Supporting Students Living Below the Poverty Line

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Abstract

In this article, we focus on interrelated mechanisms and practices that support students living below the poverty line. Addressing the needs of students living below the poverty line requires that educators consider both the inside- and outside-of-school realities of students and their families. Before discussing the recommendations, we define poverty and describe the complex ways it may shape student realities. We then discuss why we believe recommendations to support students must account for student realities outside of school. Finally, we outline recommendations for educators interested in becoming "poverty-responsive," meaning that they discontinue practices that do not support students in poverty and replace them with practices responsive to student needs. We offer three recommendations: (a) promote reflection among educators as a means to identify and discard any deeply held beliefs that are not in support of students living in poverty, (b) develop partnerships between educators and communities that address key outside-of-school factors shaping the learning experience of students living in poverty, and (c) ensure that educators teach students skills in targeted areas that are likely to improve their academic success.

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Students, regardless of their socio-economic status or poverty level, need support in the educational process. Students across poverty categories bring a range of strengths and assets into a learning environment, although those strengths may not be conceptualized as such (Milner, 2015). Students living below the poverty line are sometimes inaccurately viewed as incapable of academic and social success due to their material conditions.

The research and conceptual literature is inundated with studies that attempt to capture the role of poverty in education. For instance, studies of poverty have been linked to school size (Coldarci, 2006), trust (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009), students' and teachers' sense of community (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995), classroom and school technology use and integration (Page, 2002), growth trajectories in literacy among English language learners (Kieffer, 2008), public high school outcomes and college attendance rates (Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005), the ability of young children (ages 5–8) to self-regulate (Howse, Lange, Farran, & Boyles, 2003), and course selection and enrollment in rigorous mathematics (Klopfenstein, 2005).

Although students living below the poverty line may face challenges, it is essential that we (as educators) recognize the potential, intellect, talents, creativity, resilience, and overall knowledge these students possess and bring into schools and classrooms. To be clear, supporting students living below the poverty line requires that we seriously rethink our mindsets, beliefs, and actions about them, and their capacity, and reject deficit conceptions—negative views, mindsets, and worldviews—and consequently practices that influence students. Deficit conceptions shepherd educators into focusing on what students do not have or may not currently be capable of rather than recognizing the many assets and talents that these students have. Indeed, students succeed when mechanisms are in place to support them (Anyon, 2005b; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2015).

For instance, consider the following situation of a high school student living below the poverty line and two different ways in which a teacher might conceptualize the student's situation:

> *A high school student, Carla, works six to eight hours a day after school at a fast food restaurant to help financially support her family. She passes all her classes and shows up to school everyday.*

A teacher's deficit perspective. Poor Carla. She works too many hours. Although she passes my class, she could do so much better if she spent more time studying and less time working.

A teacher's asset perspective. Carla demonstrates the capacity to balance her schoolwork and her part-time job. I should talk with her about how I can assist her to make sure she is maximizing the class while she is working so hard in her part-time job.

The above scenario is an example of what we might call a *deficit conception shift.* Deficit conception shifts require powerful transformative thinking not only among teachers but other educators as well, including policymakers, administrative staff, counselors, social workers, and outside-of-school educators. In this article, we focus on interrelated mechanisms and practices that support students living below the poverty line. Addressing the needs of students living below the poverty line requires that educators consider both the inside- and outside-of-school realities of students and their families. Before discussing the recommendations, we define poverty and describe the complex ways it may shape student realities. We then discuss why we believe recommendations to support students must account for student realities outside of the classroom or school. We then outline recommendations for educators interested in becoming "poverty-responsive." By becoming poverty-responsive, we mean that educators discontinue practices that do not support students in poverty and replace them with practices responsive to student needs.

DEFINING POVERTY

Poverty can be defined as follows: (a) based on the federal government's formula of the poverty line, (b) based on free and reduced lunch formulas that vary from state to state, or (c) based on particular characteristics and situations people find themselves in because of the amount of monetary and related material capital they have or lack. Drawing from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2005), Burney and Beilke (2008) explained, "a family is considered to be poor if its income for a particular year is below the amount deemed necessary to support a family of a certain size" (p. 297). Consider the 2016 Poverty Guidelines (see Table 1), which outline the poverty levels for families and individuals according to the federal government.[1] The federal government's classification has significant implications for the kinds of resources available to families such as welfare and social support services, subsidized housing, including section VIII, and healthcare assistance as well as Head Start opportunities for young children.

Pritchard (1993) found that poverty has lasting effects on people's social, economic, and psychological well-being. It can be difficult for those in poverty to gain access to high-quality healthcare and effective schools or to eat healthy foods, especially fruits and vegetables that may be too expensive or difficult to acquire due to the existence of food deserts (McClintock, 2008). Additionally, poverty and social class are linked (Anyon, 1980; Rothstein, 2004; Weis & Dolby, 2012). Indeed, Weis and Dolby (2012) explained that class should be understood as:

> ...practices of living...The books we read (or if we read at all); our travel destinations (if we have them and what they look like); the clothes we wear; the foods we eat; where and if our children go to school, how far and with what degree of success, with whom, and under what staff expectations and treatment; where and with whom we feel most comfortable; where we live and the nature of our housing; where and if we attend and complete postsecondary education, and under what expectations for success and imagined or taken for granted financing (parents, public/state/national/federal money, on or off campus job) are

Table 1

2016 Poverty Guidelines for the United States Adapted from the Federal Register

_____

2016 HHS Poverty Guidelines			
Persons in Family	48 Contiguous States and DC	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$11,880	$14,840	$13,670
2	16,020	20,020	18,430
3	20,160	25,200	23,190
4	24,300	30,380	27,950
5	28,440	35,560	32,710
6	32,580	40,740	37,470
7	36,730	45,920	42,230
8	40,890	51,120	47,010
For each additional person, add	4,160	5,200	4,780

Source: Federal Register, 81 FR 4036, pp. 4036–4037

all profoundly classed experiences, rooted not only in material realities but also in shared culturally based expectations and understandings... (p. 2)

Thus, poverty has both qualitative and quantitative features.

UNDERSTANDING OUTSIDE-OF-SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

In this section, we argue that three particular outside-of-school factors are important for educators to understand as they support students living below the poverty line. These factors are (a) student and family homelessness, (b) geography and social contexts, and (c) parental and family engagement.

Student and Family Homelessness

From an ecological perspective, Nooe and Patterson (2010) conceptualized homelessness in the following way:

...homeless individuals may experience changes in housing status that includes being on the street, shared dwelling, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent...hospitalization and incarceration in correctional facilities. (p. 105)

Student and family home structures, particularly homelessness, have been shown to influence students' experiences and outcomes in schools. For instance, Duffield (2001) examined the effects of homelessness

on students' school attendance, enrollment, and academic success. She described homelessness as "the manifestation of severe poverty and lack of affordable housing; simply put, homeless families are too poor to afford housing" (p. 324). Students become homeless either as individuals or with their families, and homelessness can result from "family problems, economic problems, and residential instability" (p. 325).

Similar to conceptions of poverty, homelessness is not well defined or categorized either in the literature or in society. Finley and Diversi (2010) stressed this problem and the "fuzziness" of how homelessness is defined. They particularly emphasized this problem from the perspective of policymakers, as homelessness is seen as a much smaller epidemic than it actually is and, consequently, resources to assist individuals can be limited. They expressed that the numbers have been distorted, leading people to believe the fallacy that the problem of homelessness is not as bad as it seems. In their words,

> Let us be clear here. Such distortion has profound consequences for actual lives. For instance, families forced into couch surfing with relatives and friends are most often not counted… Nor are the families living in tent cities, vehicles, and parks around the country. As a result, thousands of lives and stories are buried under an ideologically self-serving sensation that things aren't as bad as some claim. Or if the housing crisis is as bad as it seems, it is due solely to irresponsible individual choices. (p. 7)

Powerfully, Finley and Diversi (2010) provided a collection of textual representations of homelessness from different vantage points across the United States. The researchers' goal was to assemble real life images to contribute to scholarly and public perspectives about the human condition and to provide words and photographic images that are often ignored. Moreover, their point was to extend and

problematize scholarly and public discourse that would suggest that homeless people are living in poverty because they have somehow failed as individuals, which may take the pressure and attention away from policies and practices that have not helped much.

Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) observed that

> …homeless children are particularly at risk for poor educational outcomes, which can have lifelong consequences for their future livelihood and economic independence. If school systems do not provide special educational interventions to address the particular educational barriers that these children face, then it is likely that these children will stay marginalized in the lowest economic rung of society. (p. 289)

In their study, Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) identified several educational barriers that homeless students experience in schools that should be addressed through policy and practice. These barriers include:

- *Residency:* Schools may require proof of residency, effectively blocking access to education for students without a permanent residence or address;

- *Guardianship*: Homeless children may reside with someone who is not their legal guardian, and may either be denied access to school or face a daunting amount of bureaucracy to attend school;

- *Lack of medical records*: Transient students and their families often lose these types of documents making it difficult for students to enroll in school;

- *Transportation*: Students living in shelters may move frequently, making it difficult for them to get to the school either on public transport or otherwise; and

- *Socio-emotional challenges*: Homeless students may have difficulty interacting

with peers and teachers, may have low self-esteem and suffer from excessive worry about their living situation, and may not get enough sleep.

Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler concluded that school reform policies for homeless students should be responsive and tailored to meet the evolving needs of the students they serve.

Other studies have also demonstrated that the problem of homelessness in the United States may be more significant than some believe and that support for the academic success of homeless children may be particularly thin. Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, and Peters (2003) conducted a survey study that focused on the services provided at the 102 shelters in the state of Georgia that accept children. Their findings brought to light the fact that many needs of homeless children in the state are met to some degree, but many gaps remain. Most significantly, over 75% of the shelters were full at the time of the survey and had no available spaces for children. Another 10% of the shelters had only one or two beds available. These data suggest that many homeless children in the state may be turned away from shelters that are already at capacity. These children who have been turned away may not receive any social service support at all. Furthermore, survey respondents noted that only a small percentage of shelters offered supports needed for homeless children to attain academic success such as tutoring, before- and after-school study time, and transportation to and from school. These findings can help educators begin to understand how scant support may actually be for students who are homeless.

Studies have also investigated links between a student's experience of homelessness and his or her academic success. Herbers et al. (2011) studied the effects of parenting on the academic functioning of homeless children. They studied 58 children ages 4 to 7 and their parents who stayed in an emergency shelter in a large urban

city. Almost all of their adult study participants were single mothers, and approximately 85% were identified as African American. Findings from this study highlight the idea that the unstable and constantly shifting environment that homeless children experience may affect development of their executive function (EF) skills. They described EF skills as "a set of cognitive abilities used in planning, problem solving, and other, intentional, goal-directed behaviors, including working memory, attention shifting, detecting errors, and inhibitory control processes" (p. 82). The researchers argued that EF skills help to create the foundation needed for a student's success in school: they help the student pay attention, control impulses, follow directions, engage in flexible thinking, and cooperate with adults.

Herbers et al. suggested a number of high-quality parenting moves that may serve a powerful protective function for young homeless children and support development of EF skills. Parents can foster EF skills through warm interactions, consistency in discipline, promotion of structure regardless of where the family is living, and expression of positive expectations for their children. Knowledge of which parenting skills are the most beneficial to homeless children from an academic standpoint may be of great use to educators working with homeless children and families. This knowledge may enable educators to more effectively partner with parents to encourage the academic success of homeless children.

Studies have also investigated connections between student homelessness and literacy development. Di Santo, Timmons, and Pelletier (2016) studied the results of a six-week family literacy program supporting 12 mothers and preschool children living in a residential shelter in an urban area of Ontario, Canada. Di Santo et al. engaged in this program with the goal of understanding the literacy experiences of homeless children. They found that some homeless parents did indeed engage in literacy

development activities with their children, and more were willing to do so when provided with program support. Homeless parents were able to see the local environment as a tool for literacy teaching, and program support emphasized what they could do related to literacy in the shelter and its surrounding neighborhood. Parents in the study were also effectively able to use materials such as books and take-home activities with their children when given appropriate program support to do so.

Based on their findings, Di Santo et al. offered two suggestions for educators with respect to supporting the literacy development of homeless children. First, they suggested that educators provide programs for homeless families that come with resources that can support literacy in the home environment. Materials that families can keep are easier for transient familes to use than materials such as library books, which must be returned to a particular school. Take-home activities that family members can easily use are also of value. Second, they emphasized that educators must respect parents' funds of knowledge. Doing so allows parents to feel empowered as agents of their child's academic success and gives them the confidence needed to build upon anything they are already doing to support the literacy development of their children. This knowledge may help educators more effectively support the literacy development of young children who are homeless.

Given what we know about the realities and obstacles that many homeless children face and the learning needs that they have, clear policy measures are vital to support them. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (P.L. 100-77), which was later renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, is legislation that was enacted to decrease educational barriers that hinder homeless students' access to school. First introduced in 1987, this legislation was an initial step toward improving the educational experiences of

homeless youth. Undergoing amendments in 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994, McKinney-Vento increased services and expanded programs for homeless youth (Losinski, Katsiyannis, & Ryan, 2013). Most recently, in 2002, President George W. Bush reauthorized McKinney-Vento as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). To date, through federal financial assistance, the McKinney-Vento has mandated state coordinators and local education liaisons for homeless students, decreased the difficulty in registering at a new school for homeless youth, and provided resources to homeless youth programs, including transportation, housing, free lunch, clothing, and school supplies. All of these endeavors are positive steps towards protecting and supporting homeless children.

The problems and challenges associated with homelessness may be much larger and more significant than many people may believe. Although many students are counted as homeless through receiving social services such as temporary housing, many more are overlooked because they stay with relatives or friends instead of actively living on the streets (Finley & Diversi, 2010). The experience of homelessness presents obstacles to children in enrolling and attending school (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006), may inhibit the development of the executive functioning skills required for academic success (Herbers et al., 2011), and may make literacy development more challenging (Di Santo et al., 2016). Policies such as the McKinney-Vento Act have begun to address some of the needs of homeless children, but many significant gaps in support and obstacles to academic success still remain (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). Homeless students may experience a wide variety of living experiences and respond to these conditions in myriad ways. Our point in sharing these examples is not to generalize across the population of homeless students but to provide a snapshot of some consequences and realities of those living in poverty.

Geography and Social Contexts

In addition to homelessness, the locations where students and their families live seem to influence their experiences in education. Due to structural and systemic inequities (Anyon, 2005a; Haberman, 1991; Kozol, 1991, 2005; MacLeod, 1995; Milner, 2010) and what Tate (2008) advanced as geography of opportunity, the topographical landscape can shape where businesses, transportation, housing, and related resources are strategically located. One consequence is that students and their families may have limited employment opportunities according to where they live. In what other ways can the environment of students and their families contribute to their overall experiences?

Munin (2012) explained how environmental conditions could negatively affect children. He noted that children of color and those living in poverty are much more likely to be exposed to hazardous environmental conditions that can have an influence on their health and consequently their performance in schools:

> ...families live amid air and water pollution, waste disposal sites, airports, smokestacks, lead paint, car emissions, and countless other environmental hazards...However, exposure to these toxins is not shared equally among our population. Studies show that these environmental conditions disproportionately affect people of color and the poor. (p. 29)

The conditions described above have been shown to increase asthma among children, cause mothers to deliver babies prematurely and with low birth weights, increase children's diagnosis with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and increase student absenteeism (Munin, 2012). Thus, the outside-of-school location, where children live and the environmental conditions around this location, can have a profound impact on students and their families. Most of these environmental situations extend far beyond the control of students and their families.

Fram, Miller-Cribbs, and Van Horn (2007) conducted a study in the field of social work that examined factors that shaped the student achievement of 3,501 kindergarteners in the southern region of the United States by studying the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data. Similar to Tate (2008), much of the conceptualization of their study emphasized the importance of understanding geography of opportunity. They found that "although race looms large in southern understandings of daily life...family structure, maternal attributes, peers' skill levels, and rural and nonrural location" (p. 317) were the most salient factors in explaining variation in students' achievement in their particular study. They suggested that it is important for social workers to study and address issues of poverty and location when seeking to understand student achievement (see also Morris & Monroe, 2009). This finding underscores the impact of a student's geographic and social context on his or her experience in school.

Cass (2010) also studied the relationship between location, poverty, and student experiences. Cass found that some people believe that rural poverty is more challenging, coming with more material deprivation and less mobility. This researcher also found that others believe that urban poverty is more daunting, as living in the city may have a higher cost of living and push more people into poverty unexpectedly. In both rural and urban spaces, students living in poverty can experience several disheartening realities: housing instability; hunger, health, and nutrition problems; school instability; physical, emotional, and psychological abuse due to stress; family instability; and, perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this review, inadequate schools and educational experiences.

Milner (2013) highlighted some key differences between rural and urban poverty related to geographic location and social context. In rural areas, some families in poverty own their

homes and the accompanying land because they were passed down to them from family members. However, the value of their land and homes may be extremely low due to a lack of infrastructure, business, and related amenities that attract people and corporations to areas. While people living in rural poverty tend to have land around them with distant neighbors, those living in city poverty, or those living in large urban, metropolitan areas, may reside in apartment-style homes, typically known as housing projects, which may be supported through governmental Section VIII programs, also known as governmental housing. While those living in rural poverty typically do not experience high levels of crime, those in the city experience higher crime rates. Those in urban cities also benefit from public transportation and other conveniences that large cities have to offer. In short, while both rural and urban families live in poverty, their experiences (benefits and challenges) can be quite different.

Schools located in areas with many students living in poverty, both in rural and urban areas, have many challenges. Barton (2003) shared that some of the challenges these schools have in common include:

- a disproportionate number of new teachers which leads to slower student progress in reading;

- higher teacher absenteeism which leads to the use of more substitute teachers who typically have less experience and training;

- less teacher commitment and persistence as many teachers in high-poverty schools move to "more desirable" schools when positions are available; and

- a disproportionate number of teachers teaching outside their field of expertise.

In essence, the education experience of students living in poverty is deeply informed by their geographic location and nuances of the social context in which they live. These factors must be taken into account as educators support students living in poverty.

Parental and Family Engagement

Parental and family engagement crosses the boundary between schools and communities. Such engagement can influence how well connected students are to academic and social expectations of schools. Many studies related to poverty and student success focus, to some degree, on the role of parents, families, and their engagement in their children's education. Parental and family engagement goes beyond parents and families showing up to school at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. For instance, parental and family engagement can mean that parents are involved in home-based activities, such as ensuring that homework is completed; monitoring student progress and improvement through school visits and in the home; talking over the phone to teachers and administrators; planning activities for the school; participating in fundraising activities; attending and assisting with fieldtrips; attending extracurricular activities such as sports and plays; staffing concession stands; volunteering in the classroom; and serving on advisory boards (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

A common discourse about parents of students living in poverty is that they do not show up for PTA meetings and, therefore, are not actively engaged and involved in their children's education. However, questions about why low-income parents do or do not attend PTA meetings are necessary to understand what barriers might exist that inhibit this type of school engagement. For instance, do these parents work during meeting times? Are there problems with transportation? Moreover, do these parents feel that their needs and interests are being addressed at PTA meetings? Answering these questions with the voices and perspectives of low-income families is critical in part because teachers sometimes have negative images of parents living in poverty when parents do not

"participate" or function in school activities to the degree teachers believe appropriate (Milner, 2015). Understanding why these parents do not participate or under-participate needs to be of central concern in the research community.

Studies have suggested several possible reasons that many parents do not participate in school-endorsed parental engagement activities such as PTA meetings. For instance, because the culture of many schools is centered around middle-class values, parents of students in poverty (and students of color) may be looked upon by teachers and school personnel through a deficit lens. In other words, teachers and school personnel may focus on what parents of students in poverty (and students of color) lack and not on the many assets that they possess. To illustrate, early research by Epstein and Dauber (1991) found that some teachers often viewed Black students and students in low-income families less favorably than White and higher income students, and these perceptions resulted in teachers becoming less welcoming of Black and low-income students' parents being involved inside of school. Eccles and Harold (1993) also understood the potentially powerful role that teachers and other school personnel can play as gatekeepers to low-income parents' access to schools. Through their research, the authors noted that school personnel's deficit beliefs of low-income families actively discouraged parental school and classroom involvement. These deficit views resulted in additional barriers to school participation, including low-income parents being excluded from meaningfully participating in the governance of their children's school, a lack of effective communication between the school and parents, and little engagement of parents by schools in ways that were consequential to students' academic success. While research suggests that many middle-class parents are able to navigate these potential obstacles (Howard & Reynolds, 2008), families living below the poverty line often cannot.

Additionally, low-income immigrant families are particularly susceptible to the type of treatment outlined above based, in part, on language issues. Quiocho and Daoud (2006), for example, found that some teachers hold negative views of Latino parents' commitment to supporting their children's educational pursuits, including speaking and learning the English language, and that these negative perceptions help shape Latino parents' feelings of exclusion from the school.

In addition to school-related factors, social consequences of living in poverty can also shape how involved parents can be with their children's school. Milner (2015) found that single parents, for example, might experience various obstacles that inhibit their school participation. Work-related obstacles could include working non-traditional hours, not being able to take time away from work, or working hourly wage jobs, which would mean sacrificing income to come to their children's school. Logistically, many parents living in poverty may not have access to adequate or reliable transportation to get to schools. Tate (2008), for instance, found that the geographical configuration of urban areas can restrict access to important resources for people living in poverty, including jobs and schools. Furthermore, many parents living in poverty may not have had positive school experiences themselves and may feel uncomfortable engaging directly with teachers and school personnel because of past negative experiences (Milner, 2015). Thus, it is incumbent upon schools to create welcoming environments that are comfortable and engaging for all parents.

Despite the myriad barriers to meaningful school engagement that many families living in poverty face, evidence suggests that parents can and do support the academic success of their children. In their study of African American families living in poverty, Gutman and McLoyd (2000) examined the management and educational engagement of parents of both high-

and low-achieving students inside and outside of school. Through their comparative analysis, the researchers learned that parents of high-achieving students utilized effective strategies in assisting their children with homework and had supportive conversations with their children at home about their children's potential. At school, parents of high achievers were consistently involved, having "frequently initiated contact with their children's school in order to check on their children's progress and to maintain positive relationships with the school officials" (p. 10). Outside of school, parents of high achievers had their children actively involved and engaged in community through extracurricular activities, including religious activities. This storyline might counter discourses that suggest poor students cannot be high achievers and/or parents of students living in poverty do not have specific, deliberate, and effective practices to keep their children involved, engaged, and successful in and out of school.

Milne and Plourde (2006) conducted another study that focused on race, poverty, and families. They studied and identified essential elements of success that assisted high- achieving students living in poverty. Parents in the qualitative study of six second-grade high poverty and high achievers had educational materials in the home such as books and other written materials. Parents were deliberate in spending quality time with their children to ensure they (as parents) were aware of student needs and expectations of the school. They had dinner together regularly, talked extensively to their children, and the families served as a strong support system for their children. Through talk in the home, parents also stressed the importance and value of education because they, indeed, valued education themselves. The idea that those in poverty do not value education is countered and disrupted in this study, as it is clear that these families living in poverty demonstrated strong beliefs in the importance of it. The Milne and Plourde narrative helps

to disrupt conceptions that families living in poverty do not value education or that they do not participate and support their children in developing academic and social skills in the home that are transferable to school.

Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzo, and Pituch (2010) studied parental engagement among families of different racial and ethnic groups living in poverty. Their findings suggested that African American, Hispanic, and White[2] students living in poverty experienced more academic problems than students from more affluent families. However, the researchers found no difference between Asian students living in poverty and Asian students from more affluent families, a nontrivial finding. Both groups of Asian students (those living in poverty and those from more affluent families) tended to perform well on academic measures. The researchers also found that "poor" and "non-poor" African American students both participated in organized extracurricular activities. Although these researchers found no correlation between participation in organized extracurricular activities and higher achievement in schools for this particular group of students, previously described research (see Gutman & McLloyd, 2000, above) would suggest that organized activities would supplement students' in-school learning and consequently their performance on tests. The point here is that students of various racial and ethnic groups living in poverty experience more academic problems than affluent students, and that their parents and families do indeed pursue a variety of avenues in an effort to support them.

Not only have researchers examined parents' expectations and values espoused for their children (see, for instance, Cooper et al., 2010), there has also been an emphasis on parents' expectations of teachers. While parental and family engagement seem to be a critical aspect of students' academic and social success in schools, research has found that parents place value in and have different expectations and

demands of their children's teachers. Jacob and Lefgren (2007) discovered that parents in high poverty contexts "strongly" (p. 59) placed value on the effectiveness and ability of teachers to raise their children's test scores. To the contrary, more affluent parents, according to the study, placed more emphasis on teachers' ability to keep their children "happy" (p. 60). The researchers wrote:

> Because academic resources are relatively scarce in higher-poverty schools, parents in these schools seek teachers skilled at improving achievement even if this comes at the cost of student satisfaction…In higher-income schools, parents are likely to oppose measures that increase the focus on standardized test scores at the cost of student satisfaction. (pp. 63–64)

Again, because students living in poverty may be more "school dependent," parents may rely on teachers and the school to do the majority of work to increase students' test scores. Those from more affluent backgrounds may be more available after school to monitor and actively support their children's academic success. They may also have the means to seek home tutoring to supplement and complement what is learned in school to assure that their children do well on standardardized tests. Thus, overall, parents in poverty are indeed more dependent on schools to lead their children to academic success than more affluent parents.

To summarize, that which occurs in students' lives outside of school does indeed shape that which happens in the classroom. Practitioners must understand these realities in order to comprehend what students living in poverty need from them to succeed in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, we outline recommendations for educators working with those living below the poverty line. Following these recommendations would enable educators to become "poverty-responsive." By poverty-responsive, we mean that educators are able to discontinue teaching practices that do not support students in poverty and replace them with practices responsive to student needs. To be clear, these recommendations may in fact be transferable to students not living below the poverty line as well but we are stressing that these recommendations show real potential for supporting those living below the poverty line. Becoming poverty-responsive requires that educators take three steps. First, it requires that educators engage in deep self-reflection as a means of shifting any conceptions of students in poverty that are deficit-based and not asset-based. Second, becoming poverty-responsive requires that educators work to develop partnerships with communities to respond to the outside-of-school issues discussed in previous sections of this article, namely student and family homelessness, the influence of geography and social contexts, and parental and family engagement. Finally, becoming poverty-responsive requires that educators accept the reality that many students living in poverty are "school dependent," and rely on them to develop skills in key areas such as language arts and study skills that will support their academic success.

Engage in Deep Self-Reflection

The first step to becoming poverty-responsive is for educators to engage in deep self-reflection. Reflection allows teachers to clarify their own beliefs and expectations about student learning and behavior and become more aware of how teacher beliefs and expectations shape student experiences (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Reflective practices are particularly important when working with students in poverty, as teachers' negative beliefs and expectations about these students may place the students at a disadvantage in the classroom (Milner, 2015). Once teachers possess the self-awareness that comes through

continuous reflection, they can tailor learning experiences to meet the needs of students living in poverty.

Self-reflection can help teachers become familiar with the privileges, issues, and experiences that have shaped them as people, including those related to socio-economic status (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; McIntosh, 1990). Writing a critical autobiography is one effective way to engage teachers in self-reflection (Milner, 2015). Through this process, teachers critically examine how they came to see themselves as individuals with a particular background. The following questions about socio-economic status can be starting points:

- What is my socio-economic background? How do I know?

- What was my socio-economic background growing up?

- How has my socio-economic background influenced my educational opportunities?

- In what ways does my socio-economic background shape my worldview, what I do, how I experience the world, what I teach? (Adapted from Milner, 2015, p. 161)

After responding to these questions, teachers can make connections to instructional practices using the following questions:

- How does my socio-economic background influence decisions I make about what to emphasize in course content and how to teach it?

- How might students of socio-economic backgrounds different than my own respond to my instructional choices?

- How does my personal experience with regard to family structure and family life patterns growing up shape my expectations of student behavior?

- How do my beliefs about personal and community responsibility inform the expectations I have about how my students treat the school's physical space?

The goal is for teachers to deeply understand how they approach teaching and how students living in poverty respond. Once teachers have this self-awareness, they are well on their way to becoming poverty-responsive: discontinuing teaching practices that do not support students living in poverty and replacing them with practices responsive to student needs.

Work with Local Community Partners to Respond to Outside-of-School Issues

The second step in becoming poverty-responsive is for educators to deepen their knowledge of community context by working closely with local communities from which students enter school and to which students return after school (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Zeichner, 2010). As Boutte and Johnson (2014) argued, effective engagement of students, families, and communities necessitates a participatory approach to community engagement that includes a willingness to learn *from* and *with* communities. From an asset perspective, communities with large portions of families living below the poverty line are more than simply collections of poor people. Rather, these communities are sources of knowledge that can inform educators about the realities that many students living in poverty face. Moving toward an asset-based frame in the context of poverty could, for example, shift educators away from seeing students as "impoverished" and lacking ability and support to observing the myriad ways in which students overcome many obstacles associated with poverty and the multiple supports they receive from their families and communities.

As educators develop ties with local community members, they should be mindful of the social, political, and historical features of the contexts in which their students live. Barrett, Ausbrooks, and Martinez-Cosio (2008)

documented how educators successfully responded to the needs of many Hurricane Katrina-displaced students who were grappling with trauma. The school district went to great lengths to prepare educators to support incoming students as they coped with loss and homelessness.

Many community members and students themselves are receptive and willing to work with educators in this way. For example, in a study that drew from student interviews, Dods (2013) reported that educators could be responsive to students' needs by (a) initiating interaction, (b) demonstrating genuine interactions that embody "actual caring," (c) assuming responsibility for being attuned to students' overt and covert cues, and (d) cultivating relationships that are individualized and sustained over time. Moves such as these help students, their families, and their communities to see that an educator is truly committed to supporting a student living in poverty. Educators can partner with communities to further understand the sociopolitical context of poverty in their students' communities through both community immersion and youth participatory action research. Each of these pathways is described below.

Community immersion. The concept of immersion distinguishes community immersion from community service or service learning in important ways. Particularly, community immersion involves longer-term (months-long), meaningful engagement with a wider variety of community stakeholders and anchor institutions than do community service and service-learning programs (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998). Engaged community stakeholders can include, for example, families, non-profit organizations (including afterschool programs), community advocates/activists, business owners and employees, and faith-based institutions (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998; Waddell, 2013). This community engagement can take several forms including volunteering in the community; conversing with employees while patronizing community businesses; attending community events that address sociopolitical, educational, or economic issues; and/or residing within the community. By meaningfully engaging diverse community members long-term, immersion can encourage educators to move beyond stereotypes of students living in poverty and gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for cultural norms present in their students' communities (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Community immersion can also help educators identify and connect with sources of support for students living below the poverty line.

Participatory action research. Educators might consider partnering with their students in participatory action research (PAR) that engages students in conceptualizing, conducting, analyzing, and presenting research (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) that critically examines poverty in their communities. The goal of this research practice is to give "voice to disenfranchised populations and [agitate] for social justice" (Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016, p. 25). Because youth PAR positions educators as co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge alongside their students (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), this research method has the potential to transform teaching and learning by informing a more critical understanding of educators about the sociopolitical context of poverty while privileging the lived experiences of students who live below the poverty line. For example, PAR projects could engage students in examining how public transportation routes might limit job opportunities in their communities or how housing policies shape what schools students attend and how those schools are resourced.

Teach Skills Related to Academic Success

The third and final step that educators should take to become poverty-responsive is to ensure that students living in poverty possess the skills that will most facilitate their academic success. Many students living in poverty are "school dependent," and their parents depend upon

teachers to do most of the work required to help students attain academic success. To that end, Milner (2015) highlighted the importance of teaching all students skills in a number of targeted areas that will promote their academic success. Two of these areas are language arts skills and study skills (adapted from Milner (2015), pp. 79–109).

First, Milner argued that language arts skills should be taught across all content areas and that all teachers should attend to both the standards of their content area in addition to the language arts standards for the grade level they teach. Language arts skills include the ability to read, write, and think critically. These skills are fundamental to learning most P–12 content and support student academic success. Teachers who infuse language arts skills into their content area class will ensure that students not only are exposed to the content described in the subject matter, but also are able to ensure that students can comprehend what they read about the topic, can write about the topic, and can engage in complex thought related to the topic.

Second, Milner suggested that teachers ensure students learn study skills. Study skills include the ability to take notes and organize them, what was essential for them to study, how to read a textbook, and/or how to interact with their teachers to get the best results from their courses. Although teachers typically expect students to engage in these learning tasks, not all teachers explicitly teach students how to do these tasks successfully. Spending instructional time attending to these study skills tasks will truly benefit students over the course of their academic career.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Although many educators may like the idea of supporting students in poverty, they may be surprised or even shocked to learn that truly doing so requires that they start by deeply interrogating their own knowledge, beliefs, and conceptions of people living in poverty.

Understanding how outside-of-school factors such as student and family homelessness, the role of geography and social contexts, and nuances of how parent and family engagement shape a student's learning experience is a good place for educators to start. Once educators engage in this process, they can shed practices that do not support student needs and replace them with practices that are responsive to the needs of students living in poverty. Forming community partnerships that address these key outside-of-school factors and ensuring that students learn key skills that will promote their academic success, such as language arts and study skills, are both effective ways forward. Engaging in this process may be challenging for educators—it may be difficult and even demoralizing to come to terms with the reality that previous efforts to support students in poverty were not truly beneficial. But engaging in this process will provide educators a pathway to truly support their students— a pathway that is truly poverty-responsive.

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NOTES

[1]In defining and "measuring" poverty, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) used "a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation…The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps)" (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/measure.html).

[2]Some studies conflated ethnic and racial categories.

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