

Educating Children of Poverty: Recommendations for Teachers, Administrators, and All Educators

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Recommendations for Teachers

1. Acknowledge students' growth wherever they start. It gives hope and builds confidence. Ask yourself if this is a poverty issue at the root of a student's struggling. Examine how it may hold them back. Look at where they come from and praise successes from there.
2. Reflect on your own biases. Recognize poverty as a diversity issue. It is a way of life and may not be obvious. Pay attention to class issues like you would for obvious differences, like race or gender.
3. Make the classroom comfortable. Start on the first day by stating everything clearly even if you think everyone already knows or that the information is obvious.
4. Be approachable. Don't just assume students will come to you for help. Open the door for students who aren't used to talking to a teacher. Tell them in class that you really want to help them succeed and your door is open for any questions no matter what. Walk there with them. Show them how to find you. Call them by their first name and make a point to get to know them.
5. Diversify your curriculum and make education relevant to not only the lives of middle-class students. Include experiences of people who are poor and incorporate concrete, oral culture learning styles.
6. Remember if your students can't learn your subject it's your responsibility. Examine ideas about who can learn and what is the role of the educator in the learning process. Find out who in your class is struggling or doesn't seem to be fully participating. Talk to them, link them in. Ask people what is difficult for them (both privately and in class).
7. Know not everyone is the same. Don't assume everyone shares middle class expectations.
8. Help students become aware of resources such as tutoring, social services, scholarships, mentor programs, and housing. Make it a class assignment to find resources and report back. Have the right attitude and show a willingness to help.
9. Share your stories of how you came to be educated and have others in the class share theirs.
10. Join a support group for teachers who also work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendations for Administrators

1. Use policies to serve people, not to punish and exclude them. Rethink rules and broaden to include poverty realities.
2. Make sure there are scholarships or funds to support students in need.
3. Understand that without meaningful help, students from poverty will not get an education.
4. Mandate poverty-sensitivity training for all staff.

5. Support and reward teachers for exploring the subject of poverty.
6. Don't overfill classrooms. Give teachers time to connect with students.
7. Create a climate that recognizes the injustices of poverty.
8. Get more services on site specific to the needs of students from poverty.

Recommendations for all Educators

1. Don't ignore poverty realities. They won't go away. Address the real situations people are in. Connect with people. Build relationships and trust. This demands more time and energy.
2. Encourage further education more than low-wage jobs. Know about financial aid process and be able to simplify and help students from poverty see possibilities.
3. Develop programs that meet people's basic needs so they can focus on education. Funded extracurricular activities focused on ensuring that students can read and understand math and science.
4. Work to change negative perceptions of people who are in poverty. Build relationships and understanding with them instead of judging. Operate on the assumption that people in poverty are doing the best they can in their situations. Understand each case and do not label people. Get rid of stereotypes.
5. Change some rules. Make the rules less based on middle class values and priorities. Understand what the world of poverty is like. Study cases and change the criteria to fit the realities.
6. Be more aggressive with outreach for access to health care, housing, and basics needs for those experiencing poverty.
7. Understand that people who are poor may have fears or negative attitudes about education. Work to give them a new positive frame of reference.
8. Help with life skills and fitting into middle class culture. Help to understand what is normal behavior in that culture. Uncover the secret codes. They need to know what do you eat, how do you talk, dress, act, and speak in middle-class environments. Set up mentor programs where it's safe to ask questions about these things as well as health care, basic needs and education.
9. Be an advocate and make connections for people who do not have networks of support.