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# Introduction

This book's major theme is developing greater awareness and action to engage students with a different mindset. It is also about something that many poor students are not getting: rich teaching. Here, the word *rich* means full, bountiful, and better than ever. Teachers can make a difference in students' lives with richer teaching. Every student that you help graduate means one less dropout, which means one less student at risk for entering the juvenile justice system, depending on welfare, or going to prison (Latif, Choudhary, & Hammayun, 2015). It's also one more voice that will contribute to our culture and world, making it a better place. You can ensure all students, regardless of background, graduate college and career ready.

All of us have narratives in our head about teaching. Teachers who struggle with poor students often have mentalities that reinforce scarcity, blame, and negativity. 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 or she couldn't make progress. In this book, you will discover the rich strategies that high-performing teachers use to alter the course of these destructive narratives and help students succeed through richer and more abundant teaching.

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.

Yes, poverty is a big problem. But committed teachers and whole schools across the country are finding that equity is the solution. This book is all about fostering equity for *all* by fostering the same success mindsets for *all* students. Where equality at school gives all students the same treatment, equity gives all students access to the same opportunities. Here are two examples, from two different grade levels.

1. In elementary school, many teachers have a deficit mindset, thinking that students from low-income families don't have the smarts for higher-level cognitive thinking. That's a big mistake. Many successful K–5 schools offer computer coding at school. There are dozens of free apps that teach coding starting at a first-grade level (which builds processing speed, memory, thinking, and decision making) in a fun, game-like format. This is an easy way to offer equal access to the opportunities that students from middle- and upper-class families get. Considering the booming job market that needs coders, that's nearly criminal to *not* teach coding.
2. Many secondary schools use programs to build college readiness. But some school leaders have decided that their students from poverty are not qualified, leaving many students without the resources that quality programs provide. That's *not* equity. There are many secondary schools that *do* put 100 percent of their students in this program. They may need to provide some additional tutoring, but the mission is the same—success for *all*. Yes, your mindset does matter, and it matters a lot. The measuring stick is equity.

My advocacy is for teachers like you. I'll do anything to help you grow and succeed. I see teachers as the single most critical factor in helping the United States survive and thrive. Regardless of what our policy makers do, we all need tough, gritty teachers who are willing to make hard choices to help students from poverty succeed. To kick things off, we'll take a quick tour of how I've organized this book and then support the need for its mindsets and strategies with a look at the new normal as it pertains to poverty, its effect on students, and why you can change their futures for the better.

## About This Book

This book combines and updates the best of two books—*Poor Students, Rich Teaching* and *Poor Students, Richer Teaching*. For this edition, I included the most critical knowledge from each of the seven high-impact mindsets in both of those books so that you'll have access to one effective and research-driven resource that contains all the tools you need to improve your teaching mindsets and help all your students in need to graduate.

Even if you have been successful before, my promise is that through this book, you'll become a richer teacher. To complement this book, I've also written a companion book, *The Handbook for Poor Students, Rich Teaching* (Jensen, 2019), which offers a condensed version of this content, but in place of the detailed research content on why these strategies are effective, the handbook adds in a host of reproducible tools for nearly every strategy that you can use to support and shape your evolving mindsets.

To change students' lives, *you* will have to change *before* any worthwhile change shows up in your students. I'm not telling you the path of change is easy; I'm telling you that it can be done, and you can do it.

This book's major theme is developing the most 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 (the fixed mindset), or (2) you can grow and change (the growth mindset). 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. It continues in seven parts, each highlighting a specific mindset, its supporting research, and some easy-to-implement and highly effective strategies you can use immediately. Here are the seven parts.

- **Part one: The relational mindset**—Chapters 1 through 3 explore the relational mindset and begin to discover why the types of relationships teachers have (or don't have) with students are one of the biggest reasons why students graduate or drop out. Everything you do starts with building relationships with your students.
- **Part two: The achievement mindset**—Chapters 4 through 6 teach you about powerful success builders with the achievement mindset. Students from poverty can and do love to learn, when you give them the right tools.
- **Part three: The positivity mindset**—Chapters 7 through 9 home in on your students' emotions and attitudes. Each chapter focuses on building an attitude of academic hope and 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. Your new, rock-solid positivity mindset will help your students soar.
- **Part four: The rich classroom climate mindset**—Chapters 10 through 12 offer strategies to take all that positivity you've generated and use it to create an energetic, high-performing class culture, using the rich classroom climate mindset. You'll learn the secrets that high-performing teachers use to build an amazing classroom climate.
- **Part five: The enrichment mindset**—Chapters 13 through 15 focus on building breakthrough cognitive capacity in students. A big problem for students from poverty is their mental bandwidth, often known as cognitive load. Here, you'll see the clear, scientific evidence that shows, without a molecule of doubt, that you can ensure your

students build cognitive capacity in the form of memory, thinking skills, vocabulary, and study skills.

- **Part six: The engagement mindset**—Chapters 16 through 18 dig into student involvement in a new way with the engagement mindset. You'll gain quick, easy, and practical strategies for maintenance and stress, for buy-in, and to build community.
- **Part seven: The graduation mindset**—Chapters 19 and 20 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, and you'll discover a wide range of positive alternatives to what your students are doing at school.

Each part ends with a Follow Through section that asks you to consider your personal narrative in light of what you've read about the featured mindset and reflect on how you can use the mindset to improve your teaching practices. There's much more for you to learn, but these seven mindsets and the accompanying strategies will make a world of difference if you implement them well. That's my promise.

This book ends with an epilogue that offers a quick-read summary of the book and offers organization tools for immediate application. On this book's website (visit [go.hbe.com.au](http://go.hbe.com.au)) you'll be able to access three appendices with useful resources to support your implementation of the book's tools, some tips on the important process of running your own brain, and a guide to rich lesson planning.

This powerful book is packed with real science and real teachers using powerful strategies, and it absolutely will support you in making fresh, smart choices in teaching. As you read it, 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.

Before we get into part one and all seven mindsets for change, let's briefly look just a little deeper at the research that supports them and why you can believe in them.

## About the New Normal

Books for educators typically just tell teachers what to do. This one is different because I explain *why* the suggestions in this book are relevant, important, and most of all, *urgent*. If you grew up in the United States, I know first-hand how many changes you've seen in your lifetime. If you live in another country, no doubt you have seen disruptive change as

well. Many of the changes you must learn to regard as 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 in this new normal. This is no doomsday scenario. It is about what has *already* happened. You must understand this before you walk into your classroom again.

At one school I was working with, a teacher shared some pretty serious frustrations. As she spoke, her eyes moistened, “You want us to do *this* and *that*, plus you say it might be hard—and it might even take months or years! For starters, do you even know how much we are being asked to do these days? Do you know how little support we get from leadership? How do we even know these things you suggest are possible? And, really, why should we even bother? After all, things will change again in a few years, and there'll be some new flavor of the month that we all have to jump on board with again!” She was nearly in tears, and her pain was obvious. When teachers tell me, “Our jobs have changed,” they're right. When teachers tell me, “Students aren't like they used to be,” they're right. When staff tell me, “The whole profession has changed,” they're right. Lastly, when teachers like you tell me how frustrating their jobs are, I'm on your side. I've been a teacher. I work with teachers, and I know the profession well.

So, let's use that. Let's drill down and learn some of the most relevant changes affecting your classroom when we talk about students from poverty. We'll examine the hard evidence of the new normal, what the resulting poverty means to you, and how poverty may affect your students.

### ***Poverty and Hard Evidence of the New Normal***

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 2016, two out of three student dropouts were from low-income families. Across the country, the graduation gap between the poor and nonpoor ranged from 3 percent to 24 percent. Nationwide, although many states have closed the graduation gap, almost one third of all states have seen increases in the gap (DePaoli, Bridgeland, Atwell, & Balfanz, 2018). 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 software and

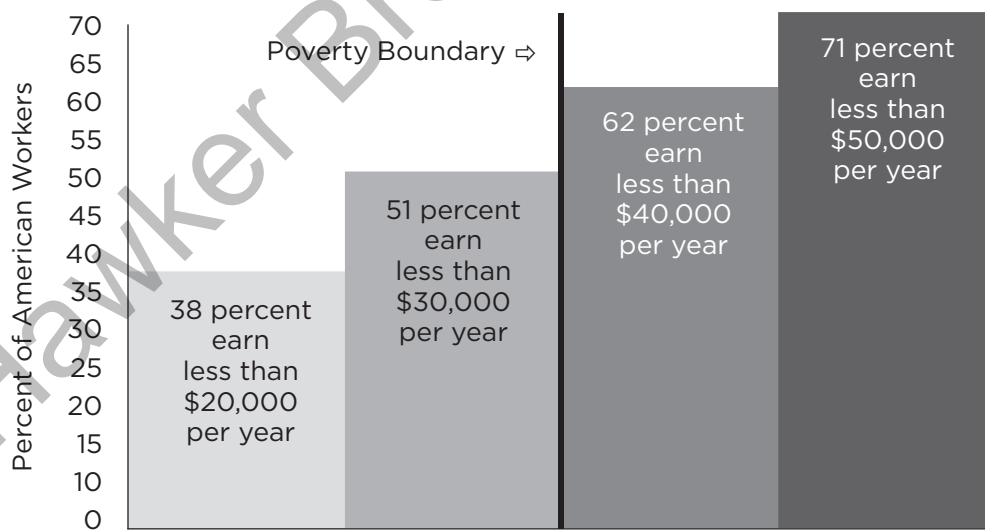


websites, and smartphones) has replaced people for many of those jobs. Trucking is the most popular job in twenty-nine states (Bui, 2015). But around the world, multiple manufacturers are actively developing, testing, and deploying automated trucks, so those trucking jobs may be eliminated as soon as 2030 (Campbell, 2018). Imagine the disruption this will cause: 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 and 2018 brings few signs of positive change (Drum, 2018).

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 I.1 for a breakdown of the new normal workforce.



Source: Social Security Online, 2016.

**Figure I.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).

However, understanding all this is only where our battle begins. We must understand what poverty is in real terms.

## ***What More Poverty Means for Teachers***

Saying that someone is from poverty tells us nothing about the family. Is it fragmented or intact, caring or careless? We don't know because, on the surface, all poverty means is having a low socioeconomic status, but it does not define the individual. My own definition is less focused on federal standards for annual income. Instead, I focus on the common effects of poverty via an aggregate of risk factors. Here's how I define poverty in this book: *poverty* is a chronic condition resulting from an aggregate of adverse social and economic risk factors.

Working with students from poverty means you'll need to deeply understand what is going on around you. In short, many poor students are different because many of their experiences are wiring their brains differently. 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 socio-emotional relationships (Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002). Although 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). Indeed, there is a powerful connection between emotion and cognition:

When we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, we fail to appreciate a critical force in students' learning. One could argue, in fact, that we fail to appreciate the very reason that students learn at all. (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p. 9)

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 anti-social. This may foster classroom friction, a huge achievement gap, annoyed students,