Using Multiple Intelligences to Bridge the Educational Poverty Gap

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Introduction

Students living in poverty have needs that are not being addressed in traditional

classrooms.   Students from "generational poverty" process information differently

Payne 1996.   Information is processed based on their living conditions and upbringing.

Differentiating instruction using Howard Gardener's Multiple Intelligence theory

transcends the rules that govern generational poverty and provide students with the

tools necessary to succeed in the classroom. F.E. Gouws, education teacher at the

University of South Africa has employed a new outcome based education (OBE)

program which implements Howard Gardeners theory of multiple intelligences to solve

some of the education problems of disadvantage youth.

Using Multiple Intelligences to Bridge the Educational Poverty Gap

"One out of every four American children (14 million children) attends an urban

district school. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 37.0 million people (12.7 %) were living in poverty in 2004 and the number increases yearly" Haberman 2005. Generational poverty is a cycle of lack that is perpetuated over generations.   Dr. Ruby Payne author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* states that students living in poverty have financial, emotional, mental and physical needs as well as the need for a support system and role models.   Teachers face the difficult task of understanding student's needs while addressing the way students learn.

A major challenge in the educational system today is improving the quality of instruction for urban students. Concentrated poverty, family instability, and early exposure to violence are but a few hardships typical of growing up in an urban environment. From an early age urban children are confronted with a series of obstacles in their attempts to meet academic, personal, and social success. Urban teachers need to be conscious of and understand the ecology of the environment that has a profound influence and impact on the urban child's success in school. McKinney, S. E., F. Charles, Frazier, W. Abrams, L. (2008)

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences are essential to the growth and development of students living in poverty. Gardner's multiple intelligences are: "linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence" Gardner 1999: 41-43.   Students living in poverty may excel in any one or several of these seven intelligences.   Teachers must assess the needs and ability of each student individually and implement activities which meet these needs.   Students living in poverty are sometimes classified as disruptive or incapable of meeting set standards.

All students can learn, educators have to find the medium to impart learning. Without differentiated instruction through multiple intelligences students living in poverty may not be taught in a way they understand.

In his article: Teach the Kids You Have, Gary Stager (2008) suggests that teachers use Gardner's theory incorrectly.   Sager (2008) says teachers either teach towards a students learning style or they teach the student in the opposite of their learning style. He says that both ways are incorrect.

Singing to a musical learner or drawing pictures for a visual learner confuse teaching with learning and shift agency away from the student. I often sense that schools tolerate various nontraditional learning styles but harbor suspicion that they are inferior to the classic "sit-down-and-shut-up" method….. The problem with classifying students isn't the form of diagnosis; it is the idea that humans need to be classified at all. Do we really help children by taking them out of their old boxes and sorting them into new ones?   Stager (2008)

Used correctly MI can enhance students natural abilities by incorporating these abilities into every aspect of a student education.

Outcome based education uses a student's natural abilities to produce a specific result.   Outcome based assessment is performed with the end result in mind. Gardner's multiple intelligences can be used to develop a clear set of learning outcomes.   The students learning style can be assessed to determine which of Gardner multiple intelligences would best meet their learning needs.   Students demonstrate evident learning results while completing activities that apply to the way they learn. Outcome based assessment is a particularly effective method of teaching students from

generation poverty because of their unique needs.

All students need guidance and support from teachers, parents and their community.   Students from generational poverty are faced with the additional challenge of trying to learn while not having their basic needs met.   Teachers have to be sensitive to the additional needs of impoverished students while structuring the curriculum around Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences in order to address the various ways students learn.

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