



Poverty and Schooling in the U.S.: Contexts and Consequences. Books, Sue. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. 174 pp.

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In *Poverty and Schooling in the U.S.: Contexts and Consequences*, Sue Books gives the reader a focused glimpse into several important aspects of the impact of poverty on families, children and schools. After the introduction, the book delves into a review of the things teachers and school staff members need to know about poverty. This chapter has three key points: (1) poverty is faced by all ethnic groups in the United States, (2) all parents, regardless of income, want their children to do well in school, and (3) children of poverty are served best by skilled teachers that understand the hurdles faced by those in poverty.

In the third chapter, Books provides the reader with a well organized discussion of the social context of poverty and includes significant topics such as the effects of welfare reform and the disparity between wages and the income needed to survive. In the following chapter describes the difficult problems faced by those in poverty, including problems of environmental toxins, poor or nonexistent health care, homelessness and violence.

In chapter 5, the author provides the reader with numerous facts and figures about the demographics of poverty and presents a rationale for a reformulation of the poverty index currently in use in the United States. The sixth chapter is an in depth analysis of the inequitable funding of public schools and focuses on court cases in states such as Arkansas, California, New York and Ohio.

Books, in chapter 7, provides a well articulated discussion of the legal struggle for equality in education with reviews of pivotal court cases including *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) and *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974). Chapter 8 moves to a description of the schooling of children of poverty and provides the reader with information in three important areas. First, the author provides a further review of funding inequalities under the topic “nested inequalities.” The second key area is a discussion of test scores and drop-out rates, and the third area offers a glimpse of classrooms of neglect.



The author continues her book with a discussion of current educational reform and its consequences. The author also includes an extensive critical analysis of high stakes testing. *Poverty and Schooling in the U.S.: Contexts and Consequences* concludes with a review of the type of educational reform that would best serve the needs of children of poverty. The author believes that this reform would ideally be fueled by a discourse that portrays the real dilemmas posed by poverty. Once this is acknowledged, Books believes that an agenda to remove sources of inequality will then come to the forefront.

There are several strengths to this book that merit review. First, the book is a major source of information for those interested in the topic of poverty and its impact on education. The book makes a significant contribution to a subject that is not often discussed. Second, the author does a skillful job of weaving together information from numerous sources which serve to enhance the author's discussion of key points throughout the book. The author also does an excellent job of integrating descriptions of teachers, pupils and/or schools into the topics for each chapter. These vignettes serve to personalize the discussion and give the reader a better sense of the struggles faced by those in poverty.

This reviewer especially applauds the author for the thought provoking writing concerning the social context of and life in poverty. The discussion of jobs and wages in Chapter 3 is a case in point and dispels the myth that the poor are not employed. Chapter 4 describes a man in a sad dilemma. This man's three children, who are in foster care, will be moved back to his custody only after he has an adequate place for them to live. He has a good job but unfortunately cannot afford the rent for anything larger than a one-room apartment. If the system allowed him 50% of the funds spent on foster care to help pay his rent, he could house his family and actually reduce state expenditures for foster care.

One weakness noted in the book is the that the majority of information is related to urban schools even though the author states on page 52 that poor children in the United States are more likely to live in a rural or suburban area rather than in a city. The arguments put forward in the text would be strengthened by additional information about the rural poor and the unique circumstances they face. The book would also benefit from a more thorough discussion of the needs of Native Americans. Finally, the text can benefit by an additional chapter focusing on useful and effective classroom strategies for teachers that address topics they encounter each day, such as student motivation, positive expectations, classroom climate and peer pressure.

Books provides the reader with a clearly organized and coherent discussion of poverty that will prove beneficial to educators, counselors, anthropologists, sociologists and politicians interested in poverty issues and their impact on education. More specifically, the book will be a valuable resource for educators interested in improving school funding and those interested in determining ways to ensure that all children have an opportunity for a quality education.