Poverty and School Success: Challenges and Opportunities with Under-Resourced Students

Tammy Pawloski
September 18, 2012
Number in Poverty & Poverty Rate

http://texasenterprise.org/article/income-poverty-and-health-insurance
Distribution of People, Families, and Households by Poverty Level

2006-2010

Northeast: 18%
Midwest: 21.9%
South: 36.8%
West: 23.3%

http://www.childtrendsdb.org/?q=node/221
In 2010, 43% of children lived in low-income homes.

(200% above the poverty threshold)
High Poverty Schools in America

66%

National School Lunch Program Participation
By Meal Type Provided, 2011

Paid: 58%
Free Lunch: 34%
Reduced Price: 8%
Implications for Education
The dropout rate for low-income students was five times greater than their high-income counterparts—7.4% compared with 1.4%. 
The income-achievement gap persists over time.
Poverty is a Key Indicator

Even when kids are the same on these:

- ethnic background
- level of mother’s education
- family structure

Children of poverty are less than half as likely to do well in school!

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

Children living in poverty are more likely to:

- fall behind their classmates in school,
- be assigned to lower ‘tracks’ in education,
- be retained in grade,
- be labeled as ‘problem’ students,
- be absent, truant, and to drop out of school altogether,
- and—over time—earn lower scores in standardized tests of knowledge and achievement.

(Biddle, 2001)
Seeking Solutions
Breaking New Ground

- Past efforts have been generally unsuccessful.

- The role of the teacher has emerged as most important.

- Teachers who possess the knowledge and skills needed to teach children of poverty and teach them well have the greatest potential for breaking this generations-old cycle.
• Effort and emotional IQ matter more than IQ in predicting achievement.  (Heckman, 2006; Mehrabian, 2002)

• Brains CAN and DO change.  (Jenson, 2009)

• Students’ academic performance *(as much as 43%)* can be traced to the quality of the teachers in the classroom.  (Marzano, 1998)

• Low-achieving students experience greater gains *(as much as 4 times greater)* with the most effective teachers.  (Jenson, 2009)
The Center’s Mission

Solve the problems inherent in educating children of poverty by developing expertise in those that work with these children on a daily basis.
Who are “Children of Poverty”?

Defined by the Center as:

“young persons who currently live (or have lived a significant period of their childhood) in an environment in which one or more of the resources identified as important for one to develop potential and function effectively in society are unavailable.”
Key Questions

1. What contributes to school success for all children?

2. What strategies are most likely to raise and level the bar for children of poverty?
Developmental Foundation
BIRTH and LIFE without resources can have a significant impact on brain development and school achievement.
Birth without resources.

More likely to:

- be premature
- be low in birth weight
- suffer from a range of disabilities

Bradley and Corwyn, 2002
LIFE without resources

Limited access to

Early ‘Extras’:
- quality child care
- stimulating toys
- books

Later ‘Extras’:
- educational vacations
- team costs
- school supplies
- scouts or summer camp
- music/dance lessons

(Posner & Vandell, 1999; Sherman, 1994).
But what if a child lives in an environment WITHOUT CRITICAL RESOURCES?
Heart Rate
Respiration
Sweating
Blood Pressure
Gastric Acidity
Digestion
Intestinal Movements
Bronchial Spasm
Emotional changes
Body Metabolism
And more!

STRESS DISORDERS
ATTACHMENT DISORDERS


3 Year Old Children

Normal

Extreme Neglect

Child Trauma Academy

1997 Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.
Age 3: 30 MILLION WORD GAP

Nearly a 2:1 advantage of environment over genetics!

Devlin, B., Daniels, M., & Roeder, K., 1997
Change the experience, and you’ll change the brain!
Center of Excellence Strategies
Brain Change

**REDUCERS**
- Distress
- Inactivity
- Boredom
- Depression
- Poor Nutrition
- Isolation
- Low Status

**ENHANCERS**
- Exercise
- Prosocial Contact
- Complex Environments
- New Learning
- Nutrition
- Low Stress

1. Life in Poverty
2. Language and Literacy
3. The Classroom Community
4. Parent and Community Partnerships
5. Curriculum Design, Instruction, and Assessment
6. Teachers as Leaders, Learners, and Advocates
8 Star Strategies
for
Teachers of Children of Poverty
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

1. Develop high-quality, meaningful relationships.
Quality relationships provide a safety net!
Relationship Builders

- Decrease stress
- Provide status
- Instill hope
- Employ proactive (and indirect) guidance
- Respond to the causes of misbehavior
How important are relationships?

9 of 10 success stories point to a relationship!

(Payne, 2005)
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

2. Provide health-related support services.
poor nutrition
asthma
alcohol and drug abuse
over tired
stress
chronic diseases
abuse
obesity
Solutions to the Dropout Crisis
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

3. Cultivate family and community partnerships.
For more information and membership details, contact:

Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director
Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
nnps@csos.jhu.edu
Goal-Oriented Partnership Planning

TYPE 1: PARENTING

TYPE 6: COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY

GOAL FOR STUDENT LEARNING or BEHAVIOR:

TYPE 5: DECISION MAKING

TYPE 2: COMMUNICATING

TYPE 3: VOLUNTEERING

TYPE 4: LEARNING AT HOME

Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

4. Align classroom instruction with required, tested standards.
Alignment of Cognitive Levels

Instruction = Standards and Assessment = Indicators
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

5. Motivate the unmotivated.
Value?            Expectancy for Success?

Value   x   Expectancy  =  Motivation

\[
\begin{align*}
10 \times 10 &= 100 \\
0 \times 10 &= 0
\end{align*}
\]
Fixed or Growth?

Dweck, C. 2012

"mindset" {noun}

a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determines one's behavior, outlook and mental attitude.
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

6. **Build academic background knowledge.**
Background knowledge is what students already know before instruction begins.

It is one of the strongest indicators of how well they will learn new related content!
Background Knowledge

IQ
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

7. Design and deliver purposeful instruction.
Purposeful Instruction

“The one attribute that seems to be characteristic of outstanding teachers is doing things on purpose.”

Adapted from Slavin (2000)
Purposeful instruction must...

• Be driven by data
• Be rigorous – active, deep and engaging
• Be inquiry-based and interdisciplinary
• Address key skills explicitly
• Employ “Model-Guide-Support” strategies
• Offer cognitive supports through models, templates, formats and rubrics
• Include the ARTS

ACCEPT NO EXCUSES!
Level the Field - Accommodate

Jensen (2010)

Transportation

Organizational Skills

Prioritizing

Parental Support

Short Term Memory

$ Anything that costs money

Medical Health Needs

Emotional Social Regulation

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University
5% -10% of student achievement performance may be ascribed to the influence of differential teacher expectations.

(Brophy, 1983)
Schools can make the difference in how brains develop and how successful children of poverty can be.

8. Benefit from strong and supportive school leadership.
What leadership traits are most important?

- Perseverance
- Compassion
- Instructional leadership
- Understanding parents and community.
- Vision and ability to inspire.
So how much does teacher quality really matter?
As much as 43% of the student’s academic performance can be traced to the quality of the teacher in the classroom.

Contact Information

Dr. Tammy Pawloski

Director, Francis Marion University Center for Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty

www.fmucenterofexcellence.org
tpawloski@fmarion.edu