

Poverty is rooted in US education system, researcher says

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Inequalities are rooted in many areas of the U.S. education system, and the current system's relationship with poverty has not improved, according to a Kansas State University researcher.

Kay Ann Taylor, associate professor of secondary education at K-State, has studied the historical and modern aspects of [poverty](#), including its relationship with education. Her research, which is published in the winter 2009 *Journal of Educational Controversy*, shows that a more in-depth understanding of poverty is needed for social transformation.

"There is no simple answer to alleviate poverty, just as there is no simple answer for its embedded state in America," Taylor said. "However, the common element shared by all is our humanness. People devastated by poverty are not deficient, less than or subhuman. They are not broken; however, the system in which they are embroiled very well may be."

Taylor's historical research shows that numerous factors led to poverty, including laws and acts, white and male privilege, scientific racism and social welfare. Her research about the current manifestations of poverty shows that much work needs to be done, because the situation has not improved. Taylor said a problem in U.S. public schools is that many reinforce a dominant cultural reproduction, which undermines independent thought.

"Education in the modern corporate-industrial society has emerged as central to state political and ideological management," she said.

"Political and ideological management involves ideation, which in this context means the imparting and reinforcement of ideas and values that support the current economic and social order."

Taylor said frequently textbooks in primary and secondary schools and in higher education do not address issues like poverty fully and often are reduced and oversimplified. "Far too many schools continue to endorse a curriculum of the absurd that encompasses 'heroification' of primarily white males, while the contributions of women and people of color appear in pop-out format in textbooks," she said.

The No Child Left Behind Act also continues to be a problem, except for students who attend private schools, which are exempt from the act. Taylor said this increases the education system's inequalities since typically children of the powerful, wealthy elite have the opportunity for a private education, as they have for generations. For example, the mandate of the act that allows military recruitment in low-achieving and typically low-income schools targets the poor and exempts the wealthy and elite, she said.

"The No Child Left Behind Act's scripted curriculum, relentless testing and oppressive mandates create a robotic-like setting for mindless regurgitation of irrelevant and contextually void facts that challenge our most creative, dedicated and culturally responsive teachers ? and run the remainder out of teaching all together," Taylor said.

Because public school funding relies, in part, on property taxes, Taylor said in communities with little property ownership in the way of a tax base, schools and children suffer. Another area that needs to be revamped is education for teachers. Educators need to understand the multiple dimensions of poverty in order to be knowledgeable and effective, she said.

"Teachers are placed in the forefront of this dilemma, and many have no personal experience or educational background to address issues of poverty in their classrooms," Taylor said.

When teachers are not well informed about issues like poverty, Taylor said they are unable to relate to situations students face. For instance, when a child acts out, many teachers neglect to consider possibilities for the student's actions that could be effects of poverty.

"Another destructive and common stereotype held by teachers is that parents of poor children do not care about their education," Taylor said. "They cite parents' lack of involvement or attendance as a reason. However, they fail to understand that poor parents love and care about their children and their education just as every parent does, and that their lack of involvement or attendance may be due to working several jobs, unreliable transportation or numerous other factors."

Taylor said educators should be respectful, caring and empathetic and should create a challenging and engaging learning environment for children at all levels. She said the essential characteristics include a small teacher-to-student ratio, relevant curriculum where the students see themselves represented and an environment where children feel safe.

"Although these characteristics may not eliminate poverty, they will provide learners with a solid foundation upon which to build, rather than reproducing control, mindlessness, isolation and stratification," Taylor said.

Source: Kansas State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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