

# **Important Work: Teaching Children of Poverty**

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Teaching students in poverty is difficult and challenging, but more importantly it is rewarding. As educators, we are able to give students the knowledge they need to become successful individuals and move beyond their current situation. However, children living in poverty need more than academic support from teachers. Recall Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and think about how this affects poverty level children throughout their academics. Students cannot engage in learning if their basic needs are not met. This includes, but is not limited to: food, shelter, and safety, all of which many families living in poverty struggle to maintain. Let's take a look on how we as educators are able to offer support for all our students including those living in poverty.

First we will begin discussing three main facts about poverty in general. Emily Liebttag explains that "Poverty is far more prevalent than one may think and the devastating effects are accelerating" (Liebttag 2016). Liebttag also explains that 51% of students in the United States are living below the poverty level. This information proves the need for future educators to be prepared to effectively teach children of poverty. The second fact about poverty is "it affects both educators and students in the classroom" (Liebttag 2016). Teachers are often not given the necessary materials needed for demonstrating lessons or providing hands-on activities for their students. Providing students with learning

experiences that offer hands-on activities and demonstrations allows them to fully understand and grasp difficult materials. This is especially important when teaching subjects like physical science because it is hard for students to relate new materials to something they have no background knowledge on. Students also often struggle with engaging and maintaining focus throughout the school day when they are concerned about their home life. Lastly, “brains can change, educators can reverse the academic effects of poverty and help student graduate college or career ready” (Liebtag 2016). For example, “chronic stress shrinks the hippocampus (a key to memory...), but supportive relationships heal it” (Liebtag 2016). This is the most important factor about poverty because it is not a culture, it is a circumstance that can be changed. Effective educators must understand that students will not remain in poverty if they are given the correct tools and support for success.

As educators, it is our responsibility that we identify and provide students with the necessary means for success. For example, many children living in poverty do not have access to reliable transportation therefore it should be provided by the school. Transportation to and from school is not enough for our students because they should be given an equal opportunity to engage in after school activities, study sessions, and athletics. “Poverty limits access, it limits

exposure, and as a result it limits opportunities” (Parsons 2017). If we are able to identify the needs of our students, we will be able to better accommodate them in their learning and personal growth. Developing relationships with our students allows us to build a bridge between school and home life. This allows us a glimpse into difficulties they may be facing at home. Although teachers are unable to provide the needs of all students, it is important that we find ways to enhance student learning through basic needs being met. Educators play a significant role in all students’ lives, but especially students who live in poverty because sometimes the classroom is their only escape from reality. It is our job as future teachers to create an environment where students feel welcomed, relaxed, and cared for. To some people this may seem so insignificant because they know they have a quiet, relaxed home they are able to go to every day after school, but to others this environment plays a huge role on the success of some children. It is important for teachers to understand that sometimes they are their students’ only advocates not only in academic performance but also in life in general.

Teaching children of poverty may seem difficult and underappreciated, but in reality this gives you the power to change someone’s life. Providing education and knowledge to students living in poverty allows them an opportunity for growth and success. Many children living in these circumstances typically rely only

on their teacher to educate them because their parents and/or caretakers most likely do not have a high education, or lack time to spend teaching their children subjects that are taught in school. Whereas with students who come from middle or upper class homes, often have the support of their parents in teaching and reteaching materials covered throughout the school year. I believe the opportunity to play such a huge role on a child's life is a blessing rather than a burden. Teachers should be grateful for this opportunity even through the difficulties of teaching children of poverty.

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