

Important Work: Teaching Children of Poverty

Poverty is prevalent and pervasive in the society that we live in today. Poverty is growing at an alarming rate, and it is a huge issue that teachers and students are effected by in and out of the classroom every day. One might ask, how we can as parents, relatives, educators, or, in general, members of this society allow our children to go to schools that are immersed by poverty. Thus, many students are not getting the education that they deserve. Many teachers feel stuck as to how they provide a quality education with inadequate resources to students living in poverty. It is not that we have willingly allowed this to happen, but it is that poverty has slowly crept into people's lives, and it now has a foothold in the door of most public schools across the United States. Unfortunately, poverty brings diminutive funding and unevenly distributed funding to schools, which causes a strain to provide adequate resources and materials for teachers and students.

Funding for public schools is a huge issue when one looks at how the funding for schools is attained. In an article for NPR's website, Corey Turner, the senior editor for the NPR Ed Team, reports that "In the U.S., school funding comes from a combination of three sources ... 45 percent local money, 45 percent from the state and 10 percent federal." This shows that almost half of public schools' funding is attained from the local community. Turner also reports one of the main factors is property taxes (Turner, et al.). This prompts an ordeal because if money is brought in from things like property taxes, then very little money will be collected in rural towns that do not have booming business to help thrive their economy. Essentially, poverty at home leaks into schools, leaving teachers at the frontline to tackle this issue head on. Thus, if a student lives in a

poverty stricken community, then the chances are high that the same student will attend a poverty stricken public school.

Due to poverty stricken schools, some teachers are not able to create the feeling of a safe learning environment because their buildings are literally falling apart around them. Public schools in Alabama are impeccable examples of this. The principle of Livingston Junior High School, Tramene Maye, paints a vivid picture of the learning environment that his teachers and students have to learn in. Maye described the school's conditions stating that "In the girls' restroom, they may have four or five stalls, but only one works" (Turner et al.). Turner furthers the description of the school by stating, "One room, no longer a classroom, leaks when it rains. Garbage cans catch some of the water, but the buckled floor and smell of mold suggest they miss plenty. Around the school, there are broken windows, peeling paint and cracked floors" (Turner et al.). It is shocking to hear this description and believe that this is a school that students are expected to learn in and teachers are expected teach in. School is supposed to be a safe place for students to go to in order to further their education. However, in Maye's school, and many others like it in our country, how can children be expected to learn when they are living in and attend a school with such poverty filled conditions? Students' learning is mostly likely stalled because the students are distracted by the smell of mold, along with the fear of collapsed ceilings. In this case, the little funding that schools, like Alabama, have to go to repairs on the school building, and not towards the latest technology that could further a student's education.

I have personally witnessed this firsthand. In school placements that I have been involved with, I have been assigned schools that have the latest technology. In fact, at

one school where I observed every student had their own Chromebook in class. On the other hand, I have been assigned a school, in a different district, where the only computer available in the class was the teacher's computer. This shows first hand that funding is distributed unevenly at schools. In one district every child had access to technology, while in the other district students only had access if they had technology at home, which was not likely due to the high poverty community.

Another example of a school that does not have funding for the latest technology, due to shortages in funding, is southeast of Phoenix in the Coolidge Unified School District. This district not only made cuts to its music and art classes and librarians, but the district made the decision to not hold any school on Fridays (Turner, et al.). This decision was made because the districts did not have enough money to pay for everyday bills, like the light bill, nor could the district afford to pay teachers (Turner, et al.). Thus, the decision to go to school four days a week has help the district lower the economic burden, along with paying the teachers their salary. However, this drastic change impacts the lives of students, who are already put at a disadvantage since they live in poverty. The educational system has failed these students and widened the achievement gap between the wealthier schools, where students attend school five days a week, and this poorer school, where students only attend four days a week. If schools like the one in Coolidge are having to take such extreme measures to keep a school opened because they do not have enough funding, then chances are high that this districts' students are not adequately getting their educational needs met.

Not only are students in poverty-stricken communities receiving an education in buildings that are falling apart around them and little to no technology incorporated in

their education, but many of the students face this same reality when they go home. Poverty USA's website reports that "On average, 2.5 million children experience homelessness in a year ... [and] [l]ast year, 1 in 7 American households were food insecure." How can one expect a student to focus on learning, when they are hungry or do not have a secure home? A student is not going to care about solving equations if they did not receive any food the day before, or if they did not receive proper sleep, due to not having a safe home to sleep in. If students are hungry they are focused on food, not learning. In addition, when you mix a hungry and homeless child with a damaged school building, like the one mentioned previously, and inadequate resources the outcome is not going to be great. Dr. Joseph Webster, former President of the Florida State Medical Association, stated that "... we don't function at our highest levels when we are overstressed, hungry, anxious, sad, experiencing a loss or dealing with family problems" (Webster: Poverty Matters). Thus, high poverty schools are not going to have the highest test scores or achievement, due to the stresses of everyday life that teachers and students have to face, which stems from living in poverty.

Overburden teachers are doing all that they can to try to relieve some of their students' burdens that are caused by poverty, even though most teachers are making very little themselves. Donors.org reports that "... 84% of teachers in the highest poverty US schools have opened their wallets, taking it upon themselves to purchase student life essentials" (Burke). Teachers are the ones that see poverty's effects first-hand. They are the ones who see the hungry and sleep deprived children who come in their classrooms hoping to escape their life of poverty, if only for a few hours at school. However, some public schools in the United States, like the ones mentioned previously

in Phoenix and Alabama, are not providing an escape from these children's poverty filled lives because these schools have signs of poverty throughout them; whether it is from outdated textbooks or caving in ceilings from rain leakage. The school system is failing these under resourced learners. Something has to change with the way that funding is distributed to United States public schools. It is not right that a child who lives in a poorer district will receive a lesser education than their neighbor who lives in a different and richer district, all because of the way school funding is attained. Poverty happens everywhere. No one and nowhere is the exception to this. If poverty is not effecting you personally, then it is still effecting your community or your surrounding communities. If what the legendary singer Whitney Huston sang is true, "I believe the children are our future ...," then shouldn't everyone want every child to grow up and get an exceptional education ("Greatest")? Thus, everyone needs to immediately act, in order to combat the poverty that has taken root into peoples' lives and public schools throughout the United States.

Works Cited

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