Facing Poverty

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This thesis project is a two part effort, including a creative project with a research paper as a supplement. The title of my project “Facing Poverty” is a very literal translation of the message this project conveys. The drawing depicts one child’s face to emphasize the issue of facing poverty. The face in the drawing is a child living in the city of Quito, Ecuador. The shaded background is an outline of the country of Ecuador. Children living in third world countries are not only deprived of food and proper health care (as generally assumed by the definition of poverty) but are also deprived of the opportunity to have a better life through education. How can the cycle of poverty be broken if there is no education to foster growth and development in a country that so desperately needs it? For these reasons, the project is called “Facing Poverty” because with or without making the choice, this child and many others in her generation, will follow in the path of their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents in a seemingly never-ending cycle of poverty.

Acknowledgements

-I want to thank Jen Warner for advising me on this project. She was a great inspiration for the topic of my research and so helpful in the writing process.

-I also would like to thank Dr. Chuck Deitzen. Had he never started the Timmy Foundation ten years ago, I would have never experienced the poverty in third world countries that inspired me to do a creative project.
Creative Project Description

Poverty is a vicious cycle and only extraordinary cases seem to escape this go-around. The child I drew came from a picture taken of me holding her on my first international mission trip. Ecuador was a new experience and opened my eyes to the world. It exposed the harsh reality that is poverty. I helped take care of this baby and can only assume it was the very first time she had received medical attention since birth. In this drawing, I chose to keep the skin very light to convey the image of innocence. At such a young age, children should think the possibilities for their life are limitless. The innocent expression on her face shows that she has not yet felt the effects of poverty, which her family suffers from every day of their life. I shaded the outline of the country in black to create an image to that of a black hole. This child, like many others will be sucked in and remain in this place with little hope of removing themselves from such a destitute world. A final outline around the border creates a box around the entire picture. This is the final image of being trapped from all sides. A young child, who does not yet know what she could become, will no doubt be cut short of her achievements due to poverty.
Introduction: Defining Poverty

What is poverty? A definition describes poverty as: "the state of being poor; lack of the means of providing material needs or comforts (thefreedictionary.com, 2008)." But how does this definition really convey what it means to suffer from poverty? How is a person's life impacted by poverty? What hope can a person have of removing themselves from such a state of being?

The hope is unknown. Poverty has such a cyclical effect. In order to change the cycle, and improve a person's state of being, significant efforts must be made. The issue is acknowledged worldwide and yet it still manages to exist. One billion children in the world are subject to a life of poverty (globalissues.org, 2008). If poverty can be synonymous with destitution, it seems imperative that a real emphasis be placed on improving the world's state of poverty and giving people a chance...to really live (merriam-webster.com, 2007).

Poverty in Third World Countries

The level of poverty in third world countries is astounding. In developing countries, 4.4 billion people today are living in poverty. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, regions suffering from poverty are home to people who live off less than two dollars a day. In contrast, the United States requires an almost six dollar an hour minimum wage. On top of a lack of income, other basic necessities cannot be met for those struggling with poverty. In the world, 1,300 million people do not have access or cannot afford clean drinking water. This leads to many preventable and avoidable illnesses that become fatal. Due to a lack of proper nutrients, nearly 30,000 children will die each day (globalissues.org, 2008). The numbers seem unbelievable and yet, they are quite real.
It is difficult to even imagine a world where such simple necessities cannot be met and, by not meeting a person's basic needs, are often turned into deathly or debilitating illnesses.

On top of clean water and proper nutrition, people living in an area of poverty also lack information. They live in an environment where there is no computer, phone, or internet. While the United States is the number one user of internet resources at 185,000,000 users in 2004, countries like Guatemala rank only in the top seventy with only 1,000,000 users as of 2005. Even further down the list, countries in Africa, such as Liberia, are nearing the lowest ranks with only 1,000 users as of 2001 (nationmaster.com, 2008). When we think about how much the internet is utilized in the U.S. as a source of information and as a learning tool, it seems hard to imagine a country being denied access to such a valuable educational resource. Countries in extreme poverty have virtually no access to world news, politics in their country, or even, most basically, an education. Not only are forms of communication few and far between for obtaining information, but education itself is such a vital need that is often overlooked in third world countries.

**Education in Third World Countries**

While malnutrition is a common occurrence of people suffering from poverty, it is not always recognized as a reason for a lacking education. The illnesses that occur from malnutrition can directly affect education by keeping children out of school and putting them so far behind in their studies that they drop out before even obtaining a basic education. With a vast majority of jobs in developing countries being physical labour, parents will often need the help of their children just to survive financially. Education is expensive on its own, but losing the income of a working child can be even more financially devastating to a family. How can a country escape poverty if there is no education to foster new ideas? This is why the cycle of
poverty continues. There is no break out from the cycle until enough money is available for education. There is no funding for education because parents cannot make enough to send their children to school (sln.org.uk, 2003).

It is so true that “money talks,” but what does it say? The U.S has one of the highest education rankings for number of years an adult has received schooling. That correlates to the 13.843 billion dollars in GDP it produced in 2007 (bea.gov, 2008). In 2003, Rewanda’s GDP was only 1.6 billion (africa-eca.com, 2005). This is a significant shortfall to that of the U.S. Funding is so necessary for education. The United State’s average number of years of schooling for an adult is twelve. Compare this with Guatemala whose average is 3.5 years of schooling for an adult. The numbers only decrease when countries in Africa are observed. Africa’s years of education for adults drops as low as .8 in certain countries (nationmaster.com, 2008). Becoming a profitable country comes, in large part, from having educated citizens. What happens when the majority of people are living in poverty, have minimal incomes, and cannot afford an education?

**Effects on a Country Lacking Education**

The effects of a lacking education system are astounding. It is what keeps a country stagnant and is an issue that only helps renew the cycle of poverty. Country leaders, who are capable of implementing great change, have had education to develop their leadership abilities. Great changes do not come about without a gifted person to enact a powerful movement. For a country to remove itself from poverty, the education system needs to be supported first and foremost. Such emphasis is not being placed in third world countries. While the U.S. requires a minimum of twelve years of schooling, many third world countries do not even enforce a middle school grade education (nationmaster.com, 2008).
High school is a time for students to find their valuable skills and learn about their talents. Many programs in the United States education system are provided to develop student skills. Advanced placement or honors programs are commonly found in many schools. Some even begin at a middle school level, when students of the same age in other countries are already wrapping up their educational experience. This means that students in third world countries are being cut short of developing gifted skills they may possess to truly enact a change in their world. These students are the vital resource for turning their countries state of being around. It is the gifted capabilities of a student that can change the lives of so many suffering from poverty.

**Defining Giftedness**

What exactly is giftedness? The United States Office of Education defines gifted and talented students as those who “have outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance and who require differentiated educational programs (beyond those normally provided by regular school programs) in order to realize their contribution to self and society (nswagtc.org.au, 2007).” Gifted students are those who have a significant skill or ability that is superior to students of the same age and background. Howard Gardner recognized these gifted capabilities and noted that there are many areas in which a person can have gifted qualities. It is estimated that 10-15% of the population could be considered gifted in some area (nswagtc.org.au, 2007). Due to their lack of education, the gifted abilities of children are overlooked in third world countries.

**Fostering Educational Growth and Breaking the Poverty Cycle**

How does a country begin to address the issue of breaking the cycle of poverty? Fostering educational growth is key to accomplishing this ever needed goal. Countries in poverty need to have education systems that “would help a whole generation learn the skills they
need to beat poverty (oxfam.org, 2008).” Educated children will grow into educated leaders. By supporting their educational growth and providing them with resources to enhance their gifted abilities, children will grow into adults with the capabilities to make a difference in the world. They will be able to read and write. They will gain awareness of the state of their country and be able to observe how other countries are supporting their people and providing a place free from extreme poverty. If children are given the support they need in their early years of education, there will be hope that future generations will have the skills needed to address poverty issues and begin to break the cycle of poverty.

While there is no quick solution as to how to fund a country in poverty and promote a better educational system, awareness is the first key step. People are aware of poverty, but without a clear answer on how to solve it, people just as easily walk away from it with the mindset of “it’s not affecting me, so why does it matter.” Issues of poverty need to saturate our educational system and information sources. The internet and computer resources can provide so many helpful sites for people to learn about countries suffering from poverty. Recent initiatives like one.org have begun the challenge of creating such awareness.

**Conclusion**

Though solving poverty is by no means an overnight event, awareness and advocacy efforts can be improved to make sure everyone in the U.S and other wealthy countries realizes the impact of poverty in third world countries. With awareness will come support. With support comes funding. And with funding comes the resources needed for educational systems in developing countries. Only once educational resources are provided, can students have a fostered educational experience and begin to develop their gifted skills that will help turn around the state of their impoverished country.
These issues are literally thousands of miles away, but with the information available, there is no excuse for not being aware of what people suffer through on a daily basis. A huge change is needed. It will take small but crucial steps to effectively break the cycle of poverty and give everyone the opportunity to a life they deserve; a life without malnutrition, without preventable illnesses turning fatal, and most importantly, a life with education.
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Sources


