



Socio-Economic Status

Teaching with differences in mind

Socio-Economic status (SES) effects the quality of education provided and the ability for children to learn. Low SES areas are focus on basics of life to improve the education, along with basics of human relations and basics of instruction in the teaching methods and classroom management.

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Introduction

Socioeconomic status (SES) is measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It associates to social standing, class and privileges, power and control.

Low SES = Low level of education

Low SES indicates poverty, poor health and lower education. Research actually shows that there is a correlation between poverty and slower learning ability compared to higher SES areas. (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009) Low literacy and high stress homes seem to directly affect children's academic abilities. In addition, low SES communities have less money to spend on the school district's resources giving less support to those most in need. (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008)

Children from low SES thus are in a very bad situation in terms of education in almost every possible way: low support from parents, community and school district – abilities further lowered by stress. As a result, not only academics are low, but also psychological development and possibilities for career are looking slim.

Initial remedies for low SES areas

During the American Education class, we learned that according to McKinsey report, the socioeconomic context affects the level of education and thus the type of interventions they would recommend. In their scale, this is "poor to fair" performance and intervention. Interventions are common sense: provide meals and clothing and transportation. Main goal is to get the students to the seats and have the schools meet minimum standards with some necessary resources. In terms of the classes, focus is on basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. For a system that's in excellent in McKinsey scale, this makes sense, but it has not been something needing attention for the last 100 years. Unfortunately, according to "Waiting for Superman", there are lots of schools in the USA that would qualify for this level of performance and would require some of this level interventions.

According to Santiago&co, other remedies can include providing health center services and mental health services to help families cope with their situation. Community involvement in parent education in parents native language is necessary. In order to alleviate some of the effects of poverty, other entities like local universities, health centers, mental health facility, need to be involved.

Anything for the instruction?

All of the above are addressing poverty as a societal problem that reduces learning. Teachers in classrooms will need to focus on teaching and having the kids learn. For that, Payne suggests these practices

1. Building a respectful relationship
 - The teacher calls me by my name.
 - The teacher answers my questions.
 - The teacher talks to me respectfully.
 - The teacher notices me and says "Hi."
 - The teacher helps me when I need help.
 - Non-verbal signals of respect
2. Make learning relate to a supportive context
3. Students should use formal language (Martin Joost, 1972 adapted by Payne) and teachers consultative language for communication to be conducive to learning.
4. To provide accurate interventions, teachers should assess students resources according to these categories
 - Financial: Money to purchase goods and services.
 - Emotional: The ability to control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. This internal resource shows itself through stamina, perseverance, and good decision making.
 - Mental: The mental abilities and acquired skills (such as reading, writing, and computing) needed for daily life.
 - Spiritual: Some belief in a divine purpose and guidance.
 - Physical: Good physical health and mobility.
 - Support systems: Friends, family, and resource people who are available in times of need.
 - Relationships and role models: Frequent contact with adults who are appropriate role models, who nurture the child, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.
 - Knowledge of unspoken rules: Knowing the unspoken norms and habits of a group.
5. Teach hidden rules and survival skills that work in different environments.
6. Chart and monitor progress and plan interventions
7. Move from concrete to abstract when teaching
8. Teach students to ask questions

These are some practical strategies to handle low SES students. Most of them are good for high SES also, but not as necessary.

Systemic remedies

Let's suppose we have the power to change the system. What would we do?

According to Simons, these are some of the remedies that have found working to tackle the main three challenges

- To tackle the achievement gap, superintendent divided schools between high SES green and low SES red schools. With an aggressive plan, red schools made serious progress.
- One district started an office of Equity and Achievement to examine student achievements and develop meaningful solutions.
- "Boys' clubs" helped Latino and black boys to improve their performance by providing tutoring and sense of community.
- Use of iPods for ELL students created good results. Students could go over homework at their own pace.
- For parent involvement, a family partnership office can bridge the gap between parents and schools.
- To have student more prepared for the school, early childhood education can be a solution.
 - Handing out free books at the library helps toward goal of exposing children to 1000 books before kindergarten
 - Vertical planning: teachers in each school meet across grade levels; children in Head Start learn the skills they need for kindergarten
 - Horizontal planning: teachers meet by grade level across the district; teachers can structure curriculum so that a student who moves to a different school in the district will not be more than a few weeks behind or ahead of his or her new classmates
- Teacher quality gap is tackled by providing performance based pay, which we can question based on Ravitch's arguments.
 - In Miami they are attempting longer school days, more instructional days each year, intensive professional development, and a higher salary with an option of staying on these terms or transferring to other schools within the district

Although Simons suggests that these are improvements and solutions to the systemic problems, there is currently little data to show their effectiveness, and even strong counter-examples and data to prove things like merit pay not working. Some of the solutions, such as tutoring, however, has been found highly effective. (Jan, 2007)

Conclusion

Low socioeconomic conditions in many school districts in the great American educational system causes low educational quality and low education overall, in addition to many obvious poverty related problems. This paper has discussed the low SES causes, effects, and remedies on instructional and systemic levels.

From all of the research, it has become evident that the #1 enemy of proper education is poverty. ("Waiting for Superman")

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