

TEACHING POVERTY

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Word Count: 804

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Many people associate poverty with a lack of money, but in fact, poverty is much more than financial resources. Poverty is not only lack of money but lack of food, secure shelter, and basic health care. In other words, poverty is living each day without a secure sense of how one's basic needs will be met. Childhood academic success is impossible for children of poverty without help from educators. "On a scale of 0 to 100, a child who has been in persistent poverty will rank ten levels lower than a child of the same age who has no experience of poverty in their early years" (Gaunt, 2012, P. 1). Although test scores may reflect which child is receiving enough resources at home, educators must be aware of their students' needs. Teachers are the adults children spend most of their time with, and as a result, have a responsibility to take care of the student's physical and emotional needs. Poverty is a dark hole many Americans face and unfortunately, in many cases tends to be a continuous cycle. Education has proven time and time again to be an effective solution to escaping the poverty cycle.

The 2016 threshold was \$24,339 for a family of four with two children under age 18 (Census Bureau, 2016, p.1). According to the 2016 Census Bureau in 2017, there were an estimated 39.7 million Americans who lived in poverty (Semega, Fontenot, and Kolar, 2018, p.1). According to the U. S. Census Bureau's 2013 annual American Community Survey data, more than 860,000 South Carolinians lived below the poverty threshold (Ellis, 2014, p.1). The current poverty rate in Dillon, SC is 30.6%. This statistic is further proof of the numbers of under resourced children in our community.

Poverty affects a child's development both physically and cognitively. It is not just the child that is suffering through poverty. It is the whole family. Children whose parents neglect to read to and with them suffer in elementary school with vocabulary and

reading. Many parents are trying to provide and are working many hours and lack the time to read to their child at night or help with homework. That disadvantage puts the child behind in school in all subjects. Poverty, particularly hunger, affects learning in the classroom setting also. A child cannot learn on an empty stomach. Hunger is a basic need, and when the basic needs are not met, learning is not possible. Education is at the bottom of the list for a child who does not know where his next meal will come from or if they will have a place to sleep at night or if when they get home, anyone will be home. If educators do not meet the hierarchy needs of children living in poverty, the educator will be unsuccessful in teaching the children.

There are many ways educators can take an active part in educating children of poverty. There are different strategies teachers can use to minimize the effects of poverty. A few examples are training teachers to equip them to adjust to different student situations, challenging students through the curriculum that is taught in the classroom, and providing learning opportunities other than traditional school. Federal money provides public schools the necessities to serve breakfast before school which gives students the opportunity to start their day with a full stomach and ready to learn. A proper breakfast is a major factor in starting a child's day off right and helping them achieve success for that day. Students are also able to get eye care from school nurses stations. Dental examinations are done by local nonprofit organizations by Healthy Smiles. Community participation is another way to serve under resourced children. Churches and organizations participate in "Backpack Buddies" where food is sent home each Friday. This program provides meals for children to eat over the weekend. "Love Feeds" is another organization that packs bags of food to send home

with children. Another way to help children of poverty is to spiritually support them. When a child is introduced to faith, they are able to gain a hope that the life they are stuck in will not last forever and that they were created for something more. If a child knows one believes in them and really cares about their well-being, they are more likely to open up to that person and listen to what they have to say.

Poverty is a cycle that many people fall into and cannot climb back out. As mentioned earlier, education is a way to help people end the cycle of poverty. As educators, it is important to recognize the under resourced students and help them to get the assistance and extra help they need. As a community, it is important to pour into the youth and meet their needs.

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