

Schools inflicted with poverty



**ASSIGN
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HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS THAT BEAT THE ODDS There is a close link between poverty and reading achievement. performance in the end-of-grade literacy tests in schools can be predicted fairly accurately if one knows the number of students qualifying for free and subsidized lunches”. However some schools have proved this wrong. Patricia M. Cunningham investigated the factors that allowed some schools to “ beat the odds”. The research was done through observation, interviews and an ‘ important-factors’ survey. The schools surveyed catered to different ethnic groups, with the number of children “ qualifying for free lunches ranging between 68 to 98 percent”. The six schools surveyed had fared well in their respective state literacy tests “ recording between 68 to 89 percent of students who had either met or exceeded their state’s standard of proficiency”. All six schools used the ‘ Four Blocks Framework’ for balanced literacy. Having established the common strain in all six schools, the writer then identified 12 factors that are important for high academic achievement and set about studying how these factors functioned in these six schools. These 12 factors are, assessment; community involvement; comprehensive curriculum; engagement instruction; leadership; materials; parent participation; perseverance and persistence; professional development; real reading and writing; and specialist support.

Assessment needs to be devised in a manner that it guides instruction, the community members must assist the school in its instructional task.

Curriculum should be centered on the basics in the primary stage but must not exclude science and social studies totally. There has to be a high level of student engagement in the literacy activities if real learning has to take place. Teachers have to devise a method for one-to-one instruction and

monitoring even while teaching the whole class. A strong leadership “embodied in a committed, passionate and hands-on Principal” is a prerequisite for any school wanting to achieve its goals. Schools must have adequate material and resources for effective instruction. Parent participation in literacy activities enhances the effectiveness of the system. Perseverance and persistence is required no matter which method of instruction is followed, since the results will begin to show only after a reasonable period of time. Professional development of teachers cannot be ignored. Teachers need to upgrade their skills constantly. To become good readers and writers, students must actually spend a lot of time reading and writing. The ‘Four Blocks Framework’ encourages just that. Teachers need to get specialist support in and out of the classroom. Special teachers can be used to provide something ‘extra’ to both teachers and students.

After having identified these factors, Cunningham asked teachers of the six schools she was visiting to rank the factors they considered most important. Although all the factors the inherent to a good school system, instruction, reading and writing, perseverance and persistence, and engagement emerged as the more important factors. Learning a lesson from these six successful schools, other high poverty schools may do well to give priority to the four elements identified above.

While Pat Cunningham has studied all the factors that are intrinsic to good academic achievement, she has overlooked the role played by the student-teacher relationship. A positive student-teacher relationship is pivotal in elevating students’ performance, especially in schools that have children from poor families. Some of the factors related to poverty that put a child in the high-risk category for academic failure are low educational level of

parents, alcoholism, abuse, financial instability and unemployment. A child reared in a negative environment almost always suffers from low self-esteem that translates into poor academic performance, which in turn does not allow the child to break free from the cycle of poverty. It becomes incumbent on the teacher who may be at times, the only positive influence in the child's life to create a caring and nurturing classroom environment for the child. A sensitive and safe environment can alleviate a child's problems. Teachers must also work at making the curriculum relevant to the child's needs, providing him with meaningful learning experiences of which he may otherwise be deprived of. A single visit to the zoo or the museum may suffice at times. Teachers must help these children to set goals for themselves and help develop their problem solving skills through role-playing. Learning by doing would be the most effective method in these cases where their sensory, motor and cognitive skills are used to bring about the desired change.

Bibliography

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