

Mitigating the Effects of Poverty through the Developmental Pathways

Poverty is a malignant blemish upon the social fabric of the United States of America. It is pervasive in that no region or locale is immune to its effects. The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University reported that 16% of American children lived in poverty in 2001. While the percentage is ominous enough, it is only when you look at the raw number that the scope of the problem comes into focus. According to NCCP the number of children in America who lived in poverty during 2001 was almost 12,000,000 and that number has not markedly improved (Hsien-Hen, 2003).

Educators throughout the country deal with children of poverty or from low-income families everyday. What can be done to mitigate the effects of poverty? This paper will examine the developmental pathways identified by Dr. James Comer and addressed in the School Development Program (SDP).

The authors will show that when educators incorporate an understanding of the six developmental pathways into the educational setting the effects of poverty can be mitigated to a degree. The authors will also correlate the six developmental pathways to the seminal work of Dr. Ruby Payne in the area of understanding poverty.

The six developmental pathways

According to Dr. James Comer, "when children are developing well, they learn well" (1999, p. *xix*). The SDP has been used with great success in low-income schools with large percentages of minority students. While most of the school districts that have adopted the SDP are found in urban areas, the program has been implemented in suburban and rural areas as well. At Drury University, the authors incorporate information about the SDP in all teacher education courses resulting in teacher education

graduates who are well-founded upon the principles of the program, even if they teach in schools which have not formally adopted the SDP.

One of the most crucial areas of the SDP is that of the developmental pathways. Too often educators focus only upon the physical or cognitive development of children, and as we are aware, children of poverty frequently lag behind in these areas. According to developmental pathways theory children not only develop physically and cognitively, they also develop socially, ethically, psychologically, and linguistically. Educators must focus their attention upon each of these areas for children to develop well.

Comer and Payne

What do the developmental pathways have to do with poverty? According to Dr. Ruby Payne poverty is usually described in terms of financial resources only, not taking into account emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical resources (1998). The lack of support systems, relationships, and role models contribute to the despair that many children experience in poverty. It is precisely these items that the SDP seeks to provide. In so doing, the devastating effects of poverty can be mitigated to a degree and children can develop well.

The authors firmly believe that the SDP and its emphasis upon the six developmental pathways represents one of the best methods to mitigate the effects of poverty while also enhancing the development of children of all socio-economic classifications.

References:

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