*Teaching with Poverty in Mind* Study Guide

Chapter 1: Understanding the Nature of Poverty

* Relative poverty is the most prevalent type of poverty at my school. The fact that the book even categorizes poverty into different types allows a deeper understanding of the people behind the circumstance.
* It gives teachers a reason to keep in mind that the certain behaviors, typical of low-SES children, they perceive as “acting out,” is often the symptom of the effects of poverty and indicates a condition such as a chronic stress disorder.
* One way that poverty can affect the students at my school is due to issues of transportation, health care, and family care, high tardy rates and absenteeism are common problems among poor students. Some strategies that might help my school to ameliorate these challenges include, but are not limited to: deepening staff understanding; changing the school culture from pity to empathy; consistent respect for your students; and using positive affirmation.

Chapter 2: How Poverty Affects Behavior and Academic Performance

* Children raised in poverty are more likely to display: “acting-out” behaviors; impatience and impulsivity; gaps in politeness and social graces; a more limited range of behavioral responses; inappropriate emotional responses; and less empathy for others’ misfortunes. This can lead to these children becoming isolated outsiders, acting out and being constantly disciplined for it, and harboring feelings that they do not belong. My colleagues and I can change our behavior to better embody respect, embed social skills, and be inclusive.
* Students will desire the drive for reliable friendships, but they will settle for an “iffy” friend if that is all that is available. However, this is where the teacher can play a key role as a consistent mentor. Students will also pursue the strengthening of peer socialization through joining groups, clubs, cliques, or gangs. By encouraging and aiming to improve student achievement and accepting academic success, you can help that student identify as “belonging” somewhere.
* Students subjected to such stress may lack crucial coping skills and experience significant behavioral and academic problems in school. This stress is linked to over 50 percent of all absences; impairs attention and concentration; reduces cognition, creativity, and memory; diminishes social skills and social judgment; reduces motivation, determination, and effort; increases the likelihood of depression; and reduces neurogenesis (the growth of new brain cells). To alleviate these effects of chronic stress in students your role as a teacher is to recognize the signs; alter the environment; and empower students.
* The correlation between socioeconomic status and cognitive development can be significant. Some of the effects of poverty on cognitive development that can be observed in school include: underdeveloped cognitive, social, and emotional competence in later childhood and have been shown to be increasingly important influences on vocabulary growth, IQ, and social skills. This is shown through the low-SES kids who often earn below-average scores in reading, math, and science and demonstrate poor writing skills. Teachers should be building core skills (attention and focus skills; short- and long-term memory; sequencing and processing skills; problem-solving skills; perseverance and ability to apply skills in the long term; social skills; and hopefulness and self-esteem); and pinpoint assignments.
* The greater incidence of health issues among lower-income students leads to increased school absences, duration of absences, tardiness rates, incidents of illness during class, and rates of undiagnosed and/or untreated health problems or disabilities. To combat this the school must be willing to increase health-related services and develop an enrichment counterattack.

Chapter 3: Embracing the Mind-Set of Change

* Neuroplasticity is the quality that allows region-specific changes to occur in the brain as a result of experience. Genes are capable of being active (expressed) or silent (not expressed). This all adds up to the fact that if brains can physically change, then we could possibly change one of the traditional measures of intelligence, IQ.
* When you change the environment to help express your students’ generalist genes, you get a broad, significant ripple effect on behavior and learning. But to get dramatic results, you must upgrade students’ brains’ “operating systems.”
* In order to strengthen the processes in your students’ academic operating systems you must have: the ability and motivation to defer gratification and make a sustained effort to meet long-term goals; auditory, visual, and tactile processing skills; attentional skills that enable the student to engage, focus, and disengage as needed; short-term and working memory capacity; sequencing skills (knowing the order of a process); and a champion’s mind-set and confidence.
* I do not believe that 100% of any staff will be united in the exact same belief system, but I do believe that everyone’s mindsets should be aligned in certain cases. A few ways to change your school’s collective mind-set include: investing in staff, supporting ongoing collaboration, encouraging staff dialogue, and gathering quality data.

Chapter 4: Schoolwide Success Factors

* Yes.
* Support of the whole child entitles that child to the appropriate accommodations to empower them as learners. Services that could be added to help low-SES kids succeed: academic and alternative tutoring; academic, career, or mental health counseling; access to medications; child care for teen parents; community services (housing and utilities); dental care; life skills classes in finances, health, housing, and so on; medical care, both urgent and long-term; psychology (diagnosis and therapy); reading materials; transportation for when students stay late for after-school help; free medical services (donated by a local hospital); free tutoring (provided by nearby university students who get academic or volunteer credits); free mental health services (by retired psychologists or therapists); and free books (donated).
* Our school most needs specific, ongoing data. The best way to do this is by selling teachers on the value of data so that they can teach smarter, not harder; creating a culture of continual data collection, analysis, and application; and emphasizing that using data to improve the teaching process is a sign of professionalism, not an acquiescence to failure. Once that is developed, your school would need to develop criteria for the data you need, gather only the data you need, analyze and share the data, and develop plans to apply the data.
* Ultimately, teachers will have to be held accountable, if they are going to commit to teaching “smarter,” and learn to adjust their practice on the fly to reach collective goals. The best way to achieve accountability is to create a compelling, collaborative goal and then to administer formative assessments that provide useful, specific data demonstrating progress toward that goal.
* Creating a staffwide enrichment mind-set and always looking for one more enriching edge are components of an enriched learning environment that can be incorporated into a school’s culture. By identifying the specific needs in your school and addressing them appropriately, so no preventable factor could have a negative impact on the students.
* However, teachers must be careful not to overdo the pep talks and hot air; plan endlessly; put the kids first and staff last; create a climate of fear; measure improvement solely through test scores; treat the symptoms, and not the causes; or count on big wins quickly.
* We have seen success come from schools that are high-performing and high-poverty because they decreased class size (thus building relationships and accountability); instituting career academies (thus providing enrichment); focusing on the future (thus providing hope); and providing extra help for students through tutoring and evening, weekend, and summer school programs (thus building the skills to upgrade students’ academic operating systems).

Chapter 5: Classroom-Level Success Factors

* Classroom-level success factors include: turning standards into meaningful units; pre-assess to determine students’ background knowledge; and adjusting your lesson plans. Schoolwide success factors include: inventory students and staff; implement 24/7 hope; and monitor results. As a teacher I will set to have influence over my classroom-level success factors, but once I have credibility I would like to build upon that to schoolwide success factors and then so much more.
* To an extent I agree with W. James Propham’s assertion. I believe there is a point to standard testing and that it can be come useful once again; however, in its current state I do not believe it is fulfilling the role it was originally designed for. Therefore, it is now, more than ever, up to the teachers to develop strategies for assessment that can give the most accurate and needed data.
* Hope changes brain chemistry, which influences behaviors. I see the entire scale of hope in my students. If teachers were more apt to using daily affirmations; asking to hear students’ hopes and offering reinforcement of those hopes; telling students specifically why they can succeed; providing needed academic resources; helping students to set goals and build goal-getting skills; telling true stories of hope about people to whom students can relate; offering help, encouragement, and caring as often as needed; teaching students life skills in small daily chunks; avoiding complaining about students’ deficits; treating all the kids in a class as potentially gifted; and building academic, emotional, and social assets in students.
* You can’t raise expectations without also raising students’ learning capacity. High-performing high-poverty schools not only add complex, challenging curriculum – including the arts, athletics, and advanced placement classes – but also add capacity to each student. The arts and a challenging curriculum enhance essential learning skills and cognition. In order to facilitate that change, your school must implement a strong arts program, step up the activity, and implement an advanced placement curriculum.
* I believe students should have wide array of options to get involved in because that is what they will have in life when they leave school. I think there are several after-school activities that can be implemented, as well requiring more integration of the arts in the classroom setting. There is no reason learning cannot be physically active, incorporate music, or challenge students.
* You can build a champion’s mind-set through modeling and by discussing biographies of relatable successful people and instilling optimism. You can build hopeful effort by listening to and encouraging students’ hopes and dreams and by teaching goal-setting and study skills. You can build attentional skills through project-based learning, inquiry, music training, and drama and theater arts. You can build memory through in-depth projects, music, and drama. You can build processing skills through such varied activities as music, cooking, writing, visual arts, critical thinking, and sports. You can build sequencing skills though such activities as music, cooking, projects, sports, and math.
* One of the most powerful ways to engage students is to let them take charge of their own learning. These students are more likely to find passion, excitement, and pleasure in learning. Find, recruit, and train the best staff you can find; gather information from students; communicate the evidence and make a plan; add a strategy each week and monitor progress. Specific strategies for teachers to implement include: switching up social groups; incorporate movement through learning stations, class switching, and assemblies; asking more compelling questions; appreciating and acknowledging every response; using energizers, games, drama, simulations, and other demonstration strategies; keeping the content alive with call-backs, hand riasers, stretching, and unfinished sentences and review questions; and being passionate about what you teach so that students are drawn into the emotional drama of the content.

Chapter 6: Instructional Light and Magic

* Before Class: collect data; plan; make personal preparations; create a positive physical environment. First 10 Minutes of Class Time: build relationships; getting started; boosting social status; taking care of administrative tasks; connecting with real life; jump-starting the brain. Core Class Time: making it relevant; building hope; building the operating system; getting physical; framing the content; delivering the content; elaborating and correcting errors. Last 10 Minutes of Class Time: strengthening memory; assigning homework; cleaning up; closing the day.
* Mr. Hawkins executes the classroom-level SHARE factors perfectly. There is always room for improvement, but he seems to have less of that to do than most.
* Mr. Hawkins is able to achieve so much more than a typical secondary-level class. He truly works, harder than most, to be creative in content. This allows him to have plenty of academic content in ways that are typically non-academic.
* I would hope my school expects all teachers to be excellent. We have one of the biggest roles to play in up to 30 something students’ lives. If we expect our students to be excellent, now and in the future, then we better have excellent teachers. I am always continuing to grow. I would like to say that I am a good teacher based on the gifts God has blessed me with and His calling to teach that He spoke into my life. My personal assessment of my own teaching will always change to be more in-depth and more challenging all the time.
* I will use every strategy that builds a stronger teacher. I will rely on constant self-evaluation, consistent and high expectations, and by being held accountable by those around me. I have already begun these techniques because I already know that I want to be a teacher. I will be accountable to God, myself, my students, my coworkers, my superiors, my subordinates, parents, and anyone else I encounter. There is no one who is not qualified to keep me accountable.