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Problem Paper

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The Baggage of Poverty

Jeanne Cline, a teacher from Scott County, Virginia, had a student named Katy that came to her every day after lunch and Mrs. Cline would usually have another sandwich or a bag of chips for her because she knew Katy usually had not eaten. Sometimes Mrs. Cline would give Katy money and make sure she had the clothes and shoes she needed to be comfortable. Mrs. Cline says in her interview, "She was a very intelligent girl. She just knew she wasn't going to college. I checked with guidance and she had great SAT scores." Mrs. Cline saw her potential and didn't let the plague of poverty affect her future. Think about how it would feel to live in poverty as an adult, but imagine the greater devastation that poverty can have on a child. Children are shaped by the things around them, meaning their homes, friends, families, and communities. Now, we cannot erase poverty from society, but we can continue to educate ourselves on the situation and act as an aid to those who are afflicted by poverty.

Poverty can come in many shapes and sizes and effects more than just the families' bank accounts. Poverty can have dangerous side effects such as poor mental health, poor education, high crime rates, and low social mobility (Rehorn, 2014). By educating ourselves of these types of outcomes of poverty, we will have a better understanding on how to further

prevent poverty from dictating these children's lives. According to Liliana Rehorn (2014), "Once we understand the effects of poverty and their many dimensions, we can take the necessary steps to eradicate the issue altogether." There is no exact answer to fixing poverty but there are steps that humanitarians can take to better the welfare of these poverty stricken families.

"Despite levels of wealth and development unparalleled in history, billions of people on our planet are still uneducated, poorly housed, sick, inadequately fed or even starving as a result of poverty" (Gupta, 2017). "Those with mental health problems are more likely to experience poverty: once incapacitated, an individual's socio-economic status is likely to fall further" (Gupta, 2017). While many studies have shown that mental health is found more frequently in deprived neighborhoods, one study showed that people who had a strong sense of cohesion within their neighborhood reported fewer neighborhood problems, and had higher levels of mental well-being (Ford, Goodman, & Meltzer, 2004). Teachers in public schools learn how to deal with many types of different mental illnesses or learning disabilities, but they often don't understand why the child has a disability.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2015), 21 percent of all children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold, a measurement that has been shown to underestimate the needs of families. Research shows that, on average, families need an income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses (Child Poverty, 2015). Unfortunately, children that are categorized as minorities such as, Black, Latino, and American Indian, tend to have the highest poverty rates. Because of these high numbers of poverty, teachers don't need to work in urban areas to teach children of poverty stricken homes. Economically disadvantaged students have a very difficult time with succeeding in school

because of their constant struggle to acquire the necessities they need, like the right amount of sleep, food, exercise, etc. Despite the bleak outlook for many of these students, teachers can do a great deal to make school a safe haven for these students (Thompson, 2017). Many of these examples include, listening to your students and meeting their needs, supplying a classroom bank of shared supplies, providing equal access to materials such as magazines, computers, and newspapers, and never requiring costly activities. Thompson (2017) also states, “Keep your expectations of poor students high. Poverty does not mean ignorance.”

Teachers have just about the most important role in a child’s life besides the parents. Teachers are taught to provide for their students as best as they can, stick up for their students when necessary, and provide a safe learning environment so that children are able to forget about their struggles and learn freely. Teaching becomes a lot harder when the students are facing struggles like a lack of food, sleep, or safety. Unfortunately, poverty and ethnicity are strongly linked in the United States (Maruyama, 2003). Students of color are more likely to be poor and struggle with disadvantages in education. It is proven that low-income students and students of color underperform at all educational levels (Maruyama, 2003). Students could also be described as being “educationally poor” because they begin school less prepared and struggle to keep up with their peers (Maruyama, 2003). In the table below, found by Maruyama (2003), research has proven that family income has a direct impact on the level of education that a student reaches. The most surprising factor of this table is the overall average column and more specifically, the college continuation rates being so high.

Table 1. Relations of Family Income, Ethnic/Racial Background, and Educational Attainment, 1997–2000

All Numbers Percentages of Students in Category					
	Family Income				Overall Average All Income Groups
	Less than \$25,000	\$25,000– \$50,000	\$50,000– \$75,000	More than \$75,000	
High School Graduation Rates					
Asian American	85.0	89.1	90.4	88.7	88.2
White non-Hispanic	69.9	81.3	89.0	92.6	85.9
African American	59.3	78.9	90.2	93.4	73.3
Hispanic	53.8	68.9	78.9	85.4	64.9
College Attendance Rates					
Asian American	73.9	74.9	78.7	82.9	77.9
White non-Hispanic	39.6	53.7	66.0	79.1	64.1
African American	28.3	53.6	64.4	77.4	46.4
Hispanic	29.4	42.6	51.7	66.7	39.8
College Continuation Rates					
Asian American	86.9	84.1	87.1	93.4	88.3
White non-Hispanic	56.8	66.1	74.2	85.5	74.7
African American	47.7	68.0	71.4	83.2	63.3
Hispanic	54.6	61.2	65.9	78.1	61.2

Note. All numbers adapted from figures appearing in *Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY*, 2001, pp. 6–7.

Fortunately, there are programs like *Kids In Transition to School* (KITS) and *Project Breakthrough* that build up and help teachers and students to understand the importance of education no matter what part of life you're in. *Kids In Transition to School* was developed to increase early literacy, social, and self-regulatory skills among children with inadequate school readiness (Pears et al., 2014). *Project Breakthrough* focused on three areas such as difficult curricula, identifying underrepresented gifted students, and teacher development. In order to significantly make a difference, a teacher development coordinator collaborated with the principals of the participating schools and mapped out a three-year plan. During these three years, teachers participated in graduate courses, school-based sessions, in-class coaching, and

network meetings with national experts in teaching students of poverty, problem-based learning, curriculum development, and broadened views of intelligence (Swanson, 2006). Programs like these are one of the many ways we can minimize the effect of poverty on our public schools.

The quality of a teacher is an important factor in a student's learning. A good teacher can make all the difference when learning is difficult for a student. This can especially be the case for a child who is in poverty and needs help staying focused on school work. This is the reason that retention of high quality teachers has become such a top priority in education today. Eran Tamir (2013) found that preparation can have some effect on teachers' preparedness to: 1. teach in culturally diverse environments and 2. adapt to challenging demands in hard-to-staff schools. When teachers are not adequately prepared to teach in such environments, they are more likely to move from their schools in search for more hospitable conditions. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003), 33% of all new teachers who enter the system leave within the first three years and about 50% leave within five years (the rate of attrition in urban districts is even higher). Unfortunately, teacher's feel the need to leave because they are underappreciated and underpaid for the work they accomplish.

Studies have shown that teacher careers are suffering because they aren't getting the support and help they need to be the best teachers possible. For example, an amazing teacher of some of the poorest children, was pushed to her limit due to an unfit request made of her. She was scolded for asking a question to the class and calling on a single student for the answer. She was told that she could no longer rely on that method to ask questions and that it

was unacceptable. Instead, she was supposed to ask the question and allow students to discuss their answers with each other. She explained that she found this new approach valuable and had been making a conscious effort to stop using the style of teaching she had gotten used to for the past 20 years. She was then told to “not try, but do...”. Needless to say, she left that meeting with her administration feeling inadequate and disrespected. This is only one example of how teachers are mistreated even when they are recognized for numerous awards and care deeply about their students. At the end of the article, Kay Basaillon (2013) states, “There are amazing teachers, young and old, veterans and rookies, who are starting to eye the exit door. These teachers feel overworked, underpaid, undervalued, deflated, and emotionally and physically exhausted.” Good teachers are hard to come by so when schools find a teacher that can interact well with the kids and make learning fun and engaging, their job is to make sure that teacher is well taken care of.

There was a study done by African American high schools’ students that discussed the way their teachers posed different expectations for them than other students. Teacher expectations, among school-related factors that can impact the academic achievement of African American high school students and quality of instruction, are the main focal points of this study (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Fifty-six years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, schools and educators are still trying to understand and solve the persistent achievement gap between white and black students. “Such unforeseen changes as the influx of middle-class white females becoming the primary teachers for children of color in public education led researchers to closely examine the role of the teacher and the impact that teacher expectations have on the academic success of African American students as well as all

children” (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). African American students that were interviewed for this study tied teacher expectations to whether or not the teacher genuinely cared about them (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Teachers have the ability to be the most influential part of a student’s academic success, but it is how they use their influence that will determine if it helps or hinders the student.

Teachers don’t go into the profession to become rich or famous, they go into the profession to provide a strong platform for learning and to help young students become successful adults. Just like in the narrative of Mrs. Cline and Katy, Mrs. Cline never helped Katy to get anything in return, she just wanted her to have the resources she needed to have the same opportunities that her classmates had. At the end of the story, Mrs. Cline ended up running into Katy many years later and Katy explained that she had graduated college, gotten married, and had a baby of her own. Katy might not have ever had the opportunity to go to college and have a successful life if it wasn’t for Mrs. Cline’s help and encouragement. Even though Katy grew up in poverty and lived with her single mother who had been divorced seven times, she had the support and help she needed from her teachers to change her life around. Poverty doesn’t have to result in poor, uneducated minority students growing up to be troublesome and reckless. With the right education and support, these students can have the same opportunities, but with a more work.

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