

Important Work: Teaching Children of Poverty

Leigh Anna Driggers
Undergraduate Student
2113 Fernleaf Lane
Florence, SC 29501
843-610-3927

ldriggers4662@g.fmarion.edu

Word Count: 1283
Francis Marion University

Important Work: Teaching Children of Poverty

As a girl who grew up in a single parent household, the idea of poverty came close to knocking on my door. On July 15th, the summer before my 5th grade school year, my father shot and injured both my mom and my aunt and then took his own life. The years prior to this I can remember never feeling unsafe or less fortunate in the house. I had a normal childhood leading up to this incident, always getting what I wanted for Christmas, always having transportation to school and to sports games, pretty much my only worry during these times was whether my brothers ate my fruit snacks or not. Now, thinking back to my early childhood days, I really did have a good life. However, on that day in July, my world turned upside down.

For a child to go from having two parents in the house to now only having one, the mental and emotional trauma was earth shattering. I can remember feeling lost and confused about everything that had happened over the following months. I was so young at the time, but I was there in the midst of it all thinking how could my own father do this to my mother, do this to us [my brothers and I]. We moved to a new but much smaller house; something my now single mom could afford. Both my younger brother and I moved to a new school. I didn't know it at the time, but we qualified for free or reduced lunch. Walking into a new school, leaving all my old friends behind was really hard for me. I have always been a very quiet, shy girl and having to have experienced so much trauma and change in my life all before my first day of 5th grade, you could say I was a wreck. I was experiencing things that students of poverty were dealing with on a daily basis. The idea of "not knowing" what was going to happen next. But, this is where

my story starts to turn for the better and this is how I learned just how much loving a child can affect them.

My fifth grade teacher, Mrs. McRae was my saving grace during that school year. She immediately made me feel welcome in her class, she hugged on me every day, made sure I had everything I needed in order to succeed. There are not enough words I can say to her to thank her for what she did for me. I'm not sure if she even knows how much she truly saved me from falling off track. From the first day, I walked into her class, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up, a teacher just like her. A teacher who loved and cared for each one of her students no matter their backgrounds.

Love is a strong and bold word. People use and express the word love in a variety of ways. For me, love healed me. Love pushed me to do my best, love cared and appreciated me. Love was my mother and my fifth grade teacher. The children in this generation need a lot of love, and teachers can provide the best kind of love that a child needs to be successful. Recently, I have been observing and working in a kindergarten classroom with students who predominately come from a poverished area. I have learned through close connection with my cooperating teacher, that each student in the class comes with their own special story. Some students come to school with the same shoes on every day because their parents can only afford for them to have one pair, some students have a lot of siblings all living under the same roof so their personal attention gets shafted and some kids have a similar situation like mine where they only have one parent at home. So, it is our job as teachers to make sure each student feels loved and feels that they can come to school and forget about what's happening at home. Luckily, I had Mrs. McRae to be that person in my life and I hope that I can be

that person for my future students as well. If a child, especially a child of poverty, knows their teacher loves them, then their rate of success will increase. In an article, I read by Eric Jensen, the topic of how poverty affects engagement in the classroom was being discussed. I thought this quote related well to my thoughts, that a teacher's love aids in the success of a student. Jensen stated that, "When you liked your teacher, you worked harder" (Jensen, 27). This is a prime example that when a child has a loving connection with their teacher, then their engagement in the classroom will be greater.

Unfortunately, for children of poverty, school may be the only place where they feel loved, because their parents are too stressed out about certain things that they don't make time to build relationships with their children.

Children are the greatest gifts on earth and us, as humans need to do everything in our power to protect them. Teachers are a vital part in a child's successful upbringing. As a future teacher, who has to teach in a low-income area for a few years, I have really been thinking about how am I going to teach children of poverty. I often question myself about knowing the proper ways to teach a child of poverty, or about how to deal with the special issues and baggage that the child has to bring to school with them every day. I question myself a lot about if I am actually capable of making a connection with my students. But, then I stop and I breathe and I remember that I am capable of doing all those things. I have unfortunately, had to experience things that some of my students will probably experience too. I learned how to overcome and grow up at such a young age that my resilience has carried me through all these years. I will be able to understand mentally and emotionally what my students are going through because I've been there. Over the years, I have gain knowledge and a deeper insight on certain

things that both students and teachers go through when being in a impoverished area. I've learned what I need to do in my classroom to make my students feel welcome.

According to Vicky S. Dill, author of *Students Without Homes*, teachers should, "create an atmosphere of community in the classroom in which all students' feelings and situations are accepted and stigmatization is out of the question" (Dill, 47) and I plan to do just that. My classroom will be one that students are free to express themselves, are free to be independent and are free to learn. I will let no child feel like they cannot do something just because of where they come from. I have learned that I cannot always go straight to punishing the students for acting out or not listening because there could be a bigger issue going on.

I still have a lot to learn but I am excited to do so. Children bring me so much joy and I cannot wait to one day be a special person in their lives. No matter a child's background or situation, love is the most important thing I can give to them. Teaching children of poverty I know will be difficult but yet so rewarding. My faith and my resiliency has made me who I am today; a strong, independent girl who is ready to be the best teacher I can be!

Works Cited

Dill, Vicky S. "Students Without Homes." *Educational Leadership: Closing Opportunity Gaps*. November 2010. Vol. 68, pg.47.

Jensen, Eric. "How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement." *Educational Leadership: Faces of Poverty*. May 2013. Vol. 70, pg. 27.