Poverty.....
Impact on language, culture, learning and more

Compiled by Mikaely Schmitz, MS CCC-SLP, www.enrichlanguage.com A summary of Dr. Ruby Payne
There are major differences between generational poverty and middle class and the biggest differences are not about money.
Poverty

- Is relative and only exists in relationship to known quantities or expectations, if everyone around you is at about the same levels then the notion of poverty or wealth can be vague.
- Occurs in all races and in all countries.
- Economic class is a continuous line, and families are placed all along that line.
• Generational poverty and situational poverty are different
  • Generational poverty: being in poverty for two generations or longer
• Situational poverty: shorter time frame and is caused by a circumstance
An individual—whether a student or an adult—brings with them the hidden rules of the class in which they were raised.

Schools and workplaces operate within the hidden rules of the middle class which are not directly taught and put those from poverty at a disadvantage.

For students to be successful we must understand their hidden rules and teach them middle class hidden rules.

We cannot excuse students nor scold them for not knowing the hidden rules—we have to teach them.
To move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth a person must at least temporarily give up relationships for achievement.

Two things that help one move up out of poverty:
- Education
- Relationships
Reasons someone leaves poverty

- It is too painful to stay
- A vision or goal
- A key relationship
- A special talent or skill
Regardless of race or ethnicity, poor children are much more likely to suffer developmental delay and damage, to drop out of high school and to give birth during the teen years.

Poor inner city youths are seven times more likely to be the victims of child abuse or neglect than are children of higher SES.

The United States child poverty rate is substantially higher (two to three times higher) than that of most other major Western industrialized nations.

Immigrant children are twice as likely to be poor as native born children.

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Poverty: is the extent to which an individual does without resources

- Financial
- Emotional – being able to choose and control emotional responses without engaging in self destructive behavior
- Mental- reading, writing, computing, etc skills to deal with daily life
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Support systems
- Relationships/role models: frequent access to adults who are nurturing, not self destructive and who are appropriate
- Knowledge of hidden rules

THE ABILITY TO LEAVE POVERTY IS MORE DEPENDEDENT ON THE OTHER RESOURCES RATHER THAN FINANCIAL
Hidden rules of generational poverty

- Organized society and middle/upper class are viewed with distrust or distaste
- Bottom line: entertainment and relationships
- The line between legal and illegal is thin and often crossed
- Being able to physically fight to defend yourself or have someone who will fight for you is important: words for negotiation are often neither available or respected
- Education is valued and revered as an abstract concept but not as a reality
- Society owes the person a living tends to be the attitude

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• Many poor see jail simply as part of life and not necessarily always a bad thing
• Relationships are more important than money (hence bailing someone out rather than paying rent)
• Extra money is shared
  • The clear understanding is that one will never get ahead, so when extra money is available it is either shared or immediately spent as there are always emergencies and needs—might as well enjoy the moment
• People are possessions and can rely only on each other
• Discipline is about penance not change
◦ The mother is the most powerful figure
  • She controls the resources
  • She dispenses penance and forgiveness
  • Discipline cycle is frequently: verbally chastise or physically beat the child then forgive and feed the child
◦ Food is equated with love
◦ Generally a strong belief in fate or destiny—therefore to expect a behavior to change is often a false hope
◦ Gangs are a type of support system
Unlike middle class (where people walk away to cool down or diffuse situations) conflict in generational poverty separation is not an option, they defend turf verbally and physically.

Women may use their body for survival.

In the Hispanic poverty pattern most families are two parent and have more emotional resources than other races in generational poverty.

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• For many parents of generational poverty, school is not given a high priority.
• School is often seen as a babysitter or a necessary evil (If I don’t send my kid I have to go to court.)
Talking to parents

- Learning this will help your child win more often
- The mind is a mental weapon no one can take from you
- If you do this, your child will be smarter and won’t get cheated or tricked
- Learning this will help your child make more money
- This information will keep your child safer
- I know you must care about your child very much or you wouldn’t be here
- This will help your child be respected or be in control

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• When sending home flyers use a lot of verbal and visual information - so that if the parents cannot read or cannot read English they can still feel connected to the school experience.
• Story structure in generational poverty is episodic and random and the discourse pattern is circular- take this into consideration when talking to parents or listening to children

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- Martin Joos- a Dutch linguist- five registers of language regardless of the language spoken
  - Frozen: words are always the same (Pledge of Allegiance, Lord’s Prayer, etc)
  - Formal: word choice and sentence structure of business/educational community, 1,200-1,600 word spoken vocabulary
  - Consultative: a mix of formal and casual register
  - Casual: language between friends, comes out of oral tradition of any country, few abstract words, nonverbal assists. 400-800 spoken word vocabulary
  - Intimate: language between lovers or twins, private language shared by two individuals
  - It is socially appropriate to go down one register during a conversation, but dropping two or more registers during a conversation is offensive

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• STRONG relationship between amount of vocabulary an individual has and poverty level
  ◦ Therefore there is a strong relationship between language exposure and experience in young children being raised in poverty- the higher the poverty level the lower the language exposure, number of different words exposure, etc
In generational poverty it is not unusual for people to only know the casual register. Majority of poor students do not have access to formal register at home--- but all state tests, WKCE, ACT, etc are in formal register. Ability to use the formal register is a hidden rule of the middle class. Poor students do not have the vocab or sentence structure knowledge to use formal register, when talking in casual register the meaning comes not so much from word choice but from non verbal assists- when writing the nonverbal assists are taken away and the student tends to really struggle.
• According to Hart and Risely
  ◦ Children in welfare families hear an average of 620 words per hour
  ◦ Children in working class families hear approximately 1250 words per hour
  ◦ Children in professional families hear an average of 2150 words per hour
THEREFORE Children between ages 1-3

- In welfare households hear an average of 10 million words
- In working class households hear an average of 20 million words
- In professional households hear an average of 30 million words
- Linguistic exposure before three has a huge effect on speech/language abilities and measured cognitive skills when kids were tested at age 3 and age 9

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• To survive in poverty someone must be very sensory based and non-verbal BUT to survive in school one must be very verbal and abstract
Abstract processes tend to be very impaired in children from poverty, they are exposed to limited language during critical language development periods, they have limited exposure to abstract reasoning, they live in a very concrete reasoning/immediate sensory world. This can have long term impacts on learning and these children need to be taught:

- **Executive Function Disorders!**
Controlling impulsivity
Exploring information systematically
Using appropriate and accurate labels (vocabulary), without a strong vocabulary the ability to use or retrieve information is severely limited. It is not enough that a student can do a task- they must be able to label the procedures and processes involved so that the task completion can be replicated.
Organizing space with stable systems of reference: up/down/right/left/north/south/etc are understood. The organization of space is essentially- otherwise there really is no difference between a b/p/q/d as they are just slight differences in spatial orientation
Orienting data in time: assigning abstract values to time including past/present/future so that the child can plan, sequence and manage time to complete work

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How can teachers support learning these abstract processes?

- Sorting and using patterns: explain, demonstrated and re-explain the patterns to any new content
- Question making: support the practice of students creating questions about the content, using stems (for word meaning ex In this story the word ___ means....)
- Planning to control impulsivity: teach the students how to plan backwards- begin with the end in mind and determine the required steps to get to that end. During planning work together or as a class to assign amounts of time to each task.
- Planning and labeling tasks
In order to be successful in work or school you need four mental models: space, time, part to whole and formal register.
• Space: mind must be able to keep track of your body in space, can be done by touching everything or using abstract skills such as words, labels and visualization to organize your knowledge of space
Time: keep track of it emotionally (how we feel as time passes) or abstractly (calendars, clocks, etc). Past, present and future are a mental model required to sequence and plan

- If you cannot sequence then you cannot plan
- If you cannot plan then you cannot predict
- If you cannot predict then you cannot identify cause and effect
- If you cannot identify cause and effect then you cannot identify consequence
- If you cannot identify consequence then you cannot control impulsivity
- If you cannot control impulsivity then you have an inclination toward negative or criminal behavior

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Part to whole: ability to identify parts as they relate to a whole (chapters are part of a book), required for the ability to analyze.
Formal register: the language currency of work and school
No significant learning occurs without a significant relations of mutual respect.—Dr James Comer

- In relationships of mutual respect you find support, insistence and high expectations
• 15 behaviors that teachers use with students with there is mutual respect between teacher and student- according to research when these behaviors are used with all students, learning jumps dramatically
- Calls on everyone in the room equitably
- Provides individual help
- Gives “wait time”
- Asks questions to give students clues about the answer
- Asks questions that require more thought
- Tells students whether their answers are right or wrong
- Gives specific praise
- Gives reasons for praise
- Listens
- Accepts the feelings of the student
- Gets within an arm’s reach of each student each day
- Is courteous to students
- Shows personal interest and gives compliments
- Touches students frequently and appropriately
- Desists - does not call attention to every misbehavior

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