

Framework of Poverty (Workshop Notes)

These notes were shared from a workshop recently sponsored by our school district's Diversity Committee. I feel this information is important and relevant to us as SLPs and teachers regarding poverty and its effect on the children in our public schools and their families. (*Consider words and phrases in **bold** as relevant areas to target as goals/objectives for speech/language therapy.*) Awareness and understanding of this information is crucial for *any* individual working in the school environment, if we are to effectively serve these students to best meet their educational needs.

"Few understand the courage it takes for a child to return to a place where he failed yesterday, the day before, and in all probability, will fail again the next." Unknown

Ten Key Points about Poverty:

1. Poverty is relative. There are three levels of poverty:
 - a) near poverty
 - b) poverty
 - c) extreme poverty
2. Poverty occurs in all races. The largest group of people living in poverty currently is children, ages 18 and under.
3. Generational and situational poverty are different. Generational poverty lasts for two or more generations. In situational poverty, there is often an attitude that this is temporary. Pride plays a big part as far as whether someone in this scenario will even ask for or seek assistance.
4. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.
5. Schools operate from middle-class norms and values. The problem is that we assume everyone knows these; they don't. Furthermore, we assume that everyone wants to be middle-class. This is also not true.
6. Individuals bring with them the hidden rules of the class in which they are raised.
7. There are cultural differences in poverty. This study is cross-cultural and focuses on economics.
8. We must neither excuse our students nor scold them. We must teach them.
9. We must teach them that there are two sets of rules. The speaker used the comparison of the rules between basketball and football to help illustrate the point.
10. To move from poverty to middle-class, one must give up (for a period of time) relationships over achievement. Children will often choose relationships over achievement; achievement is an abstract term.

2001 Official Poverty Thresholds

Family of 4	\$17,760/year
Family of 3	\$14,630/year
Family of 2	\$11,610/year
Family of 1	\$ 8,590/year

- In 1999, anyone who made \$75,000 or more a year is considered to be "statistically rich".
- 20% of the population makes \$16,000 or less a year.
- The people in the lowest earning category spend 40-60% of their income on shelter.

- The most important points or issues for each class is as follows:
Poverty=survival, relationships, and entertainment
Middle Class=work, achievement, and material security Wealthy=political, financial, and social connections
- Many times in poverty, food is stored in a cooler. The refrigerator is sometimes sold for cash.
- Nothing is taken for granted in poverty. You worry about everything.
- Most often there is a tv/vcr/radio because entertainment is highly valued. The environment is frequently loud with **background noise** from a source of entertainment.
- The relationship between the parent and the child is more important and more stable than the relationships between the parent and other adults, including teachers.
- There is a high degree of absenteeism from children who live in poverty.
- Relationships between teachers and children in poverty are crucial for those children to succeed. Children will work harder for you if they like you.
- Children in poverty often start working younger and drop out of school.
- Sometimes when a child in poverty becomes too attached to a teacher, the parent may attempt to sabotage the relationship.
- Parents of children in poverty may be reluctant to let go if the child moves out of that situation (i.e. goes to college). Some of these children may not function as well if they remove themselves from that crucial parent-child relationship.

Teachers can encourage students in poverty to learn with the following tactics. You need to learn this or do that so that you can:

- Be in control
- Be smarter
- Win more often
- Use your mind as a tool or a weapon that no one can take away from you
- Ask- but does it hurt you?
- So you won't be cheated
- So that that you will be safe when you are old
- Realize life is like a game – to sometimes get a bad hand dealt you

- Many children in poverty do not even know why they are in school
- "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship." Dr. James Comer
- Mutual respect is the key. Your students need to know you will support and encourage them.
- Financial resources are the least important of all the resources. More important are emotional resources and relationships/role model resources.
- If you do not have the mental abilities, you will always be dependent on someone else. Even a parent may depend on a child to help, especially if the parent cannot read and the child can.
- People in poverty will not work for you if they do not like you.
- Some questions to ask in assessing available resources:
 - Is there evidence that the child has persistence?
 - Can the child be alone or does s/he always need people around?
 - Does the child act on feelings: i.e. hit when angry
 - Does the child have coping strategies for adverse situations that are not destructive to self or others?
 - Can the child read, write, and compute?

- Can the child **plan**?
- Can the child **problem-solve**?
- Can the child determine **cause and effect** and then identify **consequences**?
- Does the child believe in divine guidance and assistance? -Does the child have a church affiliation?

- Many times, success in school is based on the resources a child has.
- There is a 7-10% higher level of child molestation in families of poverty. Parents may choose to ignore something that is not a problem at that exact moment (i.e. molestation) or, because it is an issue for which they have no answer. It is not a question of whether or not they love their children; they do love them – it is a question of trying to cope.
- There is a difference between being laid-off and being unemployed.
- Children in poverty learn **non-verbal cues** at a very early age. They will see what you say before they hear what you say. That means we have to be even more aware of how we use our non-verbal cues.
- The **casual register of language** that children use creates a problem because it is different than the language we teach in, which is the **formal register of language**. That is what frequently causes conflict. We have to teach them other ways (formal) to say the same thing. We need to teach them to translate from the casual register of language to the formal register of language. Formal language is the language of school and work. Casual is just that. It also uses fewer words and may not include complete sentences. Consultative is between these other two registers and is a mix of both.
- Some schools will teach the registers of language and have children write down their thoughts as well as speak them in the formal register.
- **ESOL students** often know only the casual register. Yet, we are teaching them in the formal register. This creates more confusion because the two registers are so different. It is socially acceptable to drop up or down one register in a conversation; it is offensive to drop two or more.
- In regard to conferences, - Do not interrupt parents in poverty even if they appear to be rambling; they are using the casual style of discourse. It will ruin the trust level and impact every person in that family. Instead, say something like, "I'm so glad you are here. I have....." (whatever your time limit is). Before you share, I need to share....." This allows the parent to use their style of discourse without being interrupted. It was suggested that if a parent comes to you for a conference on a day and time other than what you scheduled, perhaps you could have someone cover your classroom for a brief time. Parents who live in poverty may have more obstacles to overcome to attend conferences.
- Teaching occurs outside the head. Learning occurs inside the head.
- In our teaching we fail to mediate for our students because we don't always get so specific with what they need to know. We need to teach them how to **sort through, prioritize, and organize information**.
- We teach at the stage of elaboration, and assume that kids have all 12 strategies in the input stage. If they have all 12, they are 'ready to learn'. We need to imbed these 12 strategies at the input level into our students.
- Children may be able to tell you what something does; they may need help **naming** the thing with the correct **label**.

- Time, according to three economic levels:
 - Poverty Class*
 - Present most important
 - Decisions made for the moment
 - Middle Class*
 - Future is most important
 - Decisions made against future ramifications
 - Wealthy Class*
 - Traditions and past history most important
 - Decisions made partially on history and traditions.

- Regarding discipline, every behavior has a payoff. The payoff is the joy kids get from upsetting the teacher.
- Discipline needs to be taught. It is NOT something that gets done to the child. It is something they EARN because of their choices/action (Love & Logic training by Jim Fay and Foster Cline has this philosophy and urges teaching children how to make good decisions. They recommend starting this training at an early age.)
- 85% of discipline problems result from 5-10% of students and 85-87% come from the same teachers referring those same children.
- Often, the only place a child is allowed to be a child is at school. Many children in poverty are forced to act and talk more like a parent at a young age. Therefore, they are usually capable of using the child voice or the parent voice. Not many are taught the **language of negotiation**, or how to speak like an adult. This includes "I" statements and **how to get the point across** but in a more respectful and appropriate fashion. We can help children learn how to use an adult voice by good modeling and questioning.
- Give children **choices** and then help them know that every choice comes with **consequences**.
- The parent voice may be used to stop a behavior. The adult voice may be used to help change behavior.
- These questions are valuable in trying to help teach children how to make better choices:
 - What did you do?
 - When you did that, what did you want/
 - What are four other things that you could have done instead?
 - What will you do next time?
- The reason children respond the same way is often because they do not know that there is another way to handle it.
- We have to help children understand and **analyze** behaviors.
- Reframing is a valuable technique to help put the situation into a different perspective. An example given was about a young man who was late for P.E. class. The teacher gave him a choice of doing one minute of pushups or to go to the office. The young man chose to go to the office. The consequence of that was that he had to spend a total of 45 minutes over several days in detention. Later, the P.E. teacher asked him, by reframing, "Why did you choose 45 minutes instead on one?" This put the decision-making process into a whole new light. The student realized that one minute is easier than 45. It also allowed him a way to save face if it should happen again, with his other friends looking on. Before, the choice may have been made, in part, to save face in front of his friends. Now that the choices have been reframed, he can just explain to his friends that he would rather lose only one minute of his valuable time compared to 45 minutes.

- Behavior analysis involves six steps (paraphrased from the workbook):
 - 1) Identify what behaviors a child needs to be successful.
 - 2) Try to identify what resources are already in place that may assist the child in developing these behaviors.
 - 3) Identify what resources might be available at home and which may be developed at school.
 - 4) Decide how to teach said behaviors.
 - 5) Label other choices the child may make.
 - 6) What would encourage the child to repeat the successful behavior and create a positive change?

- Freedom always comes with a choice and with responsibility. We need to teach this to children.