Poverty & Education

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

Lack of funding for schools is a major issue in our educational system. Teachers are losing their jobs and class sizes are growing. These factors can quite possibly have a detrimental effect on the education that students are receiving in the classroom. On top of this, many schools have to find other ways to cut costs. Technology in a school is almost considered a luxury to some teachers. Our children deserve better than this. Now throw into the mix the fact that many of our nation’s students are coming to school from a family that lives in poverty. According to figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau, about 12.8 million children live in families with incomes below the official poverty level. This also adds to the problems they face in the classroom. School may be the one place they can go where they feel safe or loved or even receive their only meal. To determine how much each of the factors really affects the learning environment in a classroom I constructed a set of interview questions that I distributed to approximately forty teachers and administrators from different schools in Indiana. By reviewing all of the answers I received, I formed my own conclusion about the effects of poverty on the education of our students.
Acknowledgements

- I want to thank Jennifer Warner for advising my as I prepared this project. She was very helpful while I was in the process of brainstorming.

- I would also like to thank each of those teachers or administrators who helped me gather my information for this project. Many people took the time to complete my interview questions; their names are all listed throughout this project. Through these questions I was able to gain some very helpful and also insightful information.
Poverty & Education
Analysis

The effects that poverty has on education have been a topic that truly interested me ever since I read Jonathon Kozol’s book, *Savage Inequalities*. Kozol’s book depicts the horrors that many children must deal with everyday when they attend school. In the United States, one of the wealthiest nations in the world, many schools across the country have children learn in closets, gymnasiums, or in a classroom with a ceiling that leaks. Since reading this book I have taken two more courses that have made me take a deeper look at this issue.

As I began my work on this project, I knew I wanted to find a way to analyze the effects of poverty on education. I wanted to look at this poverty from two different angles. After reading Kozol’s book, I knew that the lack of funding for a school was a major issue in a child’s education, but I also wanted to look at the home life of these children. I wanted to discuss how a child’s education was affected by living in poverty every day of their life.

The first question I asked myself was, “How could I gather this data?” I decided to ask the teachers and administrators who teach in these schools and teach those children who come from poverty. On a day-to-day basis, teachers and administrators deal with the effects of poverty on education. I figured they would have some of the most insightful feedback for me. The intent of my project was to gather this information in hopes that it could help me, a future educator, and anyone else who might someday teach children gain a better understanding of how to handle some of these situations, caused by poverty, in a classroom.
The next step I took was to compile a list of ten interview questions to ask these teachers and administrators. I believe that the questions I asked helped me construct a better picture of how poverty affects a child’s education and also how it affects a teacher’s ability to teach. I then contacted teachers from many different schools across the state and across all grade levels. Some of the teachers interviewed taught at small rural schools while others worked in larger, more diverse schools; some of the teachers taught elementary and some of them taught high school.

I felt that I needed this variety in location as well as grade level to better see the big picture. Unfortunately I didn’t receive as much of this variety in the people that actually responded. Many of those who responded were high school teachers and quite a few were from the Anderson School Corporation. Although I felt that I learned a lot from those who responded, more variety would have been helpful.

I first had to determine whom I was going to contact and how I was going to contact them. The first place I started was at Highland High School in Anderson, which is where I was completing my student teaching. Just in my own experience as a math teacher, I was able to see some of these effects of poverty on education. In the classroom, I had to find ways to work around the lack of calculators. Most of the students did not have their own, and the school did not have very many for us to lend to the children. This played a major role during test time; multiple students needed to borrow a calculator, and we only had two in our classroom to give them. Students either had to share with each other or do the calculations by hand.

I began by talking to my cooperating teacher, Deanna House, about my project. She was very interested and eager to help. As we talked about what I was doing she
helped me determine how I was going to complete my project. I first decided that doing the interviews through e-mail was going to be easiest for me and most convenient for the people I chose to interview. By doing this, the teachers would be able to put more thought into their responses and answer the questions when it was convenient for them. Also, we did not have to find a time that worked for both of us to sit down and discuss each question. This also allowed me to interview more people in a shorter period of time because I did not have to find this time to sit down with each person.

My next task was to determine whom I would interview. My first choice was clearly Mrs. House since I had been working so closely with her. I then asked her if she could provide a list of people she knew within the Anderson Community School Corporation who might have had some experience with poverty in their teaching careers. I then e-mailed each of these people, approximately thirty, and introduced myself as well as what I was doing and provided them with the questions I wished them to answer. I received many responses this way, and I gained some great feedback from the teachers in Anderson.

I then decided to contact teachers from other schools in Indiana. The first place I started was my hometown, specifically Pine Ridge Elementary, my middle school. I talked to one teacher who I knew had dealt with some of these issues, and she directed me to others who she thought would be helpful. I went through the same process here, contacting them through e-mail and explaining my task. Once again I received some great responses.

My final list of teachers and administrators came from personal contacts. This list included family and friends, as well as faculty from Ball State University. This final
category of teachers gave me a wider range of schools and backgrounds for my data. In
the end I contacted approximately forty teachers and administrators and I received
seventeen responses. Many of those teachers who chose to help with my project had
some very insightful information to share.

The first questions I asked teachers dealt with where they had taught, whom they
had taught, and what they had taught. I felt that the answers to these questions would
help the readers put all the information gained from the interview into context. Most of
the teachers I interviewed had either taught in an area where students lived in poverty or
in a school that did not have enough funding; however, not all of them had. By looking
at the differences in the response between these two groups, you can see how views
might be changed after actually working in an area affected by poverty.

An example of this difference can be seen in two responses to the question, “Is
there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a
computer or the Internet?” The following is the response given by a teacher who has
never worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty
and the students, “No, I believe schools now have the access they need.” This teacher,
ever having worked in an area that didn’t have enough funds, has not seen the affects of
a lack of technology in the homes of students.

The response to the same question given by someone who has worked in a school
that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students shows a
different perspective. “Yes! So many supplemental activities on the internet could help
parents/students.” Through these two responses we can see the difference that working in
an impoverished school can make in your views of an issue.
The next question I asked was very open-ended. I asked, “What impact did this (working in a school that didn’t have enough funding) have on you? What impact did it have on how well you were able to do your job?” In the responses I received from this question, teachers mainly discussed problems such as large class sizes, needing to buy their own materials for the classroom, and having to forgo educational fieldtrips.

Nancy Fuller, one of the special education teachers from Highland High School, had this to say in response to the above question, “I spent my own money to meet the needs of the students in my classroom. I picked up the free breakfast available and fed them first thing in the morning. Lack of funding made my job tough, both physically, mentally, and financially.” In her response, Nancy begins discussing the issues associated with the home life of these children living in poverty and how it affected her and her students at school. Many of them come to school without the proper nutrition; not only does this affect their health, but it also affects their ability to concentrate in the classroom. Although many teachers spend their own money for supplies in a classroom, those teachers who work in an impoverished area often feel the need to spend much more.

Teachers then answered a question dealing with the provisions they felt that teachers and faculty needed to make for those students who live in poverty. Some teachers pointed out that society cannot expect students who live in poverty to be able to buy all the necessities such as folders, notebooks, binders, or markers, let alone a calculator. Therefore, teachers need to either keep a supply in the classroom or think carefully before assigning projects that might require money. Another common response
to this question was that teachers need to understand that living in poverty can often limit the background knowledge that a student brings to the classroom.

Karen De La Vergne from Highland High School had many worthy points to share, which also echoed the concerns of many other teachers. The following are a few of her provisions that she feels teachers need to make for students who live in poverty, “Simply be aware that not every kid comes in from an Ozzie and Harriet home. Give an extra dollar here or there for the kid who doesn’t have lunch but doesn’t qualify for the free lunch program. Provide an ear to listen, to find out when and where the students really need and want your help.”

I feel that this response from Mrs. De La Vergne shows that teachers just need to be truly understanding and compassionate of their students. Teachers need to be there for their students and do whatever they can to help out. She then went on to voice a few more qualities that she felt teachers needed in order to really help those students who live in poverty, “Sometimes… pushiness. This year, when a straight-A student in poverty was not going to be admitted to Ivy Tech because of clashes between their schedule and ours, I went to bat for her through the counselors. And hope. We need to reach out to them, to inspire them with the courage to try to excel in school BECAUSE EDUCATION IS THEIR ONLY HOPE OF BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE! A lot of kids have no idea that they even qualify for 21st Century Scholarships or that they qualify for interest-free loans. They buy into the hopelessness in which their parents sometimes live. The parents are often too caught up in simply surviving to worry about signing their kids up or going to college fairs. This is a gap that teachers can sometimes fill.” Through her response we see that it is not only the material things that these students need from us,
sometimes it is just believe in them and helping them believe that they can succeed as well. This is something that all students really need from their teachers, whether or not they live in poverty.

The next question I asked brought about the idea of teachers going through training in order to help them better teach students who live in poverty. Most of the teachers discussed some type of training, such as seminars or simulations that might help teachers understand what it was like for those students who lived in poverty. When a teacher better understands the life of someone in poverty, they might be able to reach out to their students more.

I felt that there was one teacher, Judy Ketring from Killbuck Elementary, who was really able to put this issue into perspective. Her answer to this question helps to explain why some form of training for teachers might be extremely beneficial to teachers and students alike. Ketring said, “Train teachers how to understand each child’s way of life. Many acts by children are misunderstood to be disrespectful and that simply is not the case. Children and family members would feel more comfortable within the school if their children or way of life was understood by the adults who work with their children.”

Through her response I think we see that understanding is a major goal for every teacher to attain. When a teacher is better able to understand his or her students, not just those living in poverty, but all students, then the connection between teacher and students is much stronger. This will in turn create a better learning environment in the classroom. Students will feel much more comfortable and able to learn with a teacher who understands them.
The next question was very closely related to the previous one. I asked teachers if they felt that the environment a teacher grew up in affected the way in which they teach. Since many of them felt that teachers should go through training to better understand what it is like to live in poverty, it is only natural that the common response to this question would be yes. Most of these teachers felt that if an educator did not grow up anywhere near poverty then it was harder for them to understand the difficulties that some of these children bring to the classroom and therefore it could possibly be harder for the teacher to relate to the student.

The response given by Paula Kluesner from Pine Ridge Elementary illustrates the different sides of this issue. “It can be both a positive or negative impact. If a teacher grew up in a comfortable (middle to upper income family) she might feel extreme and extra compassion for those who did not and go above and beyond to give to the student in need. However, others may find poverty an area she knows little about, cannot relate to the child and has no skill to work with the child to address their needs.”

Although Mrs. Kluesner presents two different sides of the issue, I feel that her last statement above is a little extreme. For those individuals who go into the teaching profession, relating to and working with all children is part of the job description. However, I do agree that it might be easier to relate to a child that grew up in the same social-economic status as you did. This is what Kluesner goes on to say in the rest of her response. “If a teacher grew up in poverty, she would be able to help those in the same situation cope with their unique feelings, she would have the skills to empower these children and give hope and inspiration. She could provide an environment that addresses
the needs of these children etc. However, the teacher with this background could also be resentful of the students from families who "have it all", "life is easy" etc."

Through this statement we can see how the environment a teacher grew up in can affect their interactions with students in many different ways. Mrs. Kluesner points out that growing up in a different social class than your students doesn’t always have to be a downfall. We can use our experiences, whatever they may be, to create interactions and connections with our students. While we may better be able to understand the lifestyle of those who live in our same social class, we can still make the effort to learn more about the lifestyle and home environment of all of our students. By making this effort we are reaching out to our students and showing them that we are trying to understand and we want to do what we can for them.

I then asked if they saw higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty and what could be done to prevent this. Some of the educators posed their own question in response. Most of these questions fell along the lines of the following question, “How can we expect students to be concerned with what is going on in the classroom when they are worried about whether or not they will have any food at home or they are working their own job to help pay the bills at home?” These concerns seem to outweigh how to solve an algebraic equation.

On the topic of this previous question, I feel that Deanna House, my cooperating teacher, from Highland High School spelled out some of the most prominent concerns. The following is an excerpt from her response. “In broad generalities, yes...students from impoverished families tend to experience more frustration in school. It could be for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the parent(s) work a great number of hours and are not
available to help with homework. Perhaps there is not money for calculators, computers, internet. Perhaps the parents do not have the educational background to help a child with questions. Perhaps education is not valued in these homes as much as in other homes. Perhaps, once a child reaches an appropriate age, he is expected to get a job to help out with the finances. Perhaps the older children are expected to act as a parent to the younger siblings (cook dinner, baby sit, care for sick children so parents can still go to work)."

I found that these concerns were very closely aligned with the responses provided by most of the teachers. I feel that this goes back again to understanding our students. We need to realize all the pressures and stress that they might be feeling at home and how this is going to affect their performance in the classroom. Although all children, whether from poverty or not, feel pressure at home, I think that living in poverty adds many more concerns that can increase this stress level tremendously. We can’t always make exceptions for them; we still need to have high expectations. However, we can still show some compassion and understanding.

The next question also tied in to the concept behind the previous one. I asked the teachers if they thought that students who live in poverty place less value on their education. Many of the answers to this questioned expanded on the responses to the previous question. Some teachers felt that students who live in poverty see college as something off in the distance, something out of reach. If a student perceives college in this way, then it’s easy to see why their motivation to do well in class would be greatly decreased.
In another response given by Karen De La Vergne from Highland High School, we receive a description of what life could be like for a child in poverty and why this might cause them to place less value on their education. “If a student goes home to a warm meal and parents who expect her to get her homework done, those expectations lead her to value education. If a student goes to a different home every night – maybe isn’t even sure where he’ll be sleeping on Wednesday – and if his mom is more worried about being kicked out of their current apartment than she is about his algebra, then those expectations just aren’t there. He is far, far, far more likely to value the safety and comfort a gang can provide than to worry about the chimerical college education I keep telling him will solve all his problems.”

The description presented here is closely aligned with the concerns discussed by Mrs. House in the previous question. These students have so much more going on in their lives. It’s almost like a juggling act for them. They must learn how to handle not only their schoolwork, but also for many of them their days include working and taking care of the family.

I then asked if the teachers felt that whether or not students had easy access to a computer or to the Internet could affect their education. This question received varying responses. Some teachers felt that this did not affect a student’s education. However some felt that technology now has such a major role in our lives that not having access to a computer or the Internet can affect a student’s education. Technology changes the way in which many teachers communicate with their students and with parents. Technology also provides many opportunities for supplemental material for teacher, parents, and
students. Not having access to this communication or supplemental material can affect a child’s education.

Dr. Cathy Siebert, an assistant professor at Ball State University, voiced her concerns in her response to this question. “I do think there is an impact on the education of students who do not have access to a computer or the internet. I think too often there’s an implicit belief that everyone has those tools available to them, and therefore assignments are given or expectations are held that students who do not have access to those tools may not be able to complete/meet.”

This statement provides us with a look at how the lack of a computer can affect a student’s education if the teacher does not fully understand this often overlooked consequence of poverty. We may not think about this issue since many of us have grown up with a computer in our house. However, for those students who would find this to be an extreme luxury, we must find ways around this so that they can still acquire the same education as the rest of the class. Technology can be a great asset to any learning experience, but we need to make sure that it is not a hindrance to the learning of those who do not have access to a computer or the Internet.

The next question was another open-ended question. I asked how the lack of funding for a school affected the teachers and the students. Many teachers again discussed issues such as school corporations cutting teachers, dropping student activities, and a lack of supplies in the classroom. All of these, among the many other effects that a lack of funding can cause, can greatly hinder a teacher’s ability to teach and therefore negatively impact a child’s education.
Barb Pavey, a retired teacher from Yorktown High School who now works for Ball State University as a University Supervisor for student teachers at Highland High School, shared her opinions about this question. “Obviously this is a question without a simple answer. Obviously, ample funding can provide many amenities: pleasant environment, attractive and safe buildings, technology, cultural opportunities. However, a lot can be accomplished with determination and effort from both teachers and students. Sadly, for every shining example of a teacher who works wonders in an inner city school, there are dozens, maybe hundreds of cases where the cycle of poverty continues partly because needs are unfunded.”

I feel that Mrs. Pavey’s comments offer a bit of hope. Although she clearly points out the problems, she is sure to say that with a little hard work from all those involved, these issues can be overcome. I think this mindset applies to many of the effects we see caused by poverty. If everyone is willing to pitch in and help out where they can, we will be able to provide so much more for these children, in terms of both necessities and their education.

My final question asked teachers to provide any advice they could for new teachers who may be teaching children in poverty. The responses here covered such a wide spectrum that it is hard to consolidate. I think this final question might help future educators the most. A few tips here and there from someone who has been there can go a long way. If nothing else, I suggest reading these responses and take them to heart. This advice comes from those who deal with these issues every day and I’m sure they’ve gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience over the years.
I found one of the best responses to this question was given by Susan Brier from Pine Ridge Elementary. She said, “Be patient! Teach with kindness, laughter and love. Try to understand that homework may not be the first or even second thing on their list, it may come after survival. Be the bright spot in their day as often as you can. Be firm, fair and consistent. You can be tough as long as you are fair. They will respect that too.” I feel that these few short sentences sum up what it means to be a teacher for all students, not just those in poverty.

As I read through every question and all the responses I received, I went through moments of frustration and moments of hopefulness as well. These teachers spell out many of the difficulties that go hand in hand with poverty and a lack of funding. However, many of them also show us that teachers can go on teaching and students can go on learning. There is hope for these students who live this life. As teachers we need to make them believe this for themselves. Only then can they truly break out of the cycle created by poverty.

I encourage any future educator, current teachers, and anyone else interested to read through the all the responses I received from the teachers and administrators that I interviewed. Each question that I asked brought to light a new bit of information from each teacher. I have only picked out a few responses throughout this paper, but there are many more within each interview that can provide some insight into the world of education. The teachers and administrators who participated in my research had a wide array of beneficial information to share, and any educator, future or current, can learn a lot from reading through the responses.
Much insight can be gained by learning from those who have had the experience of working with children in poverty or working in a school where lack of funding is a major issue that they must deal with every year. These teachers have learned what works and what doesn’t; they learned when to get frustrated and when to just let something go. By taking what they’ve learned and applying it to our classroom we can hopefully have a better experience and a much more effective and comfortable environment in our classroom. This in itself will be a major benefit to any of our students, whether or not they live in poverty.

After completing this project, I feel that I have attained my goal. I think the responses that I received from these administrators and teachers can greatly help future educators. I would like to thank all of those who helped me along the way, and I wish all teachers the best of luck in the future. I hope that the information found here can be used to better the education of at least one child.
Name: Aaron Ayres

Current School: Highland High School – Anderson, IN

Grade/Subjects or position: Mathematics 9-12

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

Considering that HHS has a student body population where 43% receive fee assistance and are on free/reduced lunch, I would consider Highland in an area where we do have a considerable amount of families in poverty.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn't have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

I cannot think of any specific examples where we did not have enough funds to maintain the current initiatives and programs we as a school and staff provide our students. We have several funding sources available to us - local, state, and national grants, as well as a few private donors, who can provide some financial assistance from time to time.

As far as personal impact, I have always found suitable workarounds to incorporating new projects or initiatives into my classroom curriculum, and I never place the burden of the cost on the shoulders of my students’ families (unless a field trip expense is involved).

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

I think it works best when teachers treat all students with the same dignity and respect, and provides each student an equal opportunity to succeed in their classrooms. Most students don't want their teachers making their poverty level a major issue, especially in front of their peers. If additional accommodations need to be made, those should be done before or after the class meeting.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

I know there's several ideas floating around regarding this, but I'm unsure at this point. What I try to do is be accommodating for all of my students and provide each an equal opportunity to succeed in my classroom. When that requires additional accommodations from me, I am more than happy to comply.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

I believe it has a major influence on how we operate our classrooms, but that's just personal opinion. I often wonder if teachers who are classified in a higher socio-economic status than me take that factor into account when measuring student achievement.
Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

In my classes, I don't think I can link frustration in my classes to socio-economic level. I think most of my students' frustrations come from the content of the course.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

To be honest, I haven't investigated this enough to know for sure if there is a correlation between these variables, but it would make for an interesting experiment. My personal opinion is I believe, for the most part, that S/E status is a mute issue, that the importance of education is a family priority - and this is at a different position in the list for each family.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Not as much as there used to be. I've seen an increase of students who have Internet access away from school since I began seven years ago. If most do not have Internet access at home, they go to the public library or to a safe haven to surf online.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

I think everyone here at Highland does the best they can with the resources currently in place. Of course, while we're always accepting of new resources to fund our curricula objectives, teachers learn quickly to make the most of what HHS already has to offer.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

It's difficult, but take some time to learn the demographics of your students - parent/guardian information, free/reduced lunch status, and other criteria can be found on the school's student information system. This can be a major help in providing the correct assistance to your students. Problem is no one will probably give this information out - the teacher will have do their own independent research.

Another important characteristic that I try to incorporate in my classroom is to keep the atmosphere "real" - students see right through any false facades. I've had the most success when I'm honest with my students upfront about classroom expectations, and I also admit when I've made mistakes. I believe this has been a major reason why I've had a lot of student success stories in my classroom.

"If you don't like something, change it.
If you can't change it, change your attitude about it.
Don't complain."

Maya Angelou
Name: Debra Benjamin

Current School: Craig Middle School

Grade/Subjects or position: 6-8 reading

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Mary Evelyn Castle & Crestview Elementaries—spec ed tchr (early 80’s)
Belzer Middle School—spec ed tchr, dept chair (mid-80’s through 90’s)
Butler University—instructor (mid to late 80’s)

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

yes

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

Special education has always been underfunded. Until recently, I developed &/or purchased/borrowed most of the materials I used for instruction. I did my own assessments of effectiveness. Students receive a better education when teachers have ready access to effective curriculum and instructional materials.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

Schools must work diligently to communicate with those students’ families. Often the families feel disenfranchised from schools, resulting in a similar attitude from students. I provide materials for my students on a daily basis. I also provide incentives for progress. Schools must have assistance available to students both within and outside of the school day in order to provide the needed support. My school has extensive after school programming.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

Teachers must be made aware of the individual needs and resulting thought and behavior patterns of those students and their families.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

I believe so. More important, though, is the teacher’s ability and interest in seeking the most effective instructional model for her students, in maximizing students’ skills and knowledge, and in striving to understand, though not necessarily to accept, others’ value systems. The teacher must respect the students’ cultural experiences while expanding the cultural knowledge of all students in a class.
Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

I do not necessarily find a higher level of frustration among these students. I do find less ability to sustain effort through academic challenges over a protracted time period. Many students today demonstrate limited frustration tolerance, but I do not find that the problem is related to socio-economic status. To maintain effort through frustration requires the development of a relationship with the student. He must know that the teacher will hold him accountable but will interact with him out of respect and forgiveness.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

I do not necessarily find less value; rather, I find less hope that education will matter. I also find a true lack of insight into the prerequisites needed to access higher level education. I find that post-secondary education is not considered a non-negotiable in some families who live in poverty. I do believe that all parents want their children to succeed and that all children want to succeed at some level.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Our school makes accommodations for those students through computer courses, computer labs, laptop carts, classroom computers, and access to the library during and after school. I think the greater impact is on the students' feelings about lack of access. Obviously, some do not develop more sophisticated technological skills, which arise from many hours spent on computers.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

Students who truly need small group instruction do not have access.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Learn from the students. Keep an open mind. Remember that each day is a new day. Remember that all kids want to succeed but that some have roadblocks. Prepare, prepare, prepare.

I keep this quote posted by my computer so that I view it each day.

I have come to a frightening conclusion.
I am the decisive element in the classroom.
It is my personal approach that creates the climate.
It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis
will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized.

*Between Teacher and Child*

*Haim Ginott*
Name: Debra Berry

Current School: Anderson Highland High School

Grade/Subjects or position:  
Business Education teacher  Grades taught:  9 – 12  

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?  
Yes.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students?  
Yes.

What impact did this have on you?  
Field Trips, out of the question unless funded by myself and the students or a grant.

What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?  
Especially in Business Law, I have had to forego a visit to a court hearing as a class. It is an invaluable experience.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty?  
Seek out a way to make up the difference in funding shortages, i.e. private donations, grants, etc.

Why?  
Students should pay the price for money shortages.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty?  
Some do. I have lived in poverty, so, I’m aware of what it’s like—not as a student, but certainly I know how to dig my way of a situation. I can encourage because I’ve been there.

What type of training?  
Perhaps, live in a poverty situation—kind of like learning to swim by being thrown in the deep end.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach?

Yes. As I described above, as a child/youth, I had advantages, but as a young adult, newly married, I lived in a questionable area of town and was a food stamp recipient for a period of time.

In what ways?

I have worked my way up, out of a hole, so, that experience gave me a wealth of knowledge to spread—to be able to even offer suggestions of how to get out of their situation. Encourage all of your students to strive for their best and watch for success to happen.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty?

Sometimes. I have also seen some students use that as an excuse.

If so, what can be done to prevent this?

I think we’re on the right track of requiring uniforms. Everyone is somewhat on a level playing field at least in the dress area.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in?

Yes.

What type of differences?

If students see no way out of their environment, they figure, why try.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet?

Somewhat.

In what ways?

Technology today is requiring more and more students to e-mail lessons to teachers or do homework from home which may require a computer and/or the Internet.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

Things at the new and improved Highland High School over the past 3 years at least, since we moved into the renovated building—are much better. I can recall many times when light bulbs were burned out and we couldn’t afford to replace them in an Overhead projector—or copiers are too dilapidated to get a good copy.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Don’t sweat the small stuff—try to make lemonade out of lemons whenever you can.
Name: Susan Brier

Current School: Pine Ridge

Grade/Subjects or position: Grade 3 Elementary

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Consolidated Elementary – West Terre Haute, Indiana 1979
Covington Elementary – Covington, Indiana 1980 - 1985
Pine Ridge Elementary – Birdseye, Indiana 1985 - present

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
I worked at Consolidated Elementary – West Terre Haute which had a high poverty rate. Pine Ridge has a 35% poverty rate.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

This is a relative question”. Some students have needs that no amount of funding will impact except time. More time spent individually working with students talking, explaining the common everyday vocabulary they misunderstand, reviewing money, basic math facts, reading aloud to students, developing positive relationships they may not have anywhere else. Some students need to see they have a way out of the cycle of poverty. How does school funding have an impact on that? How does school funding impact the cycle of hunger? The cycle of anger or hopelessness?

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why
Really, poverty shouldn’t matter ..... Children are children no matter how poor. Children are children just love them more.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
Yes – I think it would depend on the mix of students – the amount of “have vs have nots.”

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?
I have seen teachers “hold it against” students from both ends of the spectrum in their treatment whether it be implied or purposefully.
Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

In younger years students do not or may not see themselves as poor but as they gain their “big kid eyes” they begin to feel the social implications of being poor. Teaching tolerance, kindness, acceptance can sometimes help ease the burden. Self confidence if their strengths is the key.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Yes, middle class seem to place a higher value on education.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

No

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

See #2

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Be patient! Teach with kindness, laughter and love. Try to understand that homework may not be the first or even second thing on their list, it may come after survival. Be the bright spot in their day as often as you can. Be firm, fair and consistent. You can be tough as long as you are fair. They will respect that too.
Name: Karen De La Vergne

Current School: Highland High School

Grade/Subjects or position: French, all levels

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Highland High School – English 1994 - 2005

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

Yes, when I worked at AHS, we had the richest and the poorest kids in the city.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

MOST of the schools I've worked at didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students. That's why so many programs resort to those awful-but-necessary fundraisers! Luckily, in ACS we have ACSF Foundation grants, which allow us to get little chunks of money to help with classroom projects. I've been awarded several of these small ACS grants.

I've also applied for tons of other grants. For instance, when I couldn't get the technology I needed, I applied and was accepted for Purdue's Technology Grant quite a few years ago. They provided computers and software and training. About seven or eight years ago, I was accepted as a fellow in Ball State University's PT3 grant, which supplied lots of instruction and money for technology and materials for my classroom. It was awesome! A couple of years later, I became part of BSU's EPIC grant and now the EPIC II grant. This grant provided a stipend to allow us to study the UbD model and also the accountability to make sure that we actually implemented what we learned in our classrooms.

I even received a Lilly Creativity Grant a few years ago - $8000 to go to France and study. It was awesome.

I guess what I'm saying is that my two choices have always been fundraisers or grants to supply missing funds. The only other option is to grumble and complain.
What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

- Simply an awareness that not every kid comes in from an Ozzie and Harriet home
- Help with uniform dress code items
- An extra dollar here or there for the kid who doesn’t have lunch but doesn’t qualify for the free lunch program
- An ear to listen, to find out when and where the students really need and want your help
- Sometimes...pushiness. This year, when a straight-A student in poverty was not going to be admitted to Ivy Tech because of clashes between their schedule and ours, I went to bat for her through the counselors.
- Hope. We need to reach out to them, to inspire them with the courage to try to excel in school BECAUSE EDUCATION IS THEIR ONLY HOPE OF BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE! A lot of kids have no idea that they even qualify for 21st Century Scholarships or that they qualify for interest-free loans. They buy into the hopelessness in which their parents sometimes live. The parents are often too caught up in simply surviving to worry about signing their kids up or going to college fairs. This is a gap that teachers can sometimes fill.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

?? Special training?? I’m not sure. My first reaction is NO. I never had any special training, and yet I think I am accessible to students who need extra help in different ways. My second reaction is YES. When I went through Ruby Payne training, and when I participated in an educational article read, then I learned more about ways I personally could help them bridge the gap.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

I think the underlying question here is, If a teacher has never experienced what her students are experiencing, can she be empathetic? Sure, the way a teacher grew up can affect the way she reacts to students and their needs. If a teacher rose up from poverty, she’s going to be a lot more inspiring than someone who was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. However, that doesn’t mean that both can’t be empathetic and compassionate.

Specifically, I think that most teachers are middle-class citizens. Therefore, they expect middle-class behavior from their students. Therein lies the problem.

I also believe that there’s a huge difference between situational poverty and generational poverty. The cyclical problems with generational poverty are ingrained. The temporary problems with situational poverty are somewhat easier to treat.
Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

What I see might be frustration.... I don’t think they perceive it that way. I think many students who live in poverty have been exposed to different values and different experiences, which make them think in different ways. The idea that I might never get to go to college would be frightening and scary to me; to a child of poverty, it might be commonplace and expected. I believe that the frustration you mention is more of a tension between expectations and experiences.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

OF COURSE THERE’S A DIFFERENCE!!! If a student goes home to a warm meal and parents who expect her to get her homework done, those expectations lead her to value education. If a student goes to a different home every night – maybe isn’t even sure where he’ll be sleeping on Wednesday – and if his mom is more worried about being kicked out of their current apartment than she is about his algebra, then those expectations just aren’t there. He is far, far, far more likely to value the safety and comfort a gang can provide than to worry about the chimerical college education I keep telling him will solve all his problems.

If we want people to focus more on education, I believe that we have to remove the systemic issues that are always coupled with poverty. I feel like a missionary, preaching about Christ, when my listeners are really just wondering if they’ll get any dinner that night.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Yes, the gap between the haves and the have-nots is huge. A student who does not have access to technology is often ten steps behind before he ever enters the classroom. Many teachers say, “This paper must be typed. If you don’t have a computer at home, you can always go to the library downtown or spend your lunch hour in our library.” Is that really feasible? Do you think an average kid is going to skip lunch to type an English paper? How is a kid who doesn’t have money or a car going to get to the downtown library?

Lack of technology and technological skills sets students in poverty up for failure.

Sometimes, little quirks make all the difference. You’ll find students at Highland doing many, many more research projects, PowerPoint presentations, online discussion groups, etc......simply because Mark Finger had the foresight to set up computer labs. At AHS, all the labs are devoted entirely to PLATO (or that is my understanding, based on conversation with AHS teachers), so the average teacher never bothers to assign online tasks. They don’t even have a full lab attached to their library. The different use of computers (both schools have the same number, I think) when we organized our new buildings has caused a new kind of technology gap.
How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

I think I already answered this one.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

- Be creative in looking for funding. Whining and complaining are useless. Ask around. Look around for grant opportunities.
- Don’t be afraid to spend some of your own money. When I first came to Anderson, I was handed a Developmental Reading class with 32 students and six books!!!! The books were from 1951 and only had speed reading activities!!!!!!! I immediately spent over $300 of my own money for novels and short story books and comprehension tests. It happens. Just spend it and quit complaining.
- Talk to your administrator. Quite often, there are concerned parent clubs and businesses in the community who will help if given direction.
- Read Ron Clark’s 55 Essentials. You will need to be full of life and passion for your subject if you want to entice your students to pay attention in the first place. Then, you will need to have the energy to search out funding for whatever your students need. Finally, you will need to have rules and classroom management skills, if you hope to make use of the materials you get for your students.
- Be an inspiration to them!!!!

This was fun. Thanks for the opportunity.

Karen De La Vergne
Name: Rose Fischer

Current School: Pine Ridge Elementary, Schnellville, IN

Grade/Subjects or position: Resource Teacher

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
Yes

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you?
What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
Larger class sizes, buying of own supplies, updated materials.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
Teachers have to understand what background knowledge a child in poverty has and if the student doesn’t have the background knowledge teachers have to supply it.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
Yes, if they did not grow up poor.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?
Yes! Teachers use their background to supplement in their teaching plus there are different values that are honored in each economic backgrounds.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?
No.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?
I can see the difference in heritage. Students from a German background seem to have a better work ethic.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?
Yes! So many supplement activities on the internet could help parents/students

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?
Go to Ruby Payne workshops or read her materials. "People remember you not for what you say or for what you do, but how you make them feel."
Name: Nancy Fuller

Current School: Highland High School

Grade/Subjects or position: LD Resource Teacher

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

1975-76 Teacher of the Emotionally Handicapped-Muncie Community Schools
1976-78 Multi-categorical Resource Teacher-Lincoln Elementary-Muncie Community Schools
1978-1986 LD Resource Teacher-Robinson Elementary-Anderson Community Schools
1986-present LD Resource Teacher-Highland High School-Anderson Community Schools

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
Yes

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
I spent my own money to meet the academic needs of the students in my classroom. I picked up the free breakfast available and fed them first thing in the morning. Lack of funding made my job tough, both physically, mentally, and financially.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
Incentives for going the extra mile, resources for getting students what they need, and a little thank you from the administration.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
Yes. I had a minor in Teaching the Disadvantaged. My mother taught in the inner city and made it plain the obligation of helping those that need help. Teachers need to have classes in the literature/history of the poor, they need to have classes on the nuances of what it means to be poor, they need to do some volunteer work in places of poverty.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

Yes. The attitude toward them would color the manner in which a teacher would react to what would be happening in the classroom.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

Yes. A teacher must continue to encourage the students and go out of their way to help them.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Many poor students don’t see the value of school. Some are absent due to home obligations and cannot keep up with class work.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Some. Our school provides time and computer access.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

It is depressing and can make us angry. I will say that many teachers have been able to write grants to help the situation.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Provide a pleasant atmosphere that will make them want to come to school. Value all students and let them know you care about them. Work hard and expect them to work hard too.
Name: Andrea Gehlhausen

Current School: Pine Ridge Elementary

Grade/Subjects or Position: Kindergarten

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
   yes, I student taught in a high poverty school.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn't have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
   No

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
   Teachers and faculty need to treat all students as an equal. They need to make an effort to help the student not stand out as having less than others. For example, I brought in a treat for a student's birthday. I was afraid the parents would not when everyone else does. The student ended up not bringing in a treat and I was thankful for having brought something in. The student seemed to just "fit it" and be like everyone else.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
   I have been to a poverty workshop. I'm not sure if the workshop was as needed as just having resources to get personal/school items for the students.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?
   It is possible. A teacher who grew up in poverty might have a better understanding of a student's situation.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?
   Yes, environment plays a huge role in how quickly they learn and even socially. As a kindergarten teacher, I see a low level of vocabulary from those students. It would be great if we could get funding for all kids to attend a preschool and full day kindergarten.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?
   Yes, student's whose parents value education will hopefully carry that on.
Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?  
*Not too much in kindergarten.*

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?  
*Lack of funding is a big issue. If special services or more teachers are taken away, it will give less one on one time or even small group time away from students who really need it.*

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?  
*Care for them all equally, you never know what kind of life they endure. You may be their only hug that day.*
Name: Mary Harper

Current School: Shelbyville Central Schools

Grade/Subjects or position and other schools I worked in:
IPS, School 74- Special Education grades K-6 1982-1984
Shelbyville Junior High School (Advanced Language Arts 7-8th) 1984-1986
Hendricks Elementary (At one time or another taught all grades 1-6 both with
cluster special education and gifted students) 1986-2000
Half time Title I and GT Coordinator (taught a half day as well) 1995-2000
Principal of Hendricks 2000-2008
Currently Assistant Superintendent of SCS

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
I started my teaching career in IPS School 74 right by Tech High School. The free
and reduced lunch rate was over 80%. The first week of school a student was thrown
against a fence and stabbed in the hand by a group of high school students. I was
terrified. My students were only mildly amused. It was obviously nothing new to them.

Hendricks and Coulston Elementary are now considered high poverty schools with their
53% F and R status. When I started as principal in 2000 of Hendricks, the FR was 27%.
With in 7 years it was over 50%.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to
meet the needs of the faculty and the students?
I have always worked in schools where there is not enough money to support
students living in poverty. The need of funding increased as the population of students in
need grew.

What impact did this have on you?
Faculty needs to get resourceful. There is limited money to buy students school
supplies. I have always worked with teachers and support staff willing to donate money
to buy clothes, shoes, food, help pay utilities for students and families in need. In many
ways it was also humbling, especially as my kids were little. To see what I was buying
them for Christmas or birthdays and knowing how my families were struggling.

What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
I was constantly trying to find ways to connect with students and their families.
Poverty is a culture in itself. Whether you call it street savvy or survival, students and
their families viewed the educational system as somewhat of a threat. Meeting families on
their terms, at their homes, on their time...breaking down the barriers (mine and theirs)
constantly...to build relationships.
What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

A student comes in without his homework and the teacher wants to label him as irresponsible. Little did she know (or sometimes care) that the night before he made supper for his brothers, made sure they had clean clothes the next day, and put them to bed. That morning he had been up for 2 hours, dressed and fed his little brothers, made sure they had their school stuff ready. (Even if it means giving them his last pencils) Yes, he failed to complete his homework, but is he irresponsible? Educators need to continually challenge themselves to break “traditional practices” and meet the needs of at risk students. Besides just provision, we need to design and implement curriculum that is meaningful to at risk students.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

Yes, ongoing training is critical. The Response to Intervention training is great. Cultural awareness training, project based learning, social justice-focused and service based curriculum training, any training to do with theories of constructionism or constructivism.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

We are all affected by the environments we grew up in with no exception to educators. I would think that if a teacher grew up in poverty, he/she would be able to relate somewhat better than one that had the benefits of an economically stable family environment.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

To be honest, I don't see a huge difference in frustrational levels. Often times, students living in poverty DEAL with so much. They may have other acting out or inappropriate behaviors (falling a sleep in class, unprepared, attendance issues) Sometimes students that seldom feel failure or have been given it all, suffer from more frustration.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Initially, you may want to say that students living in poverty, with few educational role models...don’t value education as much as other students. But, when you do the one on one with them...they care deeply and are often very scared about their futures. Most of their parents care too, but they never learned the tools need to be successful in “traditional” schools.
Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

There is probably some. Most teachers that require internet access offer time in school to work on these projects. The 21st Century Ready (project based learning academy at SHS) will provide before and after school computer time for students as well. If we get funding, students will be able to check out lap tops.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

First, I think we can do a better job with the money we have by training teachers. The funding I would like to see would be for clothes, shoes, school supplies...for any student in need.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

READ, READ, LEARN, BE OPEN MINDED, EXPERIMENT, TAKE RISKS, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS AND FAMILIES. ENGAGE STUDENTS. KNOW THAT STUDENT FAILURE IS OUR FAILURE.
Name: Deanna House

Current School: Highland High School, Anderson, IN

Grade/Subjects or position:
Math: Pre-algebra (freshmen), Geometry & Algebra 2 (9-12th graders) and Statistics (10-12th graders)

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.
Eastside Middle Schoool, ACS, Anderson IN – 8th grade math 1998 – 1999 school year
Arlington Woods Middle School, IPS, Indianapolis, IN – 8th grade math 1993 – 1994 school year

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
I believe almost all of the students at Arlington Woods MS were at the poverty level. I think that in ACS 60% or so of our students are on free/reduced lunch program.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
Schools are always in need of extra funding. Most of the time, teachers who are involved in extra curricular activities are forced into fundraising efforts of some type. It becomes trickier if you are trying to raise funds for equipment. Usually there are grants – if you are willing/able to research for those opportunities. However, most grants specifically exclude the purchase of technologies. Most of the text books today make the assumption that the kids all have graphing (or at least scientific) calculators. Many of our students don’t even have a basic 4 function calculator. As a teacher I have to make arrangements for the students without this technology.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
I believe it is a teachers responsibility to do anything reasonable to help her students. However, I have tried purchasing calculators to have a classroom set, but they disappear. I am not willing to keep purchasing them. If I know a student is hungry, I have given them granola bars before. Usually a student in high school won’t let this be known to a teacher, though.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
There is some excellent research out there done by Ruby Payne that I believe would be beneficial to any teacher, especially a young or new teacher. I don’t care what school district you teach in, there are impoverished students, whether they admit it or not.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

Absolutely! We bring every aspect of ourselves to our role as teacher. It is who we are, and it has affected the choices we have made to this point in our lives. Our attitudes are basically constructed in our formative years and I don’t think we ever truly “escape” our past.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

I have a unique perspective because my own child, who did not grow up in poverty, experienced a great deal of frustration within the educational system. I, on the other hand, while not growing up in “poverty” did grow up with very limited funds. My basic needs were met, but we had major financial struggles growing up. I would say that it is up to the child. Where as my youth encouraged me to take every advantage I could of the education I was being provided, but certainly not every child in a financially struggling family is motivated to do so.

In broad generalities, yes...students from impoverished families tend to experience more frustration in school. It could be for a variety of reasons.
- Perhaps the parent(s) work a great number of hours and are not available to help with homework.
- Perhaps there is not money for calculators, computers, internet.
- Perhaps the parents do not have the educational background to help a child with questions.
- Perhaps education is not valued in these homes as much as in other homes.
- Perhaps, once a child reaches an appropriate age, he is expected to get a job to help out with the finances.
- Perhaps the older children are expected to act as a parent to the younger siblings (cook dinner, baby sit, care for sick children so parents can still go to work).

Students of parents who do not have this financial burden don’t have some of these very real issues. I am not judging the parents for needing the help of their older children. The parents are usually doing their best to make sure the physical needs (food, shelter, clothing) are met and must rely on the older children to provide some of the other needs.

As far as prevention, if I had this answer, I would publish a book and retire a millionaire. There is no easy fix. The best we can do is to level the playing field. Make sure the kids are healthy (with screenings), not hungry (with free and reduced meals) and offer the use of computer labs before and after school.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Somewhat yes, due to some of the reasons listed above. Some of these families are in desperate need of assistance. As a society, we need to do all we can to help out these struggling families. That takes money, and money is scarce right now.
Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

I would say yes. Many of these students cannot even afford to bring a calculator to class, and to try to assign a computer assignment is impossible unless there is time given in class. Lack of access to the internet also limits contact with parents because e-mail is such a convenient form of communication.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

Well in our school district right now, we are cutting $5 million from our budget to counteract a funding short fall and it means cutting teachers, closing schools and dropping activities.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Don’t assume that they have any school supplies at home. Be willing/able to supply all necessary items for a poster, project or diorama. Also, you will need to give plenty of time for completing such tasks in class – or they will not be completed by most students.
Name: David Jack

Current School: Highland High School

Grade/Subjects or position: Calculus, Geometry

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.


Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

When I first came to HHS in 1969 it was classified as a low-income school by the federal government. We are currently a low-income school with over 50% free reduced lunch.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

There have been numerous times that HHS has suffered through budget shortfalls. We have been fortunate to usually have the tools needed to do the job.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

I know personally that it is very hard for me to relate to the circumstances that some of our students live with. It would be helpful to have some type of awareness training concerning the current local situations.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

I feel that at time we must be compassionate to the needs of the students. However, that is not to say that the students deserve a free ride through school.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

Your life experience certainly effect the way that you interact with students. Growing up in a small town with two parents and 4 grandparents available at all times does not equip you to deal with students from single parent homes and no support system.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

Yes I believe that many of these students feel frustrated, especially when put into situations where they must interact with others who have the support that they need.
Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Many of the poor students do not place any value on their education since their parents did the same. This is especially true in Anderson during the past few decades. When jobs were plentiful and anyone with a high school diploma could get a decent job at the factory there was no value placed on a good education.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

It is like digging a hole without a shovel.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

For the teachers it makes them more likely to spend their own money on classroom supplies. At some point it becomes a burden that teachers refuse to accept.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Have high expectation for them. It is easy to lower your expectations since they are disadvantaged. It is possible for low-income students to be successful, but they have to see the value in achieving.
Name: Tammy Kennedy

Current School: East Side Middle School

Grade/Subjects or position: Eighth Grade Language Arts (2006- present)

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Anderson High School, Language Arts Department (1999-2006)
Muncie Central High School, Language Arts Department (1996-1999)

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

I student taught at South Side Middle School in Anderson. I recall the poverty level being very high even during that time period. AHS was unique in that there were very wealthy kids and very poor kids. It didn’t seem that there were many in between.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

In all of the schools I have worked, we have needed more teachers. Class sizes are always an issue.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

Teachers need to understand that we cannot expect kids whose parents are struggling to be able to buy binders, folders, markers, etc. I try to keep a supply of necessary materials on hand to give a way when needed. I also try to think carefully before assigning projects that might require money.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

Training would probably be helpful in helping teachers understand the needs of our kids living in poverty. If you have never lived in poverty, it might be hard to understand the needs of this population.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

I do think the environment in which the teacher grew up has an effect on how teachers teach. Having grown up without a lot of money definitely helps me relate to my impoverished students. It helps me understand that many of them have not had opportunities that others take for granted.
Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

I do see higher levels of frustration among students who live in poverty. Many cannot see a way out. For them, college is not seen as a reality for them. They also experience frustration when they have assignments they cannot complete because there is no computer available at home, when they cannot complete their homework because they have to watch their siblings, or they cannot do their homework because there is no one there to help them with it.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Again, for many kids living in poverty, education is not a priority. Helping their family is a priority. Going to college is out of the question.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Refer back to question six.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

Teachers get frustrated because it is difficult to teach when you do not have the necessary materials. There are still teachers who have to make copies of textbooks because there is not funding to buy them.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

You have to be patient and caring to work with kids living in poverty. You also need to know when it is time to move on. I got to that point at AHS. I wasn’t as understanding with the kids that were working at fast food restaurants until close and skipping school and/or sleeping during class. Many of them I know were working to help feed their families, but I was losing patience; that’s when I knew it was time to make a change. You also need to recognize different kinds of poverty. Some kids are not starved for food but for affection. Treat kids whether they are rich or poor with the same kind of respect. They all have something of value to teach you, too.
Name: Judi Ketring

Current School: Killbuck Elementary 2003- present

Grade/Subjects or position: Elementary Principal

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Anderson Community School System-
North Anderson Elementary- Principal 2002-2003
Valley Grove Elementary- Asst. Principal 2000-2002
Valley Grove Elementary- 5th grade teacher 1998-2000
Park Place Elementary- 6th grade teacher 1995-1996
29th Street Elementary- 6th grade teacher 1994-1995
Westvale Elementary- 1st grade teacher 1993-1994
Tenth Street Elementary- 6th grade teacher 1991-1993
Collier County School System, Florida
Golden Terrace Elementary- 4th grade- 1988-1990
Village Oaks Elementary- 2nd grade 1986-1987
Pinetree Elementary- 4th grade- 1985-1986

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
Yes, Robinson Elementary, Park Place Elementary, 29th St Elementary, Westvale Elementary, Village Oaks Elementary, Pinetree Elementary

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
No, I have always had what I needed to teach my curriculum

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
Teachers need to understand and teach to the differences in cultures and working class.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
Yes, train teachers how to understand each child’s way of life. Many acts by children are misunderstood to be disrespectful and that simply is not the case. Children and family members would feel more comfortable within the school if their culture or way of life was understood by the adults who work with their children.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?
   Yes. Misunderstanding or not knowing specific actions

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?
   Anyone would be frustrated if they were continually misunderstood

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?
   Yes, when I worked in Immokalee, FL. This was a migrant town. Many parents kept their child home to work in the fields instead of sending them to school. If the authorities were checking "green cards" they would not come to school. Taking care of their family was more important than going to school. Many of my fourth grade students would be out for weeks at a time to help their parents work.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?
   No, I believe schools now have the access they need.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?
   We have to be more creative to get what is needed for items not provided. Many teachers buy things for children out of their own pocket!

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?
   Educate yourself! 😊
Name: Paula Kluesner

Current School: Pine Ridge Elementary

Grade/Subjects or Position: First Grade

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
Yes. I worked with students in Vigo County through the County Extension after school and summer program. Most of the children that were invited to attend were at or below the poverty level.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
No

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
I think they need to feel loved and accepted at the school by both faculty and students so the teacher needs to create an environment where all are equal and not an environment that points out the inequalities. Supplies and other items needed in the classroom can be obtained and provided through many organizations. There are also organizations that help students in need of clothing and such.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?
Yes. It can be both a positive or negative impact. If a teacher grew up in a comfortable (middle to upper income family) she might feel extreme and extra compassion for those who did not and go above and beyond to give to the student in need. However, others may find poverty an area she knows little about, cannot relate to the child and has no skill to work with the child to address their needs. If a teacher grew up in poverty, she would be able to help those in the same situation cope with their unique feelings, she would have the skills to empower these children and give hope and inspiration. She could provide an environment that addresses the needs of these children etc. However, the teacher with this background could also be resentful of the students from families who "have it all", "life is easy" etc.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?
Yes. Mostly I see it in the lack of vocabulary. Students from lower income families seem to have less developed social skills.
Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Yes. Homework and school is not a priority. Getting and keeping a job, making money for essentials needed to live and paying bills is priority.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Not in my first grade class at Pine Ridge.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Compassion and get to know every student. Don't focus on what they don't have or bring to the classroom but rather focus and enhance what they do have and bring to the classroom.
Name: Barbara Pavey

Current School: Retired

Grade/Subjects or position: 1984-2004
Yorktown High School
Language Arts, Grades 11 and 12, plus AP Language and Composition the last few years of that position
Also, Language Arts Department Chair for 5 or 6 years

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.
Rushville High School just after college; Language Arts

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?
Not really. There have been some poor individuals, but not as a general school population.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?
Our funding lacks were fairly minor. There were some cuts in professional development funds. One year copy paper was rationed, though there was always enough. Class sizes were never significantly increased because of cuts in staffing. There was always conversation about needing to economize and some years there were RIFs, but we were always able to carry on good teaching.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?
In the classroom I think the most important thing may be to try to see that children aren’t discriminated against because of poverty. That can be difficult (for ex. If a student has only a few outfits or wears clothes until they are visibly dirty). The teachers can do small things that may not be covered by federal funding for school lunches, free textbooks, etc. They can set up a system so that students can borrow pencils, have notebook paper available for those who need it (Highland seems to have calculators available in the room). Field trip costs can usually be arranged quietly and anonymously.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?
Many of us who come from some level of affluence simply aren’t aware of some of the conditions of poverty that exist in this country, even in central Indiana. It’s hard for someone who has never experienced real poverty to know how to help without humiliating.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

Absolutely. I don't even know where to begin on this question. Just as people who come from vastly different backgrounds and marry often encounter problems, so do teachers and their students. They aren't married of course, but they spend a lot of time together and interact about a lot of issues. Behavior, work ethic, definitions of success and failure, care of property, self-expectations, perseverance, and on and on.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

Poverty increases frustration across the board, not just in the school environment. Especially if poverty has continued through more than one generation, a certain sense of hopelessness sets in. Those in poverty can never seem to get ahead. Historically, education has always been one of the keys to getting out of poverty, but it isn't easy to convince the poor that it is.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

Often the value students place on their education does seem to fall along social divisions. Students in families of more affluence or higher social class seem to expect to gain more education. For example they may see high school graduation as a passage to the next step in education, not as an end in itself. However, there have been some influences during the last half of the 20th century and into the current one that have skewed these trends. I'm not a sociologist, but I think some areas that bear study are the ways people use leisure time and how much of it they have (TV, ever more addictive and time-consuming video games, cheap and readily available drugs, alcohol abuse by younger and younger kids, breakdown of many aspects of family life). Also, many who do earn college degrees find themselves unemployed or underemployed. In high schools and colleges we see many students from affluence who seem to place little value on their education.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

Many schools have made up for computer-less homes by making technology available at school. Is that universal, or is technology lacking in underfunded rural or poverty-area schools?
How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

Obviously this is a question without a simple answer. Obviously, ample funding can provide many amenities: pleasant environment, attractive and safe buildings, technology, cultural opportunities. However, a lot can be accomplished with determination and effort from both teachers and students. Sadly, for every shining example of a teacher who works wonders in an inner city school, there are dozens, maybe hundreds of cases where the cycle of poverty continues partly because needs are unfunded.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Learn all you can about those who have taught in similar situations with success. Seek out colleagues who are teaching and teaching well, and learn some of their secrets. Believe that all students can learn, even if some don’t learn as quickly as others or the same way as the majority. Let your students know that you believe they can be successful. I am currently reading Teaching Outside the Box: How to Grab Your Students by Their Brains by LouAnne Johnson. She wrote the book that led to the movie Dangerous Minds. Listen to her or others like her rather than to those who have given up and are just putting in their time.
Name: Kathy Shafer

Current School: BSU

Grade/Subjects or position: Prof. Math Ed.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

   Not really.

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn't have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

   I worked at a rural school but there was enough money for me to teach my classes. Only a few of the students were on the free and reduced lunch program.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

   I have not taught at a high-poverty level school but have consulted to them. I have listened to classroom teachers describe the home lives of their students and it is heartbreaking to hear. Some kids sleep on the floor or share beds. Some of their students do not have the support they need to complete homework. The teachers then tend to have low expectations of students doing homework. This type of student is also absent a lot had has a high mobility rate – moving in and out of school districts many times a year. It becomes a challenge when they are in and out of different curriculums.

Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

   Yes. Teachers who are not exposed to different types of students begin with a distinct disadvantage. I had a student teacher who almost quite during ST because the kids were so rude to her. She did not grow up in that sort of educational setting and was not equipped to deal with these kids. Once she learned to be assertive it changed but it was not easy for her. Another aspect of dealing with these kids is knowing how to deal with culture. For example, in the African American household the male children will often be the leader of the family so submitting to a female teacher is going to be seen as a power struggle. Hispanic children will look down as a sign of respect but it can be perceived as a lack of respect because they do not maintain eye contact.
Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

See number 4 - The things that many of us take for granted growing up are just not there for students living in poverty. For example, having a mother or father in jail is not a reality that most of us understand. Not having food in the house is something we cannot relate to. The saddest part is that these kids never leave town. They don’t go to the zoo or anywhere so they do not have any experiences that many of us had as children.

Do you see higher levels of frustration from those students who live in poverty? If so, what can be done to prevent this?

Not much first hand experience with this but I do recall that one year (1995 or so) I had a student who was homeless. I tried everything I could think of to get him to do math and he just would not do anything. I used to be able to tutor one-on-one and turn kids around. Not with this young man. It was really sad and I was not successful. It really bothered me. I cannot imagine having a room full of these kids. It would make the teacher feel so hopeless.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

At the same rural school, I had a male student ask me why I worked if my husband worked. The culture was very different. Many of these kids had folks on welfare so to see me with an in-ground swimming pool - let's just say that I was rich in their eyes. They had such low expectations, since their parents never went on to higher education and some did not even go to work.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

I have no data on this.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

I don’t have information on this except to say that many teachers will buy things themselves in order to have it for their students.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

They must complete home visits and learn about the culture. Then they need to hold these kids to high standards. We weaken them if we say that they cannot do the work.
Name: Dr. Cathy J. Siebert

Current School: Ball State University

Grade/Subjects or position: Assistant Professor, Educational Studies

Please list any other school you have worked at and the dates, as well as the position you held there.

Siena Heights University - 1990 – current (adjunct faculty teaching argumentative writing and Shakespeare classes)

Lansing Community College – 1989 – current (adjunct faculty teaching Children’s Literature and Writing about Ideas and Literature classes)

Michigan State University – 1990 – 1999 (Graduate Assistant/Research Assistant teaching elementary and secondary Language Arts/English methods classes)

Waltrip Sr. High School, Houston, TX – 1984-1986 (9th grade English teacher)

Do you, or have you ever, worked in an area where many of the students live in poverty?

Yes

Do you, or have you ever, worked in a school that didn’t have enough funding to meet the needs of the faculty and the students? What impact did this have on you? What impact did this have on how well you were able to do your job?

Yes. When I taught in Houston, the school I taught in was experiencing huge waves of immigrants especially from Laos and Asian countries. In addition, obviously since it was Houston, the Spanish-speaking population of students was huge. There was ONE ELL support person in the entire district trained in Laostian, and only a handful of ELL specialists period. In fact, the school I taught at did not have an on-site ELL specialist which was very typical for the schools in Houston at the time. Given the size of the district, we were lucky if we saw an ELL specialist once a year! This definitely impacted the instruction I was able to offer the limited English language-speakers in my classrooms especially as I was a brand-new teacher who had received no preparation in my undergraduate program that would help in planning and implementing instruction for this population.

What provisions do you feel teachers and faculty need to make for students who live in poverty? Why?

I’m not quite sure what you mean by “provisions”. I think, as would be true of any student who walks into our classrooms, that we need to know our students and what baggage they may be bringing into our classrooms and use that information to help create effective learning environments and lesson plans that enable all students to be successful. I’d like to believe that “society” will step up to the plate and make “provisions” that help students living in poverty succeed.
Do you feel that teachers or faculty need special training to work with students who live in poverty? What type of training?

I worry that too often when people talk about “special training” it results in sweeping generalizations that often reflect an unintentional for the most part, but also sometimes subversive, form of racism.

Do you feel that the environment a teacher grew up in can affect the way in which they teach? In what ways?

Absolutely. Teachers don’t leave their personal histories at their classroom doors. Sometimes the environment a teacher grew up in may enable the teacher to understand some of their students who are growing up in similar environments. Sometimes, it can prove an obstacle when the teacher doesn’t share the same background as some of his/her students.

Do you see a difference in the amount of value students place on their education depending on the social class they live in? What type of differences?

I hate to be pessimistic, but I often see a lack of value for education that crosses social class. I do think that students among some social classes no longer believe in education as a “way out”. I also think students among some social classes do not know and/or believe higher education is within their reach.

Is there a large impact on the education of those students who do not have easy access to a computer or the Internet? In what ways?

This is just an outsider’s perspective (from someone who spends a lot of time in secondary classrooms but not as a teacher), but I do think there is an impact on the education of students who do not have access to a computer or the internet. I think too often there’s an implicit belief that everyone has those tools available to them, and therefore assignments are given or expectations are held that students who do not have access to those tools may not be able to complete/meet.

How does a lack of funding in the school affect the teachers and faculty and/or the students?

It limits resources especially in terms of people. When we should be investing in hiring more teachers to enable smaller learning communities, due to insufficient funding we’re looking at huge schools and class sizes. Schools are being called on to provide more and more services that used to be provided via other sources (extended families, neighbors, churches, etc.) with less and less funding.

What advice do you have for new teachers who may be teaching children who live in poverty?

Always keep what’s in the best interests of the child at the center of decision-making. Never assume you know a child because of where s/he lives, what s/he wears, how s/he talks, how many parents s/he has.