

Module 6-The Context of Poverty

In the Resources Section there is a recently published article by Dr. Scot Rademaker that gives a good introduction and way of understanding the context of poverty through the Learner Report, which was the key assignment in the EDCO 200 course. If you have not completed the Learner Report or want a refresher, please access the article. Also, reading through the Jensen (2009) text might also assist you in the process of reviewing this topic. Below are several key points related to understanding the context of poverty.

What is SES?

1. SES is an abbreviation for Socio-Economic Status.
2. Total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on 3 factors
 - a. Income
 - b. Education
 - c. Occupation

Implications of SES (Jensen)

1. Lower SES Parents tend to give more orders to their children compared to higher SES parents who tend to interact and play more with their children
 - a. Lower SES children have weaker language skills comparatively
2. Lower SES students have lower academic achievement
3. This creates teacher biases and stigmas
 - a. Beware of the self-fulfilling prophecy...

Important Points about Context (Jensen):

1. Context = assets + challenges that influence the resilience teeter-totter
2. Some are "stronger" than others
3. Some are easier to spot than others
4. They can either "protect" or "challenge" students
5. The "sum" effect of contexts determines student resilience

Effects of Stressors from Poverty on Students (Jensen):

1. Linked to 50% of all absences.
2. Impairs attention and concentration.
3. Reduces cognition, creativity, and memory.
4. Diminishes social skills and social judgment.
5. Reduces motivation.
6. Increase the likelihood of depression.
7. Reduces neurogenesis.

Effects on Health and School Behavior as a Result of Living in Poverty (Jensen):

1. School absences.
2. Duration (how long a student stays in school).
3. Tardiness rates.
4. Illness (asthma)
5. Health problems (obesity, malnutrition).

Module 6-Context of Poverty

You should read/use this article for a deeper understanding of the context of poverty as it applies to the information listed above. You could also use the articles in the References section to further research this area.

Citation:

Rademaker, S. (2015). SHAREing is caring: A practical teacher's guide for understanding children affected by poverty. *Focus on Inclusive Education, 91* (2), 42-46

SHAREing is Caring: A Practical Teacher's Guide for Understanding Children Affected by Poverty

Introduction

In the United States, 16 million children live with families that have incomes below the poverty line (NCCP, 2014). The effects of poverty on children going to school include increased absenteeism, increased dropout rates, cognitive deficits, emotional and social challenges, and health and safety issues (Jensen, 2009; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Schellinger, & Taylor, 2011; Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012; Gottfried, 2014). A higher prevalence rate of students with learning disabilities is found in school districts of poverty when compared to more affluent school districts (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014). More specifically, minority students living in poverty are one and a half times more likely to be identified as having a learning disability or receive special education services (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002). Additionally, many teachers who have not experienced poverty often have difficulty understanding the negative factors associated with poverty and how it affects their students in the classroom (Grant & Gillete, 2006; Bierman, et al., 2010).

Therefore, concentrating on a deeper understanding of the factors related to children in poverty, as well as how those factors combine to negatively influence a student's learning becomes essential for any teacher in a school of poverty (Haberman, 1995; Bierman et al., 2010). The following How-to Guide related to understanding children in poverty was derived from the work of Jensen (2009; 2013) and is seen as a way to gather data in the tier one stage of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model in order to prevent students from being misidentified as needing special education services by having the teacher gather the facts, reflect on their meaning, and suggest possible remediation to the issues being exhibited.

The How-To Guide

Context Analysis and SHARE Factors

The main component of the guide is based on the SHARE model from Jensen's (2009) text, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. The various components of the table are essential to your understanding students in poverty. Along with the information associated within the category, there are several essential questions you as a teacher should ask in order to garner a deeper understanding of the student within the SHARE model. The information should then be synthesized, summarized, and recorded using the format in Table 1.

Additionally, while using this section you should examine the various components of the SHARE model as they are related your students' school, classroom, and your own individual contribution to the concept. The information for the table can be gathered from publicly available data on the school, introspection on your own classroom practices, and reflection on your own role within the category of understanding (a more detailed outline of how to reflect meaningfully is included in a subsequent section). You can then to analyze the information gathered and, based on the SHARE model, develop some ideas about how certain services could be improved (the two analysis questions at the end of Table 1). The data gathering process will hopefully lead to a more authentic understanding of the context of the school and the issues that their student encounters.

The SHARE Model

- The S stands for “supporting the whole child” (Jensen, 2009, p. 69), which includes all non-academic supports for the child. For example, the school could provide meals, facilitate mentoring programs, or afterschool sports. The essential questions include (but are not limited to):
 - What supports are being provided by the school?
 - What supports are being provided by the community?
 - How are these supports interconnected?
 - What are some context specific challenges related to the support being provided (e.g. funding, environment, etc.)?
 - What are individual teachers doing to facilitate or assist with the supports that are present?
 - What supports can the families provide?

- The H stands for “hard data” (Jensen, 2009, p. 69). State, district, school, and classroom data should be used to make informed decisions about students’ progress. Thinking of the students as individuals with specific learning needs can help tremendously when it comes to teaching in a more efficient manner. The essential questions include (but are not limited to):
 - What individual data do you have on your student (formative or summative data)?
 - What are some of their academic strengths?
 - What are some of their academic challenges?
 - How do your students’ scores compare to the school or the state data?
 - How do your students’ scores differ in your classroom?

- The A stands for “accountability (ways students learning is modified or improved)” (Jensen, 2009, p. 80). This is the data gathering process in action. This important concept here is related to the direct responsibilities taken by teachers and students and how they are held accountable for their actions. The essential questions include (but are not limited to):
 - What are the conditions like in your classroom in terms of creating a sense of responsibility for your students (e.g. classroom rules, roles, and tasks)?
 - What are the differences between your classroom and the students’ home life?
 - How can you foster individual student responsibility in your classroom and school?

- The R stands for “relationship building” (Jensen, 2009, p. 86). Creating stable and caring relationships with your students is not always easy, but it is an essential part of that student’s school experience and allows for a comfortable environment where learning can take place (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). Often a school is the one place where students get the attention and concern they need and this should be fostered by the teacher. The essential questions include (but are not limited to):
 - How are students interacting in the school and in your classroom?
 - What is your relationship like with your students?
 - How can you improve the relationship building process between you and your students?

- Finally, the E stand for “enrichment mind-set” (Jensen, 2009, p. 94) or how is your school nurturing students’ engagement in a dynamic learning process. For children in poverty, being able to match the content to their interests, as well as to the personality of the teachers, becomes important to the development and growth related to their learning process. This could include a teacher bringing in examples of how certain content relates to the interests in their own lives or experiences from their past. This allows for the connection between one’s personal life and one’s professional life. The essential questions include (but are not limited to):
 - How are you promoting an enrichment mindset in your classroom?
 - What activities are you conducting to engage students?
 - What are you seeing in other classrooms that promote this concept?
 - What can you do to improve your classroom culture?

Now that you have completed your analysis, arrange the information in Table 1 using bulleted or short-hand format.

Afterwards, answer the two analysis questions at the end of the table.

Table 1

Data Collection Format

SHARE Factor	School	Classroom	You
(S)Support the whole child: Non-academic supports for your student			
(H) Hard data: Information about your student’s learning.			
(A) Accountability: Ways your student’s learning is monitored and improved.			
(R) Relationship: Examples of relationship-building and positive relationships			
(E)Enrichment Mindset- Examples of enrichment opportunities in and outside the classroom.			
<u>Analysis question 1:</u> Based on the information above, is the SHARE model being implemented well for your student? In what ways? Explain.			

Analysis question 2: Based on the information above, what is one important thing the school or classroom could do to improve SHARE for your student?

Note. The above table was adapted from Jensen’s (2009) SHARE model for use as an assessment and was developed by faculty at Winthrop University in a course for teacher candidates.

Analysis of the Data

Now that you’ve collected your data and have a good idea of the profile of your students living in poverty, you should be able to select what assets and challenges these students might have as it relates to their academic success. This information is essential for adapting your teaching and interactions with your students. In Table 2, list the top three assets and challenges based on the information you gathered in Table 1. The list might not be replete, but narrowing down the information to its most essential pieces can be beneficial and allow for a more concise profile of your students. This information will help you focus your reflection and your potential action steps (see below).

Table 2

Format for Analyzing your SHARE Data

Based on the information above information, analyze your student’s most relevant assets and challenges. List your student’s three most important developmental assets and challenges below.

Assets for Success	Challenges to Success
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Note. The above table was adapted from Jensen’s (2009) SHARE model for use in an assessment developed by faculty at Winthrop University in a course for teacher candidates.

Reflection on Practice and Potential Action(s)

Although the data gathering and synthesizing process is a key component of practice for any teacher of students in poverty, it means little if the teacher is unable to reflect on the meaning of the data in terms of how it fuels their ability to become a more effective and caring teacher. These reflections should lead to action. Below the process for reflection and some suggestions from Jensen on potential action steps in the classroom are provided.

Reflection Process

The reflection process is an essential piece of any teacher’s practice. It allows the individual to examine, free from retort, their thoughts, feelings, and consternations about what is going on with their students and within their classrooms (Cunliffe, 2004). This exercise is particularly important when dealing with stressful situations or attempting to understand something that you have not encountered before or something extremely complex, such as working in a high poverty school. Although there are many ways to reflect, one valuable technique is journaling with a set series of open-ended questions. Reflecting does not have to be painful, in fact it can be a forum to vent or critically analyze your beliefs or simply document what is happening and how events change. The reflection process might also include you free writing about your experience or an ongoing happening. Below, in Figure 1, is one suggestion on how to facilitate this process as it relates to incidents that occur in your classroom and the questions you could ask as part of your reflection process.

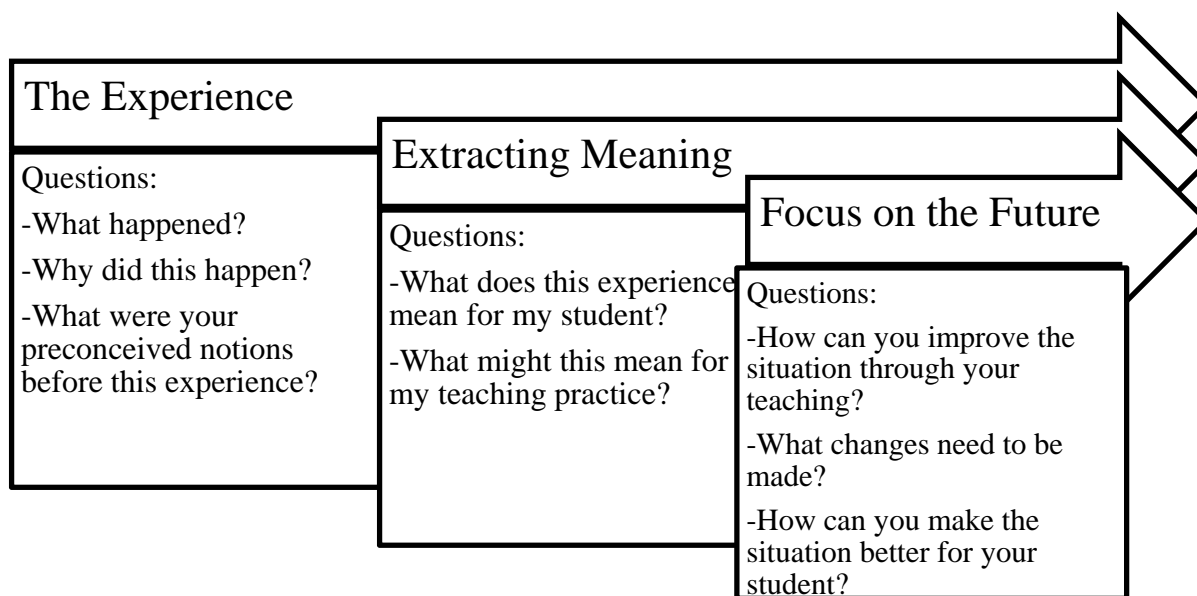


Figure 1. The reflection process adapted from Marchel (2013).

Action Steps

The action steps that could be taken based on the data and the reflexive process will vary greatly across schools, contexts, and environments. Students will interact differently with the factors of poverty affecting them and as teachers we must keep an open mind about how to act. However, Jensen (2013) does suggest several strategies for building a

foundation with students and engaging them in success both socially and cognitively. This does not mean that all students will react in the same way to these strategies, but instead that certain steps can be taken in order to facilitate the process of relationship building and enhancing cognitive capacity. Table 3 lists the category of the rules to follow (in bold), along with a listing of the rules and their subsequent description.

Table 3

Strategies for Students in Living in Poverty

The Five Rules of Engagement	
1. Upgrade your attitude.	Keep a positive, optimistic attitude towards students.
2. Build relationships and respect.	Students need to connect with teachers and creating those relationships is an essential component of reducing stress.
3. Get buy-in.	Sell their learning to them. Show them why they will need this in the future.
4. Embrace clarity.	Demonstrate the big picture and order details in a logical fashion.
5. Show your passion.	Show students that you are teaching because you LOVE to teach.
Five Actions to Build Cognitive Capacity	
1. Build attention skills.	Don't assume students know how to pay attention, practice incorporating attention techniques in your teaching.
2. Teach problem solving and critical thinking.	This strategy can increase student achievement and allow students a valuable tool for future use in their school career.
3. Training working memory.	This can help students pay meaningful attention in class and reinforcing this skills can be an asset for students.
4. Develop processing speed.	Similar to the strategies above, honing the rate at which students' process information can help them academically.
5. Foster self-control.	As a teacher you can assist your students in maintaining self-control in class, while still making the lesson being taught active and fun.

Note. The information on the table was adapted from Jensen (2013).

Conclusions

There is no one solution for working with children in poverty. The stressors and impact factors related to a higher prevalence rate of disability persist despite the best efforts of educators and advocates. However, individual teachers can make a difference and make data-based decisions about all of their students in poverty and put the focus on the individual child and his or her needs instead of relegating them to special education services needlessly. Often this means closely examining information about the student and, just as important, one's own teaching practices and the methods by which students are taught and incorporated in the classroom. The hope is that teachers will understand that they are not alone in this quest to understand children in poverty and that sharing information can make a difference in the lives of their students.

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