

POOR
STUDENTS,
RICHER
TEACHING

**MINDSETS THAT RAISE
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

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Introduction

The title of this book, *Poor Students, Richer Teaching*, suggests a rich and poor dichotomy. But it is also about something that many poor students are not getting: *richer* teaching. Here, the word *richer* means full, bountiful, and better than ever. Teachers can make a difference in students' lives with richer teaching. They can ensure all students, regardless of background, graduate college and career ready.

All of us have narratives in our head about teaching. In this book, I invite you to think of your work as richer and abundant. Teachers who struggle with poor students might have mentalities that reinforce scarcity, blame, and negativity. At school, there are poor narratives that educators circulate, often in subtle ways, sometimes throwing them in with a true statement. For example, a teacher may say, "Last year, I just couldn't make any progress with Jason. You know, *those students* just don't get any parental support, so *what can I do?*" Notice how the teacher ends with a story about why he couldn't make progress. In this book, you will discover the rich strategies that high-performing teachers use to defeat these narratives and help students succeed.

Year after year, your K–12 Title I school culture either reinforces hopelessness and assumptions that the deck is simply stacked against you or it fosters optimistic possibilities and successes with uplifting narratives. I could fill this book with stories of real high-poverty schools that are succeeding, as I have done in other books. Yet, how many schools would you need to read about before you say, "OK, that's enough. I believe it"? I hope reading this book helps to reframe any negative narratives you struggle to carry.

About This Book

In a moment, you'll dive into the first chapter. But first I will give you an overview of the resource in your hands. Books for educators typically just tell teachers what to do. This one is different because in chapter 1, I explain *why* the suggestions in this book are relevant, important, and most of all, *urgent*. Chapter 1 is about the *new normal* in the United States, making it the *why* of this whole process. Once you finish chapter 1, my guess is that you'll be on board for the rest of the book.

Then, the book moves forward into its major theme—developing the powerful tool for change: mindset. A mindset is a way of thinking about something. As Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck (2008) explains, people (broadly) think about intelligence in two ways: (1) either you have it or you don't, or (2) you can grow and change. In the areas of intelligence and competency, you may have more of a fixed mindset (stuck in place) or a growth mindset (capable of changing). Those with a fixed mindset believe intelligence and competency are a rigid unchangeable quality. Those with a growth mindset believe that intelligence and competency can develop over time as the brain changes and grows.

This book broadens and deepens the mindset theme to many new areas of student and teacher behaviors that you'll find highly relevant. The book continues in three parts, each highlighting a mindset.

Part one covers the positivity mindset. In chapters 2 through 7, you'll home in on your students' emotions and attitudes. Each chapter focuses on building your own rock-solid attitude of academic optimism in both your students and yourself. If you've ever put a mental limitation on any student (don't worry, we all have), these chapters are must-reads. You'll also see that brains can change, and you'll learn why positivity is so critical to your job. You'll learn the science behind hope, optimism, and gratitude. Without these life skills, you'll start losing students as they give less and less effort and sometimes even drop out. Your new, rock-solid positivity mindset will help your students soar.

Part two introduces the enrichment mindset. Chapters 8 through 13 focus on building breakthrough cognitive capacity in students. You'll see the clear, scientific evidence that shows, without a molecule of doubt, that change is possible. A big problem for students from poverty is their mental bandwidth, often known as cognitive load. Your students need a way to run their own brains better or this cognitive load makes them more likely to misbehave and struggle academically. Many students never get the skills of capacity building, but you can ensure yours build memory, thinking skills, vocabulary, and study skills.

Part three includes the graduation mindset. Chapters 14 through 17 help you focus on the gold medal in teaching: students who graduate job or college ready. Each chapter centers on school factors absolutely proven to support graduation. You'll learn the science of *why* these factors can be such powerful achievement boosters. Plus you'll discover a wide range of positive alternatives to what your students are doing at school.

Appendix A will help you put the implementation pieces in place. You get lesson-planning tools that show you how to design lessons with poverty in mind. Fostering the graduation mindset is the ultimate goal of this process. Appendix B offers some tips on the important process of running your own brain.

This book accompanies *Poor Students, Rich Teaching*, which covers four other mindsets to help students succeed. I have written four books on poverty, and there is still

much more transformative and practical information for me to share. The topic is *that* wide and deep. As you dive in to the upcoming pages, remember this: any resource on helping students from poverty will elicit a wide range of responses.

As you read this book, it will be up to you to pause and reflect often. Any single chapter can make a difference in your work. Ask yourself not, “Have I heard of this before?” but instead, “Do I already do this as a daily practice?” and “Do I do this well enough to get the results I want or need?” The fact is that all of us can get better. This book can take you down that path. Are you game?

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CHAPTER 1

THE NEW NORMAL

You have seen many changes in the United States in your lifetime. In this chapter, you'll discover the *new normal*. We typically say something is normal meaning it's *just fine* and pay less attention because we often take it for granted. We also say things are normal as if that is a good thing. But now I invite you to see the new normal as a threat to your job and your future. Poverty and mindsets (the topics of this book) play a big part of this new normal. No, this is no doomsday scenario. It is about what has *already* happened. You must know about this before you walk into your classroom again.

Hard Evidence of the New Normal

The economic changes are deepening and widening at an accelerating rate. Poverty in the United States is getting worse, not better. The new normal is this: we now have a majority of students in public schools who qualify as poor based on school data (Suitts, 2015). In the five most populated states (California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York), 48 percent *or more* of public school students are in poverty (Suitts, 2015). Pause and wrap your head around this.

But it gets worse. In 2009, in the fifty largest urban school districts in the United States, the average four-year graduation rate was a jaw-dropping 53 percent (Swanson, 2009). This new normal is a mindset game changer for everyone, especially educators. The trend is not our friend.

Also part of the new normal is the disappearing middle class. Gone are many good-paying jobs that required a high school diploma and hard work (manufacturing, mining, automobiles, oil and gas, and more). Technology (robots, automated websites, and smartphones) has replaced people for many of those jobs. Trucking is the most popular job in twenty-nine states (Bui, 2015). But Mercedes has successfully tested driverless eighteen-wheelers; those trucking jobs may be

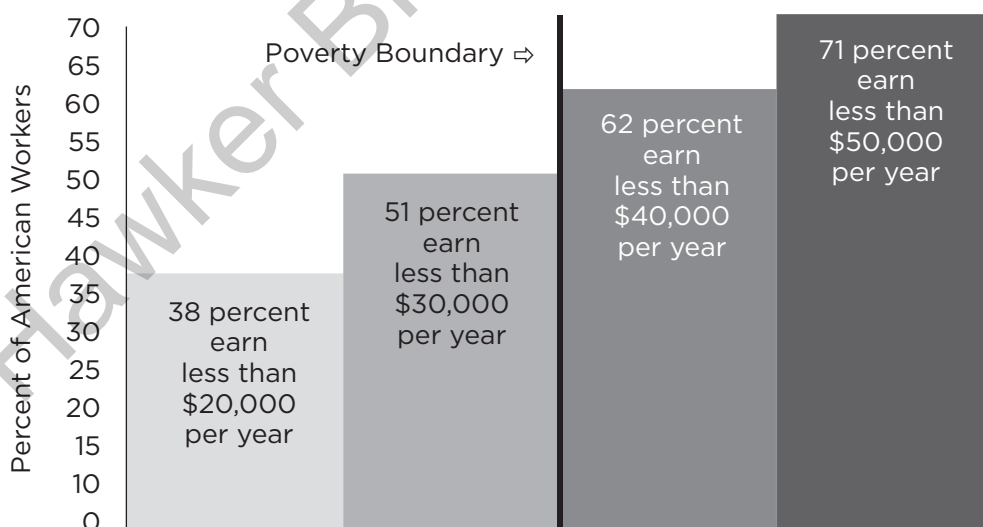
eliminated soon too. Imagine that: the number-one job in over half the states will be automated (Bui, 2015).

Often poverty occurs when the cost-of-living increase does not keep pace with inflation and real wages for the middle class and poor go down. Real middle-class annual wages (adjusted for inflation) have declined dramatically, from \$57,000 a year in 2000 to just under \$52,000 in 2014 (Economic Policy Institute, 2014). That means the average U.S. household has lost nearly 10 percent in wages to inflation since 2000. Even for the declining middle class, life has gotten harder.

Inflation consumes any increases to the consumer paycheck as the purchasing power of the dollar diminishes. The U.S. government continually changes the measuring index for inflation by adjusting the consumer price index. Using the government's original measures from 1986, inflation averages 9 percent annually (ShadowStats.com, 2016). Has your paycheck gone up 7 to 13 percent *every* single year? If not, no wonder you feel poor.

This is the new normal, and you're not alone. Roughly 76 percent of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, with essentially zero savings (Bankrate, 2012). The number of people on food stamps has doubled between 2008 and 2014 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, 2016). About half of all children born in 2015 will be on food stamps at some point in their lives (Rank & Hirschl, 2015).

Over half (51 percent) of all American workers make less than \$30,000 a year. The federal poverty level for a family of five is \$28,410, and yet almost 40 percent of all American workers do not even bring in \$20,000 a year (Social Security Online, 2016). See figure 1.1 for a breakdown of the new normal workforce.



Source: Social Security Online, 2016.

Figure 1.1: The new normal workforce in America.

Let me summarize this for you. From 2000 to 2014, the share of adults living in middle-income households fell in 203 of the 229 U.S. metropolitan areas. Think about that; in almost 90 percent of the United States' metro areas, the middle class is shrinking (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Fifty-seven cities and municipalities have filed for bankruptcy since 2010 (Governing, 2015). The United States has borrowed too much, and we already owe more than we can ever repay. The government is unlikely to fix it itself; there is no precedent in world history of any country ever climbing out of debt as deep as ours. Poverty is here to stay, and it is getting worse. Wrap your head around this new normal. This is not temporary; all U.S. residents are at risk.

What More Poverty Means to You

Working with students from poverty means you'll need to deeply understand what is going on around you. Every day at work, fresh empathy is a good place to start. Then, you can improve your teaching with better mindsets and strategies. The effects of poverty on any human being are truly staggering. This book is all about how you can mitigate the adversity that students face and enrich them.

In short, poor students are different because their brains are different. The brain's neurons are designed by nature to *reflect* their environment, not to automatically rise above it. Chronic exposure to poverty affects the areas of the brain responsible for memory, impulse regulation, visuospatial actions, language, cognitive capacity, and conflict (Noble, Norman, & Farah, 2005).

Evidence suggests the brains of children from poverty are more likely to differ via four primary types of experiences: (1) health issues from poor diet and exposure to toxins and pollutants, (2) chronic stress, (3) weaker cognitive skills, and (4) impaired socioemotional relationships (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). While not every single child from a household with a low socioeconomic status will experience all of these factors, the majority will.

This means that you'll see behaviors that show the effects of toxins (poor memory and distractibility) or chronic stress (learned helplessness, apathy, hypervigilance, and in-your-face aggressiveness). In a classroom, you'll also see the results of less exposure to cognitive skills (deficient vocabulary, poor reading skills, and weak working memory) and impaired socioemotional skills (poor manners, misbehaviors, or emotional overreactions). Teachers who do not know what these behaviors really are may inappropriately judge a student as lazy, unwilling to follow directions, a poor listener, low achieving, and antisocial. This may foster classroom friction, a huge achievement gap, annoyed students, and even dropouts. And worse yet, the teacher may blame the behavior on the student.