Achievement
Low Socio-Economic Groups

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Acknowledgement

• This presentation is adapted from:
Outline

UNDERSTANDING THE STUDENT IN CONTEXT

- The role of the teacher
- Health and Nutrition
- Mindset
- Cognitive capacity
- Relationships within the family
- Stress Level
Teaching makes a difference

“Teaching matters more than any other factor in a student’s school years.” (Hanushek, 2005)

“...quality teaching can completely offset the devastating effects poverty has on students’ academic performance.” (Hanushek, 2005)
“If you are serious about helping kids succeed, stop wishing for a miracle. Five years of strong teaching is the miracle.” [Jensen, 2013: p8].
Health and Nutrition of children in poverty

- lower birth weight,
- nutrition problem,
- health issues not attended to in a timely manner,
- higher incidence of asthma
- untreated infections
- poorly maintained homes
- ‘food insecure’, skipping breakfast which is one of the most important meal of the day.

- Poor nutrition at breakfast affects gray-matter mass in kids’ brains (Taki, 2010).

- Deficiencies in minerals are linked to weaker memory

- Low levels of certain nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids are linked to depression.
Health and Nutrition

what poor children eat for breakfast

- Simple carbohydrates such as sugary cereals, pastries, PopTarts, pancakes, or fast food
- Wide fluctuations in blood sugar.
- No Breakfast?
Consequences

Unstable glucose levels, linked to weaker cognitive and behavioural outcomes (Wang, Szabo, & Dykman, 2004). Source: Jensen, p10

“... poor working memory and a weaker ability to link cause and effect.

although your students may know the behaviour rules, they won’t necessarily understand when and how those rules apply. [Jensen, 2013: P9]

Successful strategies

The school should take an active role in informing parents, irrespective of SES.

Informing parents should be part of the school communication strategy.
Vocabulary

• “A child’s vocabulary is part of his or her brain’s toolkit for learning, memory, and cognition.

• Words help children represent, manipulate, and reframe information.” [Jensen, p11].

• Hart and Risley (2003):

  Children of professional parents have twice as much word vocabulary compared to those from low socio economic status (SES)

• (Bracey, (2006):

  Even toddlers from middle and higher income groups use many more words when communication to their parents compared to those from lower classes
Efforts and Energy

Low SES

- viewed as: lacking motivation, lazy
- parents have similar attitudes.
- deficient, and have themselves to blame

Middle & Higher SES

- not reaching their potential.
- they have potential
- come from homes where they can get support.
- the circumstances that should be mended so as to help the child.
Many people living in poverty do value education, but situational constraints prevent them from taking full advantage of institutions such as schools. (Bernstein, Mishel, & Boushey, 2002).

- Students often do not value teachers who are seen as disconnected from their world and their culture.

- Similarly students who fail are those who experience a disconnect between the school world and their home life (Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010).

Culture of Poverty v/s Situational Constraints
Mind-Set

Fixed mindset.

- **intelligence** as a **fixed** attribute, either you have it or not.
- People are **smart** only when they **do not make any mistake**.
- **Children** who do not have the right answer refuse to speak.

Growth mindset

- **Mistake** is an **opportunity** to understand one’s own shortcomings, grow from them.
- **Extra effort** is needed to be able to do something they could not do before.

*ANYONE WHO HAS NEVER MADE A MISTAKE HAS NEVER TRIED ANYTHING NEW.*

Albert Einstein
Dweck: “there is no test score that “can measure you forever…We have a tendency to give a “test the power to define them” (our intelligence).

"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think."
- Albert Einstein

Dweck, Carol (2013). “Mindset: Changing the way you think”
Mindset

Fixed mindset

- students with fixed mindset had higher levels of depression—they viewed their setback as being incompetent or unworthy.

(Growth mindset)

- They believe that certain qualities can be developed.
- Failures hurt, but does not define them.
- They believe that if ability can be expanded, there are many paths to success.

“Fixed mindset students with fixed mindset had higher levels of depression—they viewed their setback as being incompetent or unworthy.”

(Dweck, 2103).
No matter what one’s ability, it is effort that turns ability into accomplishment (Dweck, 2103).
Mindset: asset or liability?

- “…. When both teachers and students believe that students have a fixed amount of “smarts” that cannot be increased, students are far more likely to disengage.

- Conversely, when students have positive attitudes about their own learning capacity, and when teachers focus on growth and change... student engagement increases.” [Dweck, p.13]
Cognitive Capacity - Poverty & Brain

- **Cognitive capacity**: The ability of children to assimilate and internalize the learning materials.

- **Poverty affects** the physical brain. The learning memory is smaller and this affects intelligence.

Children have **poor working memory** and struggle with verbal ability, have **short attention span**, highly distracted, **unable to find solutions** to problems [Jensen, 2013].
Relationships within the family

- Lack positive caregiving: fail to learn about appropriate positive emotional response.

- Lead to inappropriate school behaviours.

- Difficult for students to develop ability to work well in cooperative groups.

No one is born happy, but every one is born with the ability to create happiness.
Successful Strategies

- **Reframe your thinking:** expect that students may act “disrespectful” until you teach them otherwise.

- Expect kids to **test** their **boundaries** until they learn stronger social and emotional skills.

- They will exhibit **coarse behaviour** until the **relationships** you build and the **school’s social conditions** make it attractive for them not to behave **inappropriately**. [Jensen, 2013:16]
Stress can be defined as the body’s response to the perception of loss of control resulting from an adverse situation or person. (Jensen, 2013: 16).

The stress problem resides more among low income families. Parents tend to be more authoritarian with their children. More likely to inflict physical punishment (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001).
Influence children’s physical, psychological, emotional, and cognitive functioning, and brain development.

Impact on academic success and social competence (Evans, Kim, Ting, Tesher, & Shannis, 2007).

At school disruptive behaviour may be a result of such stressful home environment (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Inability of children to defer gratification (Evans, 2003).
Consequences

- Students resort to **aggression**, “in your face” behaviour - a means to feel in control and to take charge of a situation. They adopt a survival strategy of: “**fight first, ask questions later**”. [Jensen, 2013:17]

- An increased **detachment and hopelessness** over time (Bolland, Lian, & Formichella, 2005).

- Tend to **give up**, become **passive** and show **disinterest** in the school and classroom activities (Johnson, 1981).

- **Passive** school behaviour such as a **failure to respond** to questions or requests, **slumped posture**, and **disconnection** from peers or the class activities.
Consequences

- 'learned helplessness' - a tendency to give up and adopt a passive attitude in the face of adversity.

- develop a fatalistic attitude, the attitude that nothing much can be done about them and their future.

- Such children do not have any role model to aspire to.
Successful Strategies

- **Schools** and **teachers** should make a deliberate effort to **teach appropriate coping skills** and **stress relieving techniques** that would decrease hostility.

- **Give students responsibilities** that help them feel a sense of control over their daily lives at school.
Rules of Engagement: Strategies you can use to engage students
Outline:

Working with children in poverty:
- Upgrading your attitude.
- Building relationships and respect.
- Getting buy-in.
- Embracing clarity.
- Showing your passion.
Rule #1: Upgrade Your Attitude

Embracing a new, **positive attitude**.
From

“*I hope I get a good batch of kids this year?*”

to

“*I know the kids I get are going to love the new engagement strategies I’ll be using this year*.”
An Ex-Teacher

I met a person at the bus stop, well dressed and looking clearly settled in a good position. He came across me and called me by my name. He happened to be an ex-student. I was surprised to hear that this man in his 30s still remembered the mathematics class he was exposed to when he was 13 years old in the second year of secondary schooling.

He reminded me of the maths corner that I had created in his class. He still believed that the maths corner was created to help children like him. He told me that today he is an engineer and I might see him in action at the airport giving the green signal for the pilot to take off.

Here was a student who was in a low achieving school, someone who was viewed as a failure and who had almost given up hope to do mathematics, now a qualified professional where maths is probably the most essential subject.

I realized that something that I might done, very much beyond my knowledge, had made a difference.
Believe

Low-SES students in particular need you to believe in them so that they can believe in themselves.
Developing simple skills

- Encourage and **support for showing up on time**.

- **Simple instruction** of being **seated on time**, and later on for **contributing in class** needs to be carefully addressed.

- **No matter how simple** they may appear, these are part of the social skills that **children should be taught** how to acquire.
Suggestions

• Ask students to **stand and stretch**.
• Ask them to take in a **slow deep breath**, hold it, and then **slowly exhale** all, and while doing so, **feel the stress getting out** and the body feel lighter.
• Students can be asked to **identify something they were just taught** by pointing to the appropriate wall poster.
• Create a **problem situation** and ask them to **try solve them** together in a **small group**.
• They can be taught to **conduct and complete a quiz**, even **mark themselves** and **use** the marking for some sort of **grading at class level**.
Will it work?

- You may fail or attain your objectives to some extent.
- You should be allowed to fail.
- It was not what you tried, but how you prepared for it that matters.

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston Churchill
Rule #2: Build Relationships and Respect

“...students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. Students who have positive relationships with their teachers experience less stress, behave more appropriately, and feel more excited about learning. Students almost always work harder for teachers they like” (Cornelius-White & Harbaugh, 2010).
Student background

- Many different life experiences.
- **Never received any praise** for something they have achieved.
- Sent to school to ‘buy time’
- They feel that **teachers do not care** for them, but have a job to do so as to earn their salary.
Help to build a success story

- Put in an idea of a **dream they can build** for themselves “...one day I will be proud of what I have achieved. **Can you think of yourself what you will be in 10 years’ time?**”

- **Create a space** where they can **write their thoughts** about themselves in the future.

**Future time sheet**

- Call it a **Future time sheet** and let them **write** a statement about themselves on it **anytime they feel like**.
Future Time Sheet

- Lay down the **rule for using** it: write your comment on it and just stick it. No need to write your name.

- **Review** it every day and make a **positive comment** about every statement.

- **Create posters** about their dreams, hobbies, family, neighborhood, problems, and passions.

Make a **motivation class**.
- **Build a language, Maths or Science class** around it.
“To earn your students’ respect, you must respect them. You don’t need to like your students’ world, but never disparage or criticise a student’s background, heritage, or culture. You must integrate students’ cultural and social capital into any goals or criteria for success you set for them” (Putnam, 2000).
Integrate student’s cultural and social capital into the classroom

- Create an **opportunity** for children **to speak** about themselves.
- Single out something they did and would like to **share to the class**.
- Find a way to **bring out the value of her/his story** and **thank her/him** for presenting it.
- Find ways to **strengthen** that experience by **providing what else s/he could do** in future.

Every Child Matters

“We have to do more both to protect children and ensure each child fulfils their potential. Security and opportunity must go hand in hand.”
Grade- shift from core to periphery

- When children cannot achieve good grades, they do not make grade a high priority.
- Would you care to collect a paper where you have failed?
- Will parent come over to hear about their kids are failures.
- They will be asked to support the child, a skill that they believe they do not possess.
Engage

- Engage students in exercise that the child prefers
- Set targets for improvement.
- Do not set targets that they cannot achieve for the moment.
- Teachers can set different academic goals using the skills that the child possess as a basis to proceed.

Teachers collaborate to achieve their goals.
Class project

- Students can participate in a **class project** which they **slowly build** at their **own pace** around a theme.

- Every now and then ask them to **speak about it**.

- Help them to make a **comment**, and **write** it if possible.

- Use the corner to **assign a mark to the class** and **individual marks** to each child who demonstrates her/his contribution.
Am I creating an activity that would run the risk of making students uncomfortable?

Will the task embarrass them if they fail at it?

How do I define success so as not to make students feel that they are a failure?

Therefore you should

Set the criteria for success on the basis of what they can achieve.

Make this criteria clear at the start.
Language

- Be **conscious of** your interactive language.
- Make **eye contact** and do not miss to draw to the good in them.
- When they are off track, **refocus** your question **without** necessarily **dismissing** what they said.
- Help them to **understand that something else is required** as an answer.
Model appropriate behaviour

- Students need to be exposed to a model of appropriate behaviour.
- Use the same language with them that you would want them to learn how to use when addressing you.
- Use of respectful words and phrases like “please”, “thank you”, “we can do it at your convenience”, or “when you have a moment”.

Always think about the future that the child will imagine for her/himself through the way you address them.

Does your treatment of the child offer a hope for him/her with a future that might change her/his life?
Rule # 3: Get Buy-In

- The teacher’s job is to “sell” the learning to the children.

- Tell the students why they should learn something and how relevant it is for them

- Take time to make a weekly assessment of learning gain and how you would wish to proceed
Why children go to school

- Because their friends are there

- School is often seen as an obligation even by the parent

- The rule obliges children to be at school.
“At least try the next step”

- The child is **allowed to make mistake**, 
- **Only good answer** will deter students from **trying**.
- If the task is challenging, it appeals to the self-esteem of the child to prove his/her worth, it will provide its own motivation.
- There should be **no issue of good or bad answer**, but a recognition that the child is **ready to try**.

No matter how many **mistakes** you make or how slow you progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn’t trying.

*Tony Robbins*
Strategies that work

• “If you finish on time, I will add additional marks on your behaviour chart that will count in the final assessment on the non-core areas”.
• Occasionally bring in some elements of competition,
• Reward: Use continuous assessment and incentive scheme: some additional marks on the final examination.
• “Work in small teams and see which one gets the solution first”: success builds self-esteem and status.
• Use ‘Homework Pass’ to skip a homework once a month.
• Provide incentive to attend extra PE classes in lieu of classwork for those who have earned credits through consistent work.
• Use goals that are more meaningful to students.
• Good grades should be a by-product, not the central concern.
Respect

- Do not put them into **embarrassing situations** by dismissing their contribution in front of their peers.
- Do **not dismiss** their answer, but say that you want more answers.
- Find out if you can **bring out** a few **positive** elements what they answer,
Rule #4: Embrace Clarity

- Plan with purpose, and think through the lesson from the student’s point of view
- Use **fewer words**. …pause instead of adding more words.
- Say what you do want from students, not what you don’t want
- Focus on positive, desired behaviour
- Give clear, simple directions
Rule #5: Show Your Passion

- Passionate teachers get their message across not only with words but also with body language.
- As teachers, you can positively affect students’ states of mind simply by being in a positive state.
- Passion tells students that you care about what you do and that you’re connecting with them.
- And passion cannot be faked. If you’re not passionate in your teaching, your students will see right through you.
Solutions you can use

- Stay active. **Move around** your classroom; do not get stuck up front. Refer to posters on the wall, use props, and gesticulate dramatically.
- **Vary your voice** purposefully
- **Vary your tone** and add pauses
- Keep your **eyes focused on students**. Avoid looking at your computer, notes, desk, or any other nonstudent destination
- Be positive. **Focus on what you want to happen** rather than the negatives.

What about yourself?

- **Use music** that gets you excited.
- Wear **comfortable** shoes, practice healthy habits,
- Use **positive self-talk** to stay relaxed and focused.
Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.

Lyndon B. Johnson