

How Does the Double Jeopardy of Learning Disabilities and Living in Poverty Affect Student  
Performance?

by

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to analyze significant literature regarding the complexities associated with the link between students living in poverty and learning disabilities. The study also examined how poverty affects the overall functioning of students who have learning disabilities.

This study was a comprehensive review and critical analysis of literature concerning students diagnosed with learning disabilities and those students living in poverty. This document identified cultural barriers and discussed how living in poverty affects students in the academic setting and how those barriers create a double jeopardy for students.

Information gathered on this topic was the basis for providing recommendations for teachers and professionals in hopes to enhancing students' educational experiences and quality of life.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my late grandma, Audrey Evanson. It was her faith, perseverance, encouragement and love that allowed me to believe in myself, to love others pursue my dreams. It is with great confidence that I close this chapter in my life and move forward, carrying on her legacy of faith, perseverance and love.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### *Introduction*

I was born on May 5, 1982, to two healthy parents. As a young child I was very active and social. My mother will tell you that I thrived on social interactions and was well beyond my years in maturity. My health was supreme and I was not in any accidents as a small child. My large motor skills were also very strong. The only area that my mother ever worried about was my small motor skills.

Apparently from a very young age I struggled to make small marks on paper and I struggled to pick up small items. My mom said it was almost as if I could not see it. That struggle carried into my school years. I can remember as far back as first grade not being able to copy off the board, having poor handwriting, and not being able to spell the simple words that my classmates were able spell. I was devastated at each grading period when I would receive the dreaded “3” in that area. I was told that I was lazy and that I just needed to work harder. By second grade I had teachers who presented my work, something I had spent so much time to make as good as I could, as something that was sloppy. I felt that I was made a spectacle. I remember in third grade being sent to the hall because of my handwriting and spelling mistakes. I also remember getting in trouble for not reading the words on the page. All of these experiences greatly influenced my motivation to succeed in school.

In fourth grade, a year after my parents divorced, I moved to a new school. After I tested in the 38th percentile on the Iowa Basics Skills test, my teacher suggested that I may benefit from extra help. My mom took her concerns seriously and sought the advice of a family friend who was a special education teacher. Through some informal testing it was shown that I was most likely dyslexic and dysgraphic. After these informal tests, my mom decided that there

must have been something wrong with the tests because I was too smart and did not in reality need special education services. She honestly felt that it was better to try and help me at home than for me to receive a label of having a learning disability.

In fifth grade my education almost turned around. I went from being the student who fell through the cracks, to the student who was at the top of the class. The change? Mrs. Jill Lehman, my teacher. She was the first teacher I had who believed in me. Mrs. Lehman was always there to listen to me, to encourage me and she always believed in my ability to succeed. Every day she would show her love to me in some way. Mrs. Lehman used many different approaches to teaching and she valued multiple intelligences. She saw my potential and let me excel.

Unfortunately, by the time I entered sixth grade, things changed for me. I enrolled at a large middle school and had teachers who did not value the multiple intelligences. I no longer received the one-on-one attention that allowed me to succeed. I quickly became withdrawn as I felt that I was not good enough.

Concerned with my academic performance, my mom took me out of public school and enrolled me in a small private school. I was placed in a six grade class with seven other kids where I was given more one-on-one attention than I was afforded in my class of thirty-two students at the public school. My teacher recognized that I was behind in many areas, but that I had the ability to learn. I had numerous teachers who took the time to teach to my learning styles and valued my multiple abilities such as music and sports. Because of their non-judgmental outlook on my education and their hands-on approach to my education, I excelled. I learned how to organize and how to type and spell check my work on a computer. I was valued as a student and began to believe in myself. By the time I reached graduation, I had beaten all odds and was

able to go back to teachers who had told me I would never graduate from high school and share my joy of graduating valedictorian.

I was officially diagnosed with a learning disability in the areas of reading and math at the end of my college career. I actually advocated for myself because I was struggling taking Scantron exams. This diagnosis has helped me receive the accommodations that I needed. I have learned how to use modifications to accommodate for myself. Using a computer to take notes and check my spelling, as well as having books on tape, are tools that help me the most.

I have had to overcome the stereotypes that often go along with having a learning disability. One thing that is a challenge for me is being able to spell correctly. Many people have told me that I am dumb and do not believe in me because of this.

There have even been times that people in my own family have not accepted the fact that I have a learning disability. But to be very frank, it does not change who I am. I know that I am smart and that I have the ability to succeed if I work hard. Having a learning disability has taught me to be patient and understanding of others' needs. It has taught me that life is not always fair, but that is okay. It has taught me that when things are hard, we just keep working and pushing through. It has taught me to be an advocate for myself and for others. It has taught me to accept myself and others.

As an adult, I have learned that there are many other people who also struggle with learning disabilities. In fact it is estimated that six million children in the United States under the age of eighteen have a learning disability (Altarac, 2007). My interest has often been sparked as to why people struggle with learning disabilities and if there is any way I can help them. This interest was ignited when I was an intern and then a full-time case manager at a local homeless shelter from 2004 to 2006. I was astonished at the number of people who entered my office who



either exhibited signs of a learning disability such as challenges with reading, math, understanding nonverbal cues, and understanding language, or many of my clients actually had a diagnosis of a learning disability (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2009) These unfortunate events caused me to question the double jeopardy of learning disabilities and living in poverty.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Students who are labeled both as having a learning disability and who have limited economic stability present one of the most challenging situations for schools today. Not only does having a learning disability present unique challenges when a student is learning, but the added challenge of the lack of basic needs distracts students from learning, affects their social engagement and ultimately encourages them to remain in the cycle of poverty.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to review significant literature regarding the complexities associated with the link between students living in poverty and learning disabilities and ultimately how poverty affects the overall functioning of students who have learning disabilities.

In this study, the author reviewed relevant literature about students diagnosed with learning disabilities and those students living in poverty. This document identifies cultural barriers and discusses how living in poverty affects students in the academic setting and how those barriers create a double jeopardy for students. Ultimately the results of this study will be used to formulate information and recommendations to those in the school and helping professions. Data for this study was collected in the fall of 2009.

### *Research Questions*

Nine research questions have been addressed in this study. They include the following:

1. What is poverty?
2. What types of challenges do students in poverty face?
3. What is a learning disability?
4. What types of challenges do students with learning disabilities face?
5. What effect does living in poverty have on students with learning disabilities?
6. What barriers dose the double jeopardy of learning disabilities and living in poverty cause for students?
7. What is the relationship between living in poverty and having a learning disability?
8. What strategies has research identified as effective for students with learning disabilities?
9. What strategies has research identified as effective for students living in poverty?

### *Definition of Terms*

For clarification, the following terms are defined.

*Accommodation* - Adjustment or provisions made for students to assist them in completing their school work. Examples include extending time for taking exams, the use of note takers, spellcheckers, and word processors.

*Americans With Disabilities Act* – ADA. “A federal law providing civil rights to individuals with disabilities” (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009 n.p.).

*Learning disability* – “A learning disability is a neurological disorder that causes difficulties in learning that cannot be attributed to poor intelligence, poor motivation, or

inadequate teaching.” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2009 para.1) The ADA further states that a “learning disability is a persistent, chronic condition rather than a transient developmental lag” (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2009).

*Poverty Line* – “a measure or threshold in which families or individuals are considered to be below a certain dollar amount in income” (Census Bureau, 2008).

*Poverty Rate* – “thresholds that are issued each year by the Census Bureau, that represent the annual amount of cash income minimally required to support families of various sizes” (National Poverty Center, 2008).

### *Assumptions of the Study*

Predominantly, the author is assuming that there is a clear and distinct connection between children who have learning disabilities who also live in poverty. It is also assumed that children with learning disabilities who do not live in poverty have a better prognosis than those living in poverty. The author is additionally assuming that the educational system needs to implement strategies that focus specifically on children who have a learning disability and are living in poverty. Finally, the author is making the assumption that there is also a cultural barrier in place with this population.

### *Limitations of the Study*

A limitation of this study is the fact that the author has been diagnosed with a learning disability which may, in turn, inhibit the author’s ability to review literature objectively. Another limitation is that much research has been done about poverty and learning disabilities; however, little research has been done on the topics existing together. Consequently, the author is creating additional research on the effects of poverty and learning disabilities co-existing together. The author is researching how effects of living in poverty affect children with learning

disabilities; therefore, children and not adults are the focus of this study, creating yet another limitation.

### *Methodology*

In an attempt to create new understandings about the relationship between poverty and learning disabilities, the author has located relevant literature using databases of professional literature, read abstracts to determine the relevance to the topic, read complete articles and books on relevant literature, summarized the literature, and analyzed it in light of the research questions.

### *Rationale*

The study of learning disabilities in relationship to poverty is important. It is a documented trend that schools are facing today.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### *Introduction*

Chapter II discusses, in detail, the barriers that children living in poverty face on a daily basis, the changes that children who have a learning disability face, and the double jeopardy of living in poverty and having a learning disability.

### *The Effects of Poverty on Children*

Poverty is an international problem. When the word poverty is presented, you may think of the television commercials that show skinny starving children with large stomachs in Africa, without clothes, nourishment, or shoes, flies around them, and living on the streets. Or maybe you think of poverty as the disadvantaged homeless man on the street who is begging for food or a few dollars. This is the way the world has trained us to see poverty. Few people would think that true poverty exists all across the nation and exists in every city regardless of ethnic population.

The United Nations defined poverty as:

A denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation". It goes on to say that "Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health care

services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of the society (2008, p6).

As difficult as it is to imagine, there are children all across the United States who lack the basic needs of life.

Among industrialized countries, the United States ranks first in military technology, military exports, and Gross Domestic Product. We have more millionaires and billionaires than any other nation, yet one in five American children are born poor and one in three will be poor at some point in their childhood. Each day in America 2,385 babies are born into poverty. Even though the United States ranks first in health technology, 2,076 babies are born without health insurance each day (Children's Defense Fund , 2004, p.1).

The Institute for Research on Poverty (2009) reported that more than eighteen percent of children under the age of eighteen lived at or below the level of poverty in 2007. That's more than 13 million children living in poverty in the United States. This level, according to the Census Bureau (2008), is measured as those who fall below a certain income level.

As the previous statistic stated, the basic premise of a poverty level is defined as a family having an income of less than a given amount. According to the National Center on Poverty, in 2007 a single adult under the age of 65 making \$10,787 or less per year was considered to be in poverty. In that same year a single parent with one child was considered to be in poverty if they made less than \$14,291. Also in 2007 a two adult family with two children was considered to be in poverty if they made less than \$21,027.

There is, however, a problem with these dollar amounts. On average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009). One of the reasons that the poverty level is inaccurate and unrealistic for today's dollars is that the numbers of today have been adjusted for inflation; however a society shift has also occurred, where the needs and desires of families are different. In the 1960's the average family household only used thirty-three percent of their budget for their food. Today, food comprises only one seventh of the family budget. With growing needs in child care, home costs, health care and transportation, all which have grown disproportionately to the rest of society, the averages from the 1960's are not enough. While the average wage in America has slowly increased, it has not grown nearly as quick as the costs of living in all areas of the country (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009).

The National Center for Children in Poverty (2009) pointed out that there are many stereotypes about people who live in poverty. Typically families in poverty are depicted as static, withdrawn, characterized by large numbers of children, chronic unemployment, drugs, violence, and family turmoil. The reality, however, of poverty and economic hardship in the United States does look like the picture that is drawn for us. In the United States people living in poverty are not necessarily easy to pick out of a crowd. In the 1960's, the United States government waged war on poverty. At that time poverty was based on income, but according to the Institute for Research on Poverty, "decades of research and experience with antipoverty programs have made it clear that poverty involves very compelling, interrelated and sometimes intractable socioeconomic, family and individual issues" (2009, p.4).

Living in the United States in the twenty-first century requires access to more than running water, electricity, indoor plumbing, and telephone service (National Center for Children

in Poverty, 2009). Although these things may not have been considered basic living necessities fifty years ago, today families' needs are different. The National Center for Children in Poverty (2009 p.2) states that "families need more than material resources; they also need human and social capital." The National Center for Children in Poverty continued by stating that "Human and social capital include education, basic life skills, and employment experience, as well as less tangible resources such as social networks and access to civic institutions" (2009, p.2).

Poverty in the United States is not as visible as it is in other nations. It is not common to see children living on the streets, going without clothes, or paraded across our television screens, but poverty still exists in the United States. It is evident in the lives of eighteen percent of Americans. Even the United States President acknowledged that poverty is a concern plaguing the nation. The White House in 2009 stated, "Too many Americans live without hope for a better future or access to goods, family support or jobs. President Obama is committed to creating the opportunity for all Americans to grab the first rung on the ladder to the middle class" (2009, p.1).

This has always been the foundation of America. People work hard to meet this abstract idea of the American dream, though this dream is different for every family. For some it is to make a difference or to shed tears and sweat building a company from scratch. For a proportion of Americans living in poverty, it is simply to be able to afford a place to live. It is to be able to pay for heat and food, and be able to reach for that bottom rung, that first rung, in middle class. And for many families, they also have to cope with having a child with a learning disability.

### *The Effects of Having a Learning Disability as a Child*

According to Lifetime Prevalence of Learning Disability Among US Children, in February 2007, learning disability is a term used to describe a constellation of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics,



foreign languages, coordination, spatial adaptation, memorization, and social studies. More specifically, the term learning disorder refers to achievement at a level substantially below those expected for a student's "age, amount of schooling, and level of intelligence, although such students have average or above average intelligence, they also have some impaired brain function that prevents them from making at least average academic progress" (Brinkerhoff, 2004, p.7) .

Learning disabilities also influence information and how it is processed. "Learning disorders involve difficulties with how we acquire information, how we retain information, and how we process information" (Brinkerhoff, 2004, p.7). It is also prevalent in the United States. "Learning disability is a common chronic condition among United States children, affecting 1 in 10 overall" (Altarac, 2007, p.6). Further, 5% of children will be diagnosed with a learning disorder this year. Learning disabilities also tend to run in families and are more common in boys than in girls (Brinkerhoff, 2004). And so there is this population that finds it hard to speak out or get their voices heard. (Learning Disability Educational Journal, 2005).

Traditionally speaking, it is generally this discrepancy between intelligence and achievement that signals a teacher that a student might have a learning disorder or disability. Altarac stated that "as a group, *learning disabilities* are poorly understood. It was shown that the child's age at *learning disability* diagnosis and mother's first suspicion of a problem" (Altarac, 2007, p.7). Typically learning disabilities are not identified until the third grade, and tragically, some students are never identified increasing the risk of drop-out in mid-high school. Over all, learning disabilities are difficult to diagnose. It is unfortunate that students that desperately need assistance are often missed understood or misdiagnosed.

A student may have a mild learning disability or a severe learning disability. The learning disability may hardly be noticeable in the classroom or it may impair functioning. It is estimated that up to twenty percent of children may have a learning disability that is not recognized or diagnosed (Brinkerhoff, 2004). Learning disabilities not only vary in intensity, but in the types of learning disabilities that are present. A student may exhibit difficulty in multiple areas of learning or in just one area. Lifetime Prevalence of Learning Disability Among US Children indicates that although learning disabilities cannot be cured, the underlying conditions can be treated and managed so that children with learning disabilities adapt, achieve academic success, and live productive, fulfilling lives. (2007, p.6). Further, if the learning disability is detected before the third grade, the chances of a student's success are greater than if a student uses individual coping methods alone.

There are many misconceptions about learning disabilities. Many people believe that people with a learning disability have a lower intelligence, because they not want to learn, or they are not trying hard enough. Nothing could be further from the truth. A person with a learning disability has average to above average intelligence but struggles in one or more areas of learning. With an estimated six million students under the age of eighteen who have learning disabilities, it is hard to imagine that all those students would have this disability simply because they do not want to try or do not want to learn. It is in fact the exact opposite. Not only are these often students who are trying their hardest and have the strongest desire to learn, but they are also meeting roadblocks when they encounter people who are uneducated about learning disabilities.

These roadblocks are struggles students who are diagnosed with learning disabilities face in the classroom every single day. They struggle with curriculum content, they do not

understand social cues, they are more likely than their peers to be picked on or bullied, they miss classroom content when it is presented in a way that they cannot decode or understand, and sadly, they finally just give up. They also struggle with self-esteem issues. This is compounded by the normal ups and downs that their peers experience.

There are also students who are misdiagnosed with a learning disability. This is where the issue of poverty comes in. “Sometimes, though, children who come from another cultural background or from a home with few economic resource are misdiagnosed – they may appear to have a learning disorder, when really they have just never had the opportunity to learn skills that other segments of the population have” (Brinkerhoff, 2004, p.8).

*The Double Jeopardy of Learning Disabilities and Poverty on Children*

“People with disabilities are among the poorest of all Americans” (Batavia , 2001, p. 141). Whether students have a learning disability or live in poverty, they face a variety of challenges, but facing both of these put them at risk for multiple challenges. Students who have a learning disability not only have to navigate the challenging world of education, but also the challenging world of living in poverty. The social implications both in the educational world and at home are great. “The financial vulnerability of people with disabilities states that people with disabilities are among the poorest of all Americans” (Batavia, 2001, p141). Children who have both a learning disability and who are living in poverty face a constant cycle of difficulty. Many things that are taught in schools are not just the lessons presented, but the inferred social lessons that come from living and working with other students in the classroom.

Students with learning disabilities miss these hidden or inferred lessons and therefore have a difficult time interacting with other students and teachers. Schools across America try to fight against this struggle by placing students in special education classrooms where each student

is evaluated and given an Individual Education Plan. Special education classrooms can help in this struggle, but the problem becomes difficult if the family moves to another school district. If a student has a solid support system at home, the student may be presented with the opportunity to catch up with their peers, however students living in poverty are often coming home to environments where parents just are not there, because the parents are working a second or a third job just to make ends meet. "Economic hardships and other types of deprivation can have profound effects on children's development and their prospects for the futures" (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009, p.8). Quite often this means the students are also expected to help out with cleaning or cooking around the house, and is expected to act more like an adult then to be able to get the help they need to bring their grades and their understanding of topics in the classroom up to grade level. Because parents are quite often working late or working other shifts, students can also be left to tend to younger siblings in order to help them get ready for dinner, and get into bed. Homework and studying is not as high of a priority.

Even when the parents are home to be around their children, learning disabilities are quite often genetic, so parents often struggled with the same topics when they were the child's age. This often means the parents do not fully understand the materials, so they are likely to give up helping their children with homework.

The added stress in the home, combined with all the effects of poverty is the perfect storm for abuse and neglect. According to the United States Department of Agriculture "a child in poverty is seven times more likely to be abused than a child not in poverty. Twelve million poor children report food insecurity" (Poverty Does Not Restrict A Student's Ability to Learn, 2009, p1). This environment of abuse and neglect makes it less likely that the student with a learning disability will receive the help and support at home that they so desperately need.

It is believed that “people with learning disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and become seriously ill as a result” (Link Between Poverty and Illness Stressed, 2004, p.1).

Combined effects of facing poverty, abuse, neglect, hunger, depression or any number of other socioeconomic limitations puts the child in a situation of anxiety and stress, so that he or she may be that much less likely to absorb the following day’s lesson. Something as simple as facing a food anxiety, when children do not know when or where the next meal is coming from, can significantly limit their ability to concentrate and learn in the classroom. This can also lead to an increase in illness due to malnutrition or inadequate preventative healthcare.

After some time passes the children can fall behind in school and parent-teacher confrontation can take place. Teachers blame the parents, the parents blame the teachers, and quite often the result is the children are moved to other school districts, towns, and homes. This cycle may lead many people to assume that the parents do not love their children because they do not pay attention to them as much as what “good” parents do. Judgment and verbal bashing can result from teachers to parents, when the parents themselves are doing the best they can with the jobs they can get, as long as they can keep them. Unfortunately, parents of students with learning disabilities often have learning disabilities themselves, and they struggle to keep long-term jobs and they strive to just survive from paycheck to paycheck, so they again move to another place. “Disability often leads to greater need and this will increase the risk of poverty” (The Cost of Disability and the Incidence of Poverty, 2007, p.461).

After being moved, students face all of the same challenges they did before, except the additional burden of being in a new classroom, with a new teacher, using a different teaching style, causes the child to fall that much farther behind, perhaps even being held back a grade and all too often the cycle repeats. This continuous cycle of a lack of support system at home,

combined with the challenge or inability of a child to understand and interact socially in a classroom will cause the child and the poverty-stricken family to change school districts again and again. The long-term effect is that the child simply falls through the cracks and is forgotten in society, especially because IEP's are quite often not transferred or are misplaced so the teacher in the new district must start over from scratch. Students unfortunately drop out and live in poverty or are homeless as they grow older. If they have children themselves, the roles are simply reversed and they struggle to keep jobs, going from job to job, town to town, taking their now young children with them.

A parent's education is one of the biggest risk factors in becoming a low income family. Eighty-three percent of children whose parents have less than a high school diploma live at or below the poverty line. (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009) As society changes, workers with only a high school degree have seen their wages fall steadily, while those students with a college education have seen the income gap between those who have a college education and those who do not, double. The reality of our society is that only twenty-three percent of workers in the United States have a college degree according to the National Center for Children in Poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009).

Low family income can impede children's cognitive development and their ability to learn. It can contribute to behavioral, social and emotional problems. And it can exacerbate poor child health as well. The children at greatest risk are those who experience economic hardship when they are young and children who experience severe and chronic hardship. (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009, 8).

*Summary*

The cycle is clear. Children are more likely to struggle with a learning disability if they also have to deal with living in poverty, when compared to their peers who live above the poverty level. Their parents, who could possibly have learning disabilities, are at a loss to help them due to their disability, distraction by multiple jobs, moving frequently, and clashing with the classroom teacher. So the question becomes, how can these students be helped?

### Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, Recommendations

#### *Introduction*

Chapter II discussed the barriers that children living in poverty face on a daily basis, the changes that children who have a learning disability face, and the double jeopardy of living in poverty and having a learning disability. This chapter summarizes the challenges that are faced by children who not only live in poverty but who also have a learning disability and offers suggestions to teacher and practitioners working with those children.

#### *Summary*

Poverty is a worldwide epidemic. The United Nations defined poverty as “a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means a lack of competency to stand up and live and function in modern society (The United Nations Children's Fund, 2008 p. 6). The Institute for Research on Poverty (2009) reported that more than eighteen percent of children under the age of eighteen lived at or below the level of poverty in 2007. This means that more than 13 million children are living in poverty in the United States alone.

Listening, speaking, reading, writing, reading, mathematics, foreign languages, coordination, spatial adaptation, memorization, and social studies are all limited or challenged by the presence of learning disabilities. Any definition of any form of a learning disability could include these areas. Not only are the topics and areas of learning disabilities expansive, but they are often difficult to diagnose, and as a group of disorders are poorly understood. It is shown that the child's age at learning disabilities diagnosis and mother's first suspicion of a problem can be far apart (Altarac, 2007).

It is estimated that up to twenty percent of children may have a learning disability that is not recognized or diagnosed (Brinkerhoff, 2004). Regular education teachers and parents often



misdiagnose learning disabilities in students. Teachers and parents may simply think of or treat these students as less intelligent. However, the misunderstood reality is that a person with a learning disability has an average to above average intelligence, but struggles in one or more areas of learning. So the child will appear low functioning in the classroom, whereas the child is very smart, but lacks the mental processing abilities in order to function on the same level in key areas in the classroom.

### *Critical Analysis*

The literature in Chapter II provided strong evidence of negative implications of both poverty and learning disabilities. The double jeopardy is clear. Children are more likely to struggle with a learning disability if they also have to deal with living in poverty, when compared to their peers who live above the poverty level. “The financial vulnerability of people with disabilities states that people with disabilities are among the poorest of all Americans” (Batavia, 2001, pg. 141).

There are many theories to why double jeopardy takes place but no one appears to have the answer. It is possible that the parents have learning disabilities and are unable to assist the students due to their own disability, the parents may be distracted by multiple jobs, the families may move frequently or there may be a multitude of other explanations. A parent’s personal education can compound the issue. It is documented that eighty-three percent of children whose parents have less than a high school diploma live at or below the poverty line (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009). The implication that poverty has on students is great. Research from The National Center for Children (2009, p.8) stated that “Low family income can impede children’s cognitive development and their ability to learn. It can contribute to behavioral, social and emotional problems.” The research went on to say that “Economic hardships and other types

of deprivation can have profound effects on children's development and their prospects for the future" (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2009, p.8).

Illness is a common result of people both who live in poverty and people who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities. Other effects may also follow such as hunger, depression, or children are often neglected, abused and stressed. If a child is worried about where his next meal is coming from, or how many times he or she is being abused by parents, he/she is much less likely to pay attention in the classroom and be able to function and absorb the teacher's materials. Quite often the child is also physically sick because of the parent's inability to get proper health insurance, so they don't go to the doctor when the child is sick.

Unfortunately the cycle of learning disabilities and poverty quite often does not start with the children; the parents have often faced similar challenges themselves when growing up, as did their parents and grandparents. A long continuing cycle of learning disabilities is often the result. A common assumption about these families is that they do not love their children, and they are not committed to their well being.

A constant cycle of difficulty surrounds students with both learning disabilities and poverty-stricken homes. One of the common misconceptions about school is that the teacher's lessons are the only lessons learned, which is not true. Social interaction is also key to a child's personal development. If a child misses that social structure or development, the child will often be placed in a special education classroom where he or she is offered an individual education plan where education can be tailored to a child's needs and hidden curriculum can also be taught.

Neglect and abuse are commonly the result of all of the effects of poverty and stress at home. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a child in poverty is seven

times more likely to be abused than a child not in poverty (Payne, 2007, p.372). Furthermore, twelve million poor children are also reported to have “food insecurity”, in other words, they don’t know when or where they will receive their next meal (Payne, 2009, p.372).

In conclusion, further research is necessary into the lives of students and families in order to answer the problems and challenges of both learning disabilities and poverty. Both of these problems need to be addressed. One does not necessarily lead to the other, but quite often both poverty and learning disabilities exist in homes across America. Teachers and professionals need to be sensitive to the needs of the students, both on a personal and professional level. They may also need to coordinate with local government resources in order to provide adequate transportation for the parents and students so that everyone can still be involved in school activities.

### *Recommendations*

Further research is needed into the lives of students and families with learning disabilities and poverty.

- ☐ Meeting both the poverty need and learning disabilities needs of students would enhance the lives of these students.
- ☐ Teachers and professionals need to be sensitive to students needs.
- ☐ Teachers need to realize that parents may not have transportation, but may still want to be involved in their children’s school activities.
- ☐ Academic policy should be to not send homework home that students cannot do on their own, because the parents may not be able to help.

- Because students often move, parents and teachers must be proactive and track down IEP and other information to best serve students in the classroom, but be careful not to make families feel like the school is prying.
- Teachers need to get involved in a local food pantry, community table, or homeless program to gain perspective on poverty.
- Teachers and Administration staff need to attend an annual workshop or summit on poverty or disability.
- Professionals need to visit their student's homes and talk with parents about their child's needs.
- Professionals need to coordinate with government support programs to help families find beneficial transportation.
- Professionals and schools need to be aware of their local community resources.
- Schools need to be aware of the local community resources in order to better assist their students.
- Teachers would also benefit from offering a snack to students in the classroom.

Teachers and faculty need to become familiar with the resources of the community and the department of human services to give a better life and a better opportunity to their students. Parents need to realize that there are resources out there that can help, and understand that for a better life to be possible, families need to reach out. Help can be found, resources can be used, and changes can be made to stop this double jeopardy from happening to the next generation of pupils in their family.

The double jeopardy of learning disabilities and poverty is a complex issue. The research presented in this investigation is intended to be used as a foundation for further research. Double

jeopardy of learning disabilities and poverty is a growing problem in the United States and is an issue that demands further research. Furthermore, it is hoped that teachers and other professionals would develop a plan of action to assist student who face the double jeopardy of learning disabilities and poverty, that effort would be made to make teachers and professional aware of the problem and that teachers and professionals would ask questions, get involved, and truly help the students get the information they need in order to fight back the cycle of these seeming never ending generational battles.

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