matter how effective the arts may be, an art program has a serious hurdle to jump when the program lacks quality and support. A case study on the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) brings to light the lack of attention to art and its importance in the schools (Slavkin & Crespin, 2000). In the LAUSD, art education was incorporated back into the schools, but was not given attention or support. Eight schools’ administrations were examined to measure their dedication to the arts. When the

administration had little care for the well-being of the program, there was an evident deficiency in the program's effectiveness. In order for an art program to be effective it has to have the support of the school board. Arts programs are deserving of passionate advocates, due to their effectiveness with the development of inner-city youth's education (Slavkin & Crespin, 2000). An unfair assumption is made about the effectiveness of arts on the students, because of a faulty and lackluster program. There is little impact made on students involved in a program that is not supported. When there is an unfavorable opinion about art programs within the school, it may be necessary to analyze what programs have built up that opinion; this is because full effectiveness cannot be seen in a malnourished system.

The Dynamic Duo

Inner City students have experienced broken relationships, society, and dreams. Characteristics of the neighborhood in which the children grew up, in addition to the family functioning, contribute in some respect to a child's exposure to the harsh realities of their environment (Sheidow, et al., 2001). A neighborhood is a community in which the inner-city person is raised, and the relationships at home should be the most intentional and raw relationships available for any person. When there is a lack in both of those areas imprints are made on the students functioning, including the high risk of mental illness (Ofonedu, et al., 2003). While a child may face a high propensity to acquire mental disorders or other harmful effects from their rough upbringing, it is important to keep in mind that there still remains a population of students that, as Forrest-Bank (2016) puts it, "demonstrate resilience such that they overcome adverse conditions and function normatively" (p. 429). These inner-city children have been exposed to some

aids that have supported them in overcoming their suppressive environmental factors; they are overcomers. The content to follow seeks to uncover which factors are essential to transform more urban youth into conquerors of their detrimental circumstances.

Intentional relationships. An inner-city child's life is saturated with unconstructive, and oftentimes destructive, influence (Podder, 2016). Many times the bad influences that pollute their lives (and expectations) are in the roles of leaders and people that should be the support systems in their life. A mentorship with an adult may be off-putting due to their inability to see the potential of this relationship; instead, based on their past experiences they see it as restraining and damaging, and so they flee from it. The past relationships in their lives have held the responsibility of forming a positive perception of this adult-child mentorship, yet, these are the very relationships that have failed them. Many violent adults in the urban child's life have left scars on the child- emotionally, mentally, and even physically. The term "violent", in this case, means far more than physical destruction (Sauma, 2008).

I talk about violence not only in the physical sense; violence is also seen in betrayal of relationships by adults who lie, who neglect, who undermine, and who betray the trust that these young people need to develop a positive association with adults. (Sauma, 2008, p. 34).

Street children fight against the authority that has been of no help to them. Sauma (2008) explains that children who end up on the streets and in gangs are directed there as a result of not being listened to. In turn, they resist relationships with adults and do everything to push off oncoming adulthood (Sauma, 2008). Children finding purpose on the streets, oftentimes, don't feel like they have a guardian to confide in. Therefore, special

attention must be paid to the interaction between outreach workers or mentors and the child they are advising-as they hold the special privilege of reconnecting these children with a meaningful relationship.

Unfortunately, many times when there are outreaches to these violent environments, the organizations are over structured to the point of dehumanizing the targeted urban/street population. These programs are, "...structured to deal with these young people only as isolated individuals rather than as human beings dependent on meaningful relationships" (Sauma, 2008, p. 34). The street children are *dependent* on meaningful relationships. Relationships should foster sensitivity to the child's circumstances as well as a determination to listen and understand (Sauma, 2008). A meaningful relationship does not necessarily rip the urban child from their toxic environment. Rather, it is seen as more appropriate to care for them where they are at, breaking down walls in the process, and hopefully opening up a whole new world of possibilities to these children. Half the battle is breaking down the built up walls to reconstruct the child's trust in authority. Seeking to understand the children and their motivations serve as the foundation for engagement in a healing relationship with an adult mentor (Sauma, 2008).

In a report by Susan Jekielek, Kirstin Moore, Elizabeth Hair, and Harriet Scarupa (2002), the signs of positive development due to an intentional mentorship program were palpable. Students involved in the mentorship program exemplified an increase in motivation during school, an increase in academic performance, a decline in absences, a decrease in violent outbursts, a decrease in alcohol and drug use, and an improved relationship with guardians or parental figures (Jekielek, et al., 2002). To only participate

in a short-term mentorship was strongly discouraged; to do so is to do more harm to the receiving child. The potential of a long-term mentor could redirect them towards a successful path and reconstruct the student's perceptions of authority figures.

Xin Li and Dhyana Lal (2006) tell a narrative of the large-scale impact of a principal, called "Daddy" by many, in *An Inner-City School Mentor: A Narrative Inquiry of the Life Experiences of "Daddy."* Two individuals, Tyler and Maria, and their experiences with "Daddy" are highlighted. Tyler never bothered to go to class and had made a habit out of getting in trouble. Maria had slipped into a negative crowd at school. The principal would pull them aside and carry on conversations with them, even amidst a circumstance where both students would have expected to be disciplined. When the students predicted a lecture to come, "Daddy" defied logic and engaged in caring conversation. The students were also given responsibilities that made them feel important and needed. The conscious effort placed by this principal made a difference in the lives of those he was in contact with. His planned and spontaneous mentorship with troubled youth left a huge mark on their lives (Li & Lal, 2006).

Pertaining to the classroom, healthy relationships are an important element to a cohesive and healthy classroom environment. The cultivation of a teacher-student relationship paves the way for a trust that allows the teacher a say in the child's life. As mentioned earlier, Foote (2005) discusses that to have a classroom that revolves around the students, their learning, and their overall development, the teacher must prioritize creating a nurturing relationship with the individuals. The behaviors and reactions of the adults in the classroom are read and interpreted by the students. "In the playground, children and teenagers play out the roles they are in the process of learning and

interpreting from adults” (Sauma, 2008, p. 34). What students observe from adults, they repeat or react to. A healthy classroom relationship can be understood as one that is patient, stern, loving, and encouraging. The teacher or adult professional can have a special impact on the learning process of the student and what they believe of themselves.

Healthy community. Community adds social, mental, and emotional support for an individual; a community, as explained by Rodriguez (2017), is a place where they can belong in order to gain an understanding of where they fit into the big picture. This is not to say that it is advantageous to be a part of *any* community of support; the quality and direction of the support matters. Imagine being encouraged by a large surrounding community of people that hit people on impulse. Not only would you be supported to do so, but it would become normalized among the environment that you were in. The likelihood of you actually giving into this pressure and acting on this impulsivity would be high. This dramatized example emphasizes an assumption-that if your community around you does it and urges you to do the same, you will slip into it. Whatever is normalized and romanticized in one community can become the reality of one’s mindset and then that can, in turn, affect the way he or she interacts with the world at large. The quality of the community matters. What the community encourages and urges a single individual towards gives a good snapshot of the overall condition of the environment.

Urban youth have a tendency to find community in the wrong places. When seeking a community to belong they gravitate towards availability and comfort-whatever approaches them and whatever is familiar in their upbringing. Many times this might mean slipping into gang culture, drugs, or party scenes. Their belonging in these environments may simply be defined as a place where they feel like they have people

around that support them. Sadly, this support becomes conditional when it breaches the comfort of another community member. As Sauma (2008) expresses the street gangs' experiences as one, "...marked by death, as well as by betrayal and belonging" (p. 33). There is a reoccurring theme of betrayal within this commonly selected community. Though Sauma (2008) reports from observations made on gang culture in Rio and in the United Kingdom, there are still some gang behaviors, "...that can be compared cross-nationally..." (p. 32).

A community is also a place where a member finds purpose. Many times a community will gather solely for a central purpose, like a club gathering to discuss one topic, but other times the community becomes tightly interwoven through circumstances and life experiences; in this way one relates to the people, shares in the load of life, and learns to work towards a purpose together. A gang's purpose and philosophy is centered on destruction and violence; yet, their claim is that they are family. The gangs, or the factions, were always in a group. A previous street-kid, Maria, explains that when she was alone she would be beat up, and when she was in a collective group with her gang members she would also be beat up. She says, "...but at least I was in the group" (Sauma, 2008, p. 33). Students desperately want to belong, and they will go to extensive measures to achieve it. Along with the feeling of belonging, there is a pride and identity that is linked to the title of "gang member". To belong to a specific gang means to be purposefully associated in order to feel a certain level of importance. This is the main reason for their association with gangs, especially since, "...the faction doesn't give anything to [you]," in the words of Maria (Sauma, 2008, p. 33).

These “street kids,” a term coined by Sauma (2008), have created an unpleasant view of the “adult-world” and the overbearing power that they see connected to it. “The street allows them to connect to the trade [of drugs] without becoming imprisoned by it” (Sauma, 2008, p. 33). Yet, the children that find their community among the streets are at risk of being seriously injured or killed upon leaving their gang’s designated territory. The captivity of this street standard seems undeniable. Yet, from their vantage point there is freedom in belonging, and in knowing that someone-anyone- has your back. Remedially, it would be necessary to create a community not so far removed from the culture in which they are familiar, but far enough away to where they get exposure to a healthy community. The freedom in a community that has their best interest in mind will shed light on the true imprisonment of the street life. Through a healthy conditioned environment an urban child will experience an open door to a world of possibilities, along with the guidance to go out and succeed.

Another one of the most well-known forms of community is the neighborhood in which one resides. It can become a go-to social support group. Unfortunately, a healthy neighborhood community is not always guaranteed to urban adolescents. “Males living in the most devastated inner-city communities--those with high levels of poverty and violence and low neighborhood social organization—were more likely to show patterns of escalating offending than were males living in equally poor, inner-city neighborhoods but with greater neighborhood social organization...” (Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry., 2001, p. 347). This study by Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2001) highlights two factors that are important to consider when measuring violence exposure for inner-city adolescents: the social organization of the community and the

family orientation. “Social organization is reflected in perceived social support and cohesion among neighbors, sense of belonging to the community, supervision and control of children and adolescents by other adults in the community, and participation in formal and voluntary organizations.” (Sheidow et al., 2001, p. 348). There is an avid need for social support within the neighborhood community and family. There are some lower income students that reside in an area where neighbors are supportive, even if they themselves cannot provide a way out of that environment. The benefits of having any community of support is evident, however the impact of a healthy community would create life altering results. It can be understood in this way: any supportive community can love them where they are at, however a healthy community can love them too much to keep them there. This is not to suggest that the students need to be pulled from their culture in order to experience success or growth, it is only to reveal that there is possibility outside of the closed mindset acquired within a confined community of people who just accept “life-as-it-is.”

When students are shown the world outside of their small neighborhood community, as is done with the All Stars Project (based out of New Jersey), students start to get a glimpse of what could be (Lobman, 2017). Upon reading this article reporting on the vast range of benefits from this inner-city program, something became very obvious- the students benefited from discovering a new community. The students in this particular program were in awe of the city that was only 20 minutes from their home towns (Lobman, 2017). It was the interaction with a new environment of opportunity that opened up their mind to dreaming and succeeding. This exposure is important in order to help these students become dreamers and believers of their own bright future.

As a part of the solution, incorporating the elements necessary to minister to inner-city kids, an organization could be put into place to minister to the inner-city students as a whole using Christianity. The local church is one of the powerful examples of a healthy community in an urban child's life. Cook proposes that the success of the church is the power of incorporating God in the training up of troubled youth (2000). The biggest contribution to the character of an inner-city child was done by the church (Cook, 2000). A Christian perspective is among other proposed methods of aiding urban students' whole being. Students are more than capable, they just need to have an outlet, a loving mentor, and the influence of a nurturing community (included, but not limited to the local church).

Adding art. The combining of these three elements, mentorship, a healthy community, and art, is another creative method to aid urban students' whole being. Intentional relationships, healthy community, and art education provide healing and growth to urban youth. Individually, all of these factors have an immense impact on the mindset of a troubled student, yet together the trio can alter the life course for that soon-to-be world-changer. Students are more than capable of extreme life change and achievement, they just need to have an expressive outlet (art), a loving mentor, and a healthy community.

Conclusion

As Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2001) discussed, there is an abnormally high percentage of young children in the inner-city that witness impure acts of hatred. These children become comfortable with violence, making it easier for them to fall into the cycle that has allured their relatives and acquaintances in the past. This cycle becomes a trap that seems most impossible to escape: violence and destruction to oneself and others. The discussion offered within this thesis serves as a springboard for possible remedial support and, more directly, a way to escape the trap. Knowledge of home environments, the need for nurturing relationships, and of effective support systems (such as art intervention) give direction for action.

Based on the research provided, a business that would support the growth of inner-city youth could be started. To maximize the possible impact, this business should combine the elements of community, relationships, and art - bringing to life a well-rounded effort advocating for the success and personal growth of all struggling adolescents.

“Richters and Martinez (1993a) evaluated several family characteristics as possible mediators, including parental education, income, marital status, and living arrangements (home versus apartment). Only living arrangements could be linked to violence exposure, with those who reported higher levels of witnessing violence more likely to live in houses rather than apartments and to have lived longer in their current home.” (Sheidow, et al., 2001, p. 346)

So, what if they were given a safe place to call home? Sheidow, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2001) expressed that, “violence reduction and broader efforts to reduce youth exposure to violence seem to be essential to prevention” (p. 357). While that quote seems to put a spotlight on escaping *violence*, the same principle exists for escaping the mundane cycle of inner-city normalcy: violence, broken communities, crumbling relationships, and uncertain futures. Within the same study, we discover that when students (in the poorer functioning areas) have a place to call a “safe haven” the impact of their family functioning and corrupted community become less weighted on their outcome. This idea of a “safe haven” can be understood as a place that is removed from their toxic environment and, instead, gives them a new vision for a life of possibility. Decreasing time spent in an environment littered with violence can give this troubled adolescent population a chance to escape the tainted pathway of an underprivileged urban being. It may be more beneficial to not only take them out of the environment, but to provide a life-giving atmosphere for them instead. When false security is uncovered, new security and comfort must be revealed. The creation of such an environment should include the three main factors discussed in this thesis: relationships, community, and art. Doing so will provide students a complete foundational system to take root and grow from.

The takeaway purposed in this thesis is illustrated in this quote by Donald Gensler when describing the story behind one of his murals, “This mural is a mural of hope. The young man is stepping out; he’s looking to the future. He has a goal and a vision in mind” and he believes that *he can do it*” (O’Connell, 2008, p. 20). That is the goal - to

understand and care for the life of an inner-city child and therefore direct them towards a purposeful and fulfilling life.

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