

Final Portfolio

A&S 420: ADV Writing and Research

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Reflection/Cover Letter

By Kristen Hughes

When I reflect on previous classes, one of the main elements in each class has been research of some kind. Whether it was my Ecology class and reading how global warming is affecting the earth or in researching authors for an English class, research provides the foundation for understanding and knowledge. Without research, there would not be the statistics on lawsuits and labor laws that I learned about in Business Ethics. Research allowed for glimpses into the plight of the economy and Third World countries in my Anthropology and Globalization class. I have read countless texts and books for each class that I have taken. Each book is filled with research done by the authors into topics specific to the classes I have taken. Add in that the writing itself connects this class with past classes, and the importance is evident. Writing and research is imperative to the collegiate world. Without it, there is no way to learn and develop new ideas, expand upon research already done, and reach new conclusions and solutions to problems. Each author of every book I have read has become an expert on their topic through research. After learning everything about the topic, they chose to write a book and share their knowledge with the world. Most of the authors that I have read, have written their book (s) because the topic that they are discussing is important to them and they want to inform others about it. This is exactly like our research topics in class. We found a topic that was either of interest or important to us and we began to research it. Our goal was to learn all that we could about the topic so that we could inform others about it through our writings. I believe that those in a learning environment all seek to gain such knowledge of the world, societal issues, political issues, and gain scientific understanding. In addition, many of my classes have centered around social issues and the social world, as my emphasis is in Social Sciences. This class has allowed us to research and write about topics pertaining to the Social Sciences. I feel as though I am more prepared to research and write about topics in a scientific manner rather than from an emotional and perhaps biased point of view. This is extremely important when addressing topics that you want to educate society about. You must be able to educate through facts, data, and statistics rather than opinions. You must allow the people who read your research to see what you observed and noted in an unbiased manner. That is the only way that research will have merit.

Since I have applied for the masters program in Library Science, this course is extremely valuable to me. My desire is to be a children's librarian, and my research topic is one of the reasons why. I hope that through reaching children through different avenues of literacy, that I may help bridge the gap, and help children develop a love for reading and learning. Research will be a valuable tool for me, whether it is researching books, the community where I work, learning styles, and story ideas. I will also use research to learn about the schools in my community and the best forms of outreach for the families and students at those schools. I will be able to orchestrate programs that are of interest for the children in the community and

choose curriculum that meets the needs of the children and their families. There may be times when I am asked to serve in other areas of the library and will need to know how to search for specific titles and topics. I may be asked to help students do research for papers or develop a hypothesis for a paper or science experiment. I may even be asked to write informative articles about what the library does and the services it provides. There might be times that I work in the historical section of the library and need to be able to reference specific titles. Sometimes librarians are asked to research and record historic events. I may even be asked to work in a law library one day and must know how to research legal cases or laws. There are so many ways that librarians are asked to use writing and research. On a personal level, I would like to write children's books one day and what I have learned in this class will help me tremendously. Although I hope to write fictional books, I will need to be able to research non-fictional aspects for my stories, such as locations, scientific events, historical events, and empirical information.

This course has helped me to understand and interpret research in that I had never thought about the scientific elements of social science research before. Taking a social science topic of interest or concern and breaking it down into a hypothesis with defining variables sets the tone for valid research. Being able to validate a hypothesis, implement research strategies, and compare the results to previous research promotes a greater understanding of the findings. By writing out the methodology, levels of measurement, the type of research to be done (quantitative or qualitative), identifying the population and sample, and the sampling method to be used, it creates an outline of how to complete the research and answer your research question. This outline also allows you to find previous studies, data, and literature to either substantiate or disprove your hypothesis.

Critical thinking skills are vital for any career. Being able to critically analyze information in my career is important because it ensures that I am using valid information. As with research, critical analysis allows me to gain a better understanding of topics of importance. In terms of literature, it would help me to gain a deeper understanding of what I read. I think employers rely on the fact that employees can make informed decisions and can interpret information in an objective manner. Not only does critical analysis apply to work-based decisions, but it also helps you to analyze your work ethic and focus on self-improvement. By using critical analysis, you will be able to make informed decisions and avoid misinformation. Critical thinking and analysis helps to improve problem solving and allows for informed, evidence-based decisions. As a librarian, this will be helpful when evaluating literature, through developing programs that are important to communities, in locating relevant information, and in how policies and procedures are implemented and changed. Since librarians are champions of lifelong learning, being able to analyze the research and data that I will read and encounter daily will help me to learn and grow in knowledge through constant research and evaluation.

Revised Topic Proposal

By Kristen Hughes

For my research topic, I will be researching the effects of poverty on literacy. My primary question is to ask: How does poverty affect literacy rates? Although I will briefly touch on the United States as a whole, my primary focus will be on Kentucky literacy and poverty rates. I will detail how poverty and literacy are directly linked and the consequences of illiteracy across the state. This topic should be of concern for everyone in our state, not just on an ethical level, but how it affects the economy and livelihoods of those living in poverty. Literacy rates correlate to better jobs, which means increased incomes and a chance to rise above the poverty level. Those who are illiterate are also more likely to be incarcerated according to some statistics. While poverty is often spoken about, the devastation that surrounds it is often not brought to light. Being born into poverty can be a life-long struggle, especially when education suffers as a result.

In order to understand the magnitude of the issue, “per the Literacy Project Foundation, three out of four people on welfare cannot read. Fifty percent of unemployed individuals between 16 and 21 years of age are not considered literate” (Tkatchov). According to the Literacy Gap Map, “130 million Americans-54% of adults between the ages of 16 and 74 years old-lack proficiency in literacy, essentially reading below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level. Often, counties with the lowest literacy rates are the same areas that experience poor health, poverty, and low economic mobility” (<https://barbarabush.org>). The cycle of poverty seems to be never-ending. According to a “1995 study by Hart and Risley, an average preschool child from a professional family was provided experiences with 11 million words per year, a working-class family six million words, and a family living in poverty three million words” (Tkatchov). According to Tkatchov, the “more vocabulary a child possesses early in life, the higher chance of academic success later in life” (orantkatchov.medium.com). Obviously, poverty impacts the ability to read and learn. So, how does Kentucky rate?

According to Diva Karthikeyan in her article, “Listen: New Census Data Sheds Light on Poverty Rates in Kentucky,” data shows that “Kentucky has a sixth highest poverty rate in the country and the seventh highest child poverty rate among the states.” She goes on to say that “we have a really persistently high poverty rate of 16.5%, about one in six Kentuckians, and that stayed flat year over year” (Karthikeyan). Although Kentucky’s rates have been staying the same, they have never improved either. According to Statista, the current poverty rate will actually get worse, with an increase to 17.4% in 2023-2024 (<https://statista.com>). So how does this amount of poverty affect literacy rates in Kentucky? Sandra Craft at ThinkImpact lists Kentucky’s literacy rate at 87.8%, with a rank of 29 out of the 50 states. Child literacy in Kentucky for fourth graders not reading proficiently is 64%, which ranks child literacy at 21 out of the 50 states

(<https://www.thinkimpact.com>). Kentucky's poverty rates correlate to the literacy rates across the board.

One of the most telling articles pertaining to literacy and poverty is an article entitled, "A 335 Billion Loss: The Hidden Ways Kentucky's Reading Battle Is Costing Us," by Mandy McLaren. According to McLaren, "1 in 4 Kentucky adults can read and comprehend only basic material, making them functionally illiterate." McLaren goes on to explain how illiteracy has a trickle-down effect to poverty, health, and crime. Those who are functionally illiterate earn, on average, \$34,000 compared to the minimum average salary of \$63,000 of those who are considered reading proficient (McLaren). Also of interest is that "the odds of a U.S. adult being in poor health is four times greater for those with low literacy skills" (McLaren). Those who are functionally illiterate also have a greater risk of committing a crime. "Roughly 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. prison system-including both first-time offenders and those previously incarcerated-cannot perform basic critical thinking skills, such as comparing and contrasting information they read" (McLaren). A precursor to incarceration is student dropout rates in relation to low literacy. Students from "low-income families being 2.4 times more likely to drop out of high school than middle-income students" (Christle, Julivette, Nelson 326). It should be noted that dropouts "comprise 82% of the prison population and 85% of juvenile justice cases" (Christle, Julivette, Nelson 325). So, we have poverty and illiteracy as a catalyst for poor health, continued low-income employment, dropping out of school, and the potential for crime and incarceration, but what happens to the low-income jobs when AI and other computer programs are capable of taking these jobs from impoverished people? According to Stephen Pruitt, president of the Southern Regional Education Board and former Kentucky Education Commissioner, "In Kentucky, 750,000 adults are at risk of not being employable. That's what we're looking at here. If you don't get the literacy foundations right out of the gate, we're going to continue to have students who don't have the skills to be employable" (McLaren).

With poverty comes fewer educational opportunities. The cycle tends to repeat itself with no end. Kentucky's poverty rate has remained unchanged but threatens to get worse over time. With worsening poverty comes more educational challenges, especially those of literacy. Without being proficient in literacy, the job market is limited which leaves those struggling to escape the hold of poverty, stuck. With limited resources, the risk for health problems and criminal activity increases. There is also the potential that poverty and illiteracy will continue to impact the next generation that is born into it.

Revised Literature Review

By Kristen Hughes

In researching the topic of the effects of poverty on literacy, there are some stark statistics and research studies that have been done. So, how does poverty affect literacy rates? Although the primary focus is on Kentucky, it is important to look at the United States as a whole. This topic is concerning and of interest to society since illiteracy can be linked to high school dropout rates, crime, prison, and economic loss. This issue should also be of interest as it is an ethical issue and efforts to bridge the socioeconomic gap have been ongoing for years. In the literature that is in this review, the statistics and research articles highlight the issues associated with poverty and illiteracy. It should also be noted that of the research done, very little has been peer-reviewed. The lack of scholarly publications shows that more research needs to be done. Much of the research found, with actual statistical data, was through news articles. Kentucky is lacking in research on the issue of poverty and literacy, and there has been no research done at all about the socioeconomical implications of illiteracy. There has been, however, research done on teaching methods and ways to reach those affected by poverty. Studies have been done to record parental involvement, nongraded primary programs, and the impact of effective teachers. Much needs to be done regarding this issue, as the statistics show an overwhelming failure of those living in poverty and the consequences of falling into the poverty gap.

To understand the magnitude of the issue of illiteracy, it is important to look at some statistics. According to ThinkImpact, “21% of adults in the U.S. are illiterate” and “54% of adults read below a sixth-grade level” (Craft, ThinkImpact.com). Across the United States, “66% of all fourth graders were reading below proficiency levels” (Craft, ThinkImpact.com). According to the World Population Review, California has the highest percentage of illiteracy in the United States at 23.1%, followed closely behind by New York with a 22.1% illiteracy rate. Although the data varies between different statistical publishings, Kentucky’s illiteracy rate is 21.9% (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/us-literacy-rates-by-state>). According to Mandy McLaren at the Louisville Courier Journal, “nearly 1 in 4 Kentucky adults can read and comprehend only basic material, making them functionally illiterate” (<https://www.courier-journal.com>). McLaren also notes that adults who are illiterate struggle to find jobs and earn markedly less than their literate peers. Those with low literacy skills have “four times greater” risk of being in poor health and “roughly 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. prison system” are incapable of “comparing and contrasting information they read” (<https://www.courier-journal.com>). Both ThinkImpact and McLaren note that “low levels of literacy cost the U.S. up to 2.2 trillion dollars per year” (Craft, ThinkImpact.com). McLaren expands upon that statistic in saying that Kentucky “could secure a \$335 billion windfall of its own-172% of the state’s GDP-by getting all

students to basic proficiency” (<https://www.courier-journal.com>). However, the real concern is the effects of poverty on children and education, as education is, for many, the only way to break above the poverty line and escape a fate of low literacy, dropping out of school, or becoming imprisoned due to criminal activity. So, how does poverty influence literacy achievement?

According to Melissa Stinnett in her article, “The Influence of Poverty on Literacy Achievement,” extensive research has been done on the relationship between economic status and education. Stinnett explains that children living in low socioeconomic situations have fewer opportunities for exposure to literacy-related activities. Also, “the quality and number of shared reading activities are lower, as well as trips to the library and exposure to varied vocabulary and syntax” (Stinnett 65). Children in poverty are exposed to less language from a young age. When looking at state and international exams, it was noted that “Childhood poverty influences achievement when measured by standardized tests” (Stinnett 68). Considering that a study conducted showed that “children from low SES backgrounds are at increased risk of reading problems,” it is not surprising that two-thirds of fourth and eighth graders from lower socioeconomic backgrounds “did not score proficient on the 2013 NAEP reading test” (Stinnett 66-67). Not surprisingly, on international tests, it was found that “every country that outranked the U.S. in aggregate terms had significantly lower percentages of poverty” (Stinnett 66). Furthermore, Stinnett quotes C.H. Tienken from his article, “Kappa Delta Pi Record” in saying, “A contention by some is that if our country wishes to improve the rankings of U.S. students on international tests, we need to advocate for a reduction in childhood poverty” (Stinnett 68). When poverty is a factor, students struggle academically. Unfortunately, one variable of poverty is homelessness.

In a study on homelessness, it was found that “more than 550,000 families of young children are homeless” and “13 million children are living in poverty” (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 84). There are many factors in play when it comes to homeless children and literacy development, the largest being “out-of-home placement experiences” (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 84). In the article, “Homelessness, Poverty, and Children’s Literacy Development,” the plight of homeless children is evident in that “Seventy-five percent of U.S. homeless children perform below grade level in reading” and “schools and teachers may not be prepared to teach these students, further hindering their literacy development and school achievement” (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 84). In addition, some of the problems underlying homelessness are the high mobility of students, lack of stability, and behavioral issues coupled with schools’ lack of resources. Certain efforts can combat some of the issues which are associated with homelessness, such as working with communities and teachers engaging with students on a personal level. However, “poverty is a key factor in homelessness” and children who are homeless often feel fear (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 85). A key factor in why studying the effects of poverty is so important is that “The study of poverty issues and relevant literature can help develop empathy for homeless families and challenge associated stereotypes” (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 85). When poverty is not addressed, these children tend to fall through the cracks and become another statistic.

“Substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, crime and violence, gangs, unsafe sexual practices, teenage pregnancy, single parenthood, limited healthcare, slum housing, and homelessness are problems frequently experienced by families living in poverty-stricken urban areas” (Dupper, Poertner 415). The article, “Public Schools and the Revitalization of Impoverished Communities: School-Linked, Family Resource Centers,” says that often, schools are at fault for the failure of the students in their care. In many cases, schools become as impoverished as the communities that surround them and lack the resources to ensure academic success. Studies have found that “70 percent of children born into poverty experienced severe academic problems during their early elementary grades” and “poverty in the inner cities has a profoundly negative impact on children’s educational success” (Dupper, Poertner 416). The article points out that education is one of the only ways to escape from poverty and to find better jobs. However, there is some hope that by bringing communities together, that programs can be established to offer children in poverty the help they need. A movement is taking shape that would offer children a chance to “grow and develop in a safe family home, acquire essential education in a normal school setting, and become productive members of the community” (Dupper, Poertner 417). In Kentucky, the “Family Resource and Youth Service Centers is an example of a state-wide movement targeted at poor communities and linked to educational reform” (Dupper, Poertner 419). These programs aim to involve parents and establish positive relationships. Yet, many school districts do not have these programs and often, parents feel frustrated and unheard.

“Hearing the voices of parents living in high-poverty communities is critical. We argue that by listening to parents, educators can identify ways to support families as they negotiate living in poor communities and working with underfunded schools” (Compton-Lilly, Delbridge 531). Again in this study, it is noted that “Poor children face challenges that affect school performance and literacy learning, including nutritional needs, access to healthcare, living in dangerous neighborhoods, and a lack of resources to support literacy learning” (Compton-Lilly, Delbridge 532). In the study, “What Can Parents Tell Us About Poverty and Literacy Learning? Listening to Parents Over Time,” Compton-Lilly and Delbridge chronicle the lives of two parents struggling in poverty. The unfortunate reality is that school systems and communities often blame parents for their child’s poor academic performance. However, the “voices of people who live below the poverty line are rarely heard” and listening to parents is “critical in making sense of the historic failure of schools to educate children from high-poverty communities” (Compton-Lilly, Delbridge 532). Parents cite lack of resources for their child’s educational struggles and educators must be cautious not to view impoverished parents in a negative light. Parent involvement is crucial for a child’s success in school. When key relationships are not formed and the socioeconomic gap is left open without essential resources to fill the gap, students fail or drop out of school.

“Dropping out of high school is a serious problem, not only for the individual, the school system, and the community, but also for society” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 325). In a study done on dropout rates, it was found that “students who drop out of high school are more likely to be unemployed, to earn less than those who graduate, to be put on public assistance, and to

end up in prison” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 325). Poverty and poor school performance appear to be factors in the dropout rate. Students from “low-income families being 2.4 times more likely to drop out of high school than middle-income students” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 326). Also, “early school failure may act as a starting point in a cycle that weakens a student’s attachment to school and eventually leads to dropping out” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 326). The authors of this study point out that there has been “little empirical research” done on the factors associated with dropping out, but that school factors play a role as do “accumulating risk factors,” one of which is poverty (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 326). The study included a look at the Kentucky Department of Education’s dropout rates. “According to the KDE, high schools in the state averaged a 3.91% dropout rate,” however, this did not include students with disabilities that dropped out of school (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 327). It should be noted that administrators from high dropout schools reported “poor family involvement” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 330). The condition of the schools and teacher engagement were also factors that played a role in low and high dropout schools. School failure was documented as a cause of dropout. In addition, “a strong positive relationship between poverty and school failure has been documented in numerous studies, and our results corroborated this research” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 333). With fewer options available to dropouts, it is not surprising that they often turn to criminal activity. Dropouts “comprise 82% of the prison population and 85% of juvenile justice cases” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 325).

Since students who drop out of school have limited options for employment, there is an increased probability that they will turn to a life of criminal activity. Since “increased literacy rates have been associated with increased employment and wages,” it stands to reason that those who suffer from low literacy, and subsequently dropout of school, would struggle to find employment (Shippen, Houchins, Crites, Derzis, Patterson 4). According to “An Examination of the Basic Reading Skills of Incarcerated Males,” “one of the most common characteristics prison inmates typically share is unsuccessful educational experiences including dropping out of school, repeating grades, and not gaining basic literacy skills” (Shippen, Houchins, Crites, Derzis, Patterson 4). It is noted that “across all age groups, incarcerated adults score statistically lower in prose, document, and quantitative literacy levels” (Shippen, Houchins, Crites, Derzis, Patterson 5). A study in Alabama in 2007 suggested that “approximately 75% of all Alabama inmates read below the 5th grade level” and “60% have not completed high school or a General Equivalency Diploma” (Shippen, Houchins, Crites, Derzis, Patterson 6). According to the study, the inmates’ reading scores were so low that they would not be able to pass the GED exam, leaving them with limited job opportunities upon release from prison. The article, “Prison Literacy Connection,” by E. Herrick says that “illiteracy for adult inmates is estimated at 75 percent” (1). Literacy Mid-South published an article entitled “The Relationship Between Incarceration and Low Literacy.” In the article, Literacy Mid-South gives a few statistics in correlation to the “fact a strong correlation between early low literacy skills and our country’s exploding incarceration rates” exists (<https://www.literacymidsouth.org/news>). Among those statistics are that “85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are

functionally low literate” and “high school dropouts are 63% more likely to be incarcerated” (<https://www.literacymidsouth.org/news>). Another staggering statistic is that “74% of third graders who read poorly still struggle in ninth grade, and third grade reading scores can predict a student’s likelihood to graduate high school” (<https://www.literacymidsouth.org/news>). These statistics are warning signs and indicators of the effects of poverty and literacy. It is not surprising that adults in the prison system have poor reading skills and struggled in school or dropped out. “A low level of literacy is not a direct determinant of a person’s probability to be convicted on criminal charges, but correctional and judicial professions have long recognized a connection between poor literacy, dropout rates, and crime” (<https://www.literacymidsouth.org/news>). If socioeconomic and educational gaps increase the risk of dropout and incarceration rates, what can Kentucky and the U.S. do to close the gap? How is Kentucky managing its poverty rates and at-risk students?

A study done by Robert Lyons, EdD, showed that the “majority of Kentucky schools had inequitable outcomes, particularly in the upper grades” (Lyons 20). The study was done to investigate the “equity in Kentucky, and of potential trends that might exist between schools of different sizes and of different poverty levels (Lyons 18). Lyons asserted that “exogenous school characteristics,” such as poverty, school size, and resources affected the achievement gap (Lyons 13). The study established a trend “between equitable student outcomes and overall school socioeconomic-level and school size” (Lyons 10). These outcomes are not new or surprising. However, it still does not suggest a plan of action for closing the gap.

“The Kentucky Reading Study” by Wallace Ramsey is an older study done on the reading gap affecting eighth grade students. What is most notable about this study is that it was written in 1962 and establishes a trend in low reading scores that we are still seeing today. According to Ramsey, Kentucky “has involved itself in an unusual effort in general self-improvement in education. Despite the state’s lack of resources...” (Ramsey 178). Ramsey goes on to say that as Kentuckians become more aware of the needs of the school system, they are responding and offering support. Ironically, lack of resources continues to be a problem and community response is varied. Ramsey conducted his study on fourth and eighth graders and concluded that fourth graders were reading up to “national norms,” but there is a “lag in reading performance among eighth graders in Kentucky” (Ramsey 181). Ramsey insists that there could be many causes for the lag, but more research needs to be done to determine what reading programs are working, and which are deficient. Considering the gap, the research done on the educational gap, the shortfalls in test scores, and decades of the same problem, one might think that poverty was bigger than the schools and teachers combating it. Yet, programs are emerging that show promise and some schools in Eastern Kentucky are beating the odds.

Unlike other articles that cited Kentucky’s low reading scores, “reading achievement is normal in Eastern Kentucky, despite high proportions of children living in Poverty” (Marietta 56). “Reading Achievement in Eastern Kentucky” by Sky Marietta states that “the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that, for the subgroup of elementary students

taking the test who could be identified as poor, no state scored significantly higher in reading than Kentucky, a trend likely driven by the 190,000 children currently enrolled in Eastern Kentucky's public schools" (56). Although this is an achievement that should be highlighted, especially with the numerous articles saying the contrary, Marietta says it is "largely unnoticed" (Marietta 56). It is well known that impoverished children enter school already behind and struggle to make strides, especially in reading. Children "living in poverty are exposed to far fewer words than their middle-class peers" (Marietta 57). Therefore, it stands to reason that these children are being exposed to a wealth of language from an early age. Upon observation, Marietta realized that there were significant differences in language exposure, and the "differences were present across home, school, and the community" (Marietta 58). Children in Eastern Kentucky differ from inner-city children in that they were part of a "large family and social networks" (Marietta 58). They are included in adult conversations, spend time with relatives and grandparents, and are "integrated within the stories, gossip, and news of mountain life" (Marietta 58). Teachers are an integral part of the community, know the families well, and have high expectations for their students. However, even with the high reading scores, the influence of poverty shows itself in full force when looking at graduation rates. The "region has the lowest percentage of children graduating from high school in the country (about sixty-two percent of students in Eastern Kentucky complete high school, compared to eighty percent in the United States)" (Marietta 59). Even with the low graduation rates, Eastern Kentucky is an example and proof that poor children are capable of learning given the right environment.

"There is an unprecedented emphasis in the United States on improving the teaching of reading in elementary classrooms, and the press for improvement has been increased by the Reading First provisions of Title I, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002)" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 3). A study of 140 high-poverty classrooms revealed that high-level thinking skills "increased students understanding of what they were doing and encouraged them to be meaning makers" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 4). The most effective teachers used "modeling and explanation to teach students strategies they could use to decode words and understand texts" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 4). It was also noted that effective teachers "provided a balanced literacy program. They taught skills, actively engaged students in a great deal of reading and writing, and fostered self-regulation through a combination of modeling, scaffolding, and providing informative feedback to students as they tried to apply strategies" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 4). In a study done in 2002, it was found that these effective teachers were as concerned about the student as they were about the lessons taught. During the study of nine schools as part of the CIERA School Change Project, the focus was placed on reading and writing. All the schools were high poverty. The students were assessed in the fall and the spring. The results from the study showed that "higher-level questioning contributed to students' growth in reading and writing" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 7-16). Higher-level questioning also contributed to "improvement in reading comprehension and fluency" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 16). The

conclusion of the study determined that this manner of teaching was effective, even in high-poverty schools. "One consistent finding is that higher-level questioning matters. The more a teacher asked higher-level questions, the more growth the nine target students in her class experienced on a variety of measures" (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 22). As teachers and schools are pushed to close the achievement gap, new methods of teaching are being implemented, some with great success.

A study on nongraded primary programs "focused on one reform initiative designed to narrow the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their middle-class counterparts" (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 47). Kentucky implemented nongraded primary programs in 1990. The program is "based on a constructivist philosophy in which learning is no longer viewed as the transmission of knowledge where recitation and paper-and-pencil, fill in the blank exercises characterize classroom work, but rather, the active construction of knowledge built on students' current sociocognitive schemes" (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 48). Many of the concepts are based on sociocultural theory and "most educators agree that reconstructing education to make schools more equitable for poor and minority groups is a moral imperative" (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 49). Throughout the study, researchers and teachers visited the homes of the students every eight weeks to learn about the children from their parents. They interviewed the parents about their background and belief system. In addition to the nongraded primary program, each school in the study had multiage settings, which allows children to work at their own pace, with peers on the same level, or with children at a more advanced level. "In all the classrooms, the teachers believed in the concept of continuous progress and worked toward helping children move forward in their development..." (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 54-55). Parents were asked to be involved in various ways in the classroom. Even though the children were considered poor and many of the parents had limited education, all of the children showed educational growth using these teaching methods. It is the researcher's opinion that "despite the complexity of teaching children in poverty, we believe that, theoretically, all children can ultimately become strong, independent learners within nongraded primary programs, if certain conditions exist" (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 61).

The number of scholarly articles that could be found is minimal. Some of the research that has been done is old and outdated. The vast majority of statistical data comes from news articles and other sources online, not from peer-reviewed literature. There is a need for more research to be done on this topic and the research that has been done needs to be updated and expanded upon. Several of the articles mentioned the fact that Kentucky was lacking information and research on the topic. Hopefully, with continued research, the importance of this topic will become known, written about, and discussed.

Revised Research Proposal

By Kristen Hughes

Abstract:

In this study, I will be investigating the link between poverty and illiteracy to answer the question: How does poverty affect literacy rates? The majority of my research will be quantitative methods, such as surveys and numerical data, but will also include qualitative methods when it comes to observation and discussion. My project is descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, and evaluation research. Since my project seeks to define and describe the effects of poverty on literacy rates, it is descriptive. Since my research identifies an issue that is concerning to the impoverished community, it is exploratory. My research is explanatory in that it shows the cause and effect of poverty and low literacy. Finally, my research is evaluation research because it shows the impact of certain teaching methods, family resource centers, and parental and community involvement. Through statistical data, I will show the links between poverty, low literacy achievement, dropout rates, and incarceration. Although this study will focus on Kentucky, data from the United States will be used to draw parallels between socioeconomic status and illiteracy. Using information from the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card, I will provide test scores along with economically disadvantaged percentage rates from two of the largest counties in Kentucky. In addition to reading scores and socioeconomic status, the current dropout rate will be recorded. There was limited data available for the reading levels of the incarcerated population in Kentucky, so statistical data from other states will be presented for this study. Data for this study will also be obtained through surveys of parents, teachers, school administrators, the prison population, and prison staff (as allowed). Observation of third and eighth grade classrooms will take place to observe teaching styles, classroom dynamics, and the learning environment. In-person interviews will be conducted with parents, teachers, and inmates (as allowed) to determine areas where the achievement gap is most evident, what can be done to improve the gap, and to allow for clarity pertaining to the survey questions. Documentation of the notes taken during in-person interviews will be recorded and summarized. Responses will be charted next to a graph of the statistical data.

Hypothesis:

Poverty affects literacy rates and low literacy rates increase the risk of dropping out of school and/or being incarcerated.

Levels of Measurement:

The levels of measurement are ordinal, interval, and ratio.

Variables:

The variables in this study are as follows: The independent variable (cause) is poverty. The dependent variables (effect) are illiteracy, dropping out of school, and increased risk of being incarcerated. The control variables (constant) are the schools and class/district size at the time of the study. In order to adequately measure the variables in this study, the conceptual definition of literacy will need to be defined. As such, literacy is “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (<https://nces.ed.gov>).

Validity and Reliability:

Validity of this study will occur through consistent statistics showing that poverty affects literacy rates. Reading scores from state and national tests will be compared to socioeconomic data to show a valid relationship between the two sets of data. Reliability will be proven through consistent test scores that show similar results with little to no change in variance. The results will not be affected by outside factors or errors.

Participants (Units of Analysis):

Students from two of the largest school districts in Kentucky, Fayette County and Jefferson County, for test scores. For observations and in-person interviews, students, teachers, and school administration from a third and eighth grade classroom in each district. Teachers, students, and parents will be asked to participate in surveys. Some parents may be asked to do in-person interviews. As allowed, incarcerated persons will be asked to participate in surveys and in-person interviews.

Population/Sample:

The population is the students at the schools and the inmates at the prison. The sample is the two classrooms in Fayette County and the two classrooms in Jefferson County along with the inmates who agree to participate. Probability sampling will be used.

Methodology:

1. Student assessment data from the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card will be pulled. This data will give the reading scores for the Fayette County and Jefferson County school districts.
2. School district size and socioeconomic factors will also be pulled from the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card. These statistics will be recorded.
3. Statistics on dropout rates will be pulled from the Kentucky and from the United States. Limited data is available on the Kentucky Department of Education’s website, so statistics from other states will also be recorded.
4. Statistics on reading levels and dropout rates in correlation to incarceration rates will be recorded. The data establishing the link between poverty, reading levels, dropout rates, and incarceration rates will be compared, recorded, and graphed for clarity.

5. Surveys will be given to parents, teachers, school administration, and incarcerated persons (as allowed). Questions to be asked will include:
 1. What is your highest level of education?
 2. What is your profession?
 3. If you did not graduate from high school, did you, or are you planning to, receive your GED?
 4. What do you consider to be barriers to literacy?
 5. Do you feel that there are financial barriers to educational success?
 6. What do you think will help a child learn to enjoy reading?
 7. Do you feel that you have adequate access to books and other reading materials?
 8. Did you enjoy school?
 9. What is your favorite book?
6. Classroom Observations will be conducted in a third and eighth grade classroom in each district. I will observe teaching styles, student/teacher interactions, barriers to learning, and classroom dynamics.
7. In person interviews will be conducted with parents, teachers, students, and school administration of the schools and classrooms observed. If allowed, in-person interviews will also be conducted at the prison (s). The interviews will expand on the surveys given and allow for more extensive answers with clarity.
8. Documenting classroom dynamics and reading program content. Notes will be taken during observations. These notes will expand upon describing the classroom environment, learning responsiveness of the students, the reading curriculum, teaching styles, and student participation. Teacher/student interactions will also be noted.

Ethical Practices:

In accordance with the code of ethics and principles, this study will commit to “practicing with integrity, and to maintaining responsibility for their actions. They must also respect the rights, dignity, and diversity of others, including research participants, as well as be socially responsible to their communities and use research to contribute to the public good” (Schutt 72). To this end, the privacy rights of all participants will be of utmost importance. Ensuring that the incarcerated persons feel as though they have a choice in participating and do not feel forced to comply is also extremely important. Respecting each participant’s views and opinions is paramount. Obtaining written permission from parents/guardians of the underage students will also be necessary. The privacy of underage students will be of utmost importance.

Conclusion:

This study is extremely important as it has been shown that there are direct links between poverty, literacy, dropout rates, and becoming incarcerated. In order to understand the magnitude of the issue, “per the Literacy Project Foundation, three out of four people on welfare cannot read. Fifty percent of unemployed individuals between 16 and 21 years of age

are not considered literate” (<https://www.orantkatchov.medium.com>). According to data, “Kentucky has a sixth highest poverty rate in the country and the seventh highest child poverty rate among the states” (<https://www.lpm.org>). Sandra Craft at ThinkImpact lists Kentucky’s literacy rate at 87.8% with a rank of 29 out of the 50 states. Child literacy in Kentucky for fourth graders not reading proficiently is 64%, which ranks child literacy at 21 out of the 50 states (<https://www.thinkimpact.com>). If that data alone is not convincing that there is a direct link between poverty and literacy rates, the statistics from the Kentucky Department of Education provide overwhelming evidence. Fayette County has a student population of 40,494 students. Of those students, 57.1% are considered to be economically disadvantaged. Reading scores were given with Novice being the lowest score and Distinguished being the highest score. Economically disadvantaged students had scores of 35% Novice, 28% Apprentice, 23% Proficient, and 14% Distinguished. The scores for homeless students were even lower with 50% Novice, 24% Apprentice, 17% Proficient, and 9% Distinguished. In comparison, noneconomically disadvantaged students had scores of 10% Novice, 18% Apprentice, 29% Proficient, and 44% Distinguished. Jefferson County has a student population of 93,418 students. Of those students, 64.8% are considered economically disadvantaged. Reading scores for the economically disadvantaged students were 42% Novice, 29% Apprentice, 20% Proficient, and 9% Distinguished. The homeless students’ scores were 57% Novice, 28% Apprentice, 12% Proficient, and 3% Distinguished. In comparison, noneconomically disadvantaged students had test scores of 16% Novice, 22% Apprentice, 29% Proficient, and 33% Distinguished (<https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com>). According to Melissa Stinnett in her article, “The Influence of Poverty on Literacy Achievement,” two-thirds of fourth and eighth graders from lower socioeconomic backgrounds “did not score proficient on the 2013 NAEP reading test” (Stinnett 66). This is evident in Kentucky’s reading scores as well. Considering one variable of poverty is homelessness, it is not surprising that “seventy-five percent of U.S. homeless children perform below grade level in reading” (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko 84). This is evident in the Kentucky Department of Education’s School Report Card.

Unfortunately, there has been little research done on the correlation between poverty and literacy rates even though the statistics are alarming. This is an issue that should be researched and reported on in order to garner change. Not only is it an ethical issue, but it is also important due to the economic and criminal issues surrounding it. According to Mandy McLaren in her article, “A \$335 Billion Loss: The Hidden Ways Kentucky’s Reading Battle is Costing Us,” “Roughly 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. prison system—including both first-time offenders and those previously incarcerated—cannot perform basic critical thinking skills, such as comparing and contrasting information they read” (<https://courier-journal.com>). In a study done on incarcerated males, “one of the most common characteristics prison inmates typically share is unsuccessful educational experiences including dropping out of school, repeating grades, and not gaining basic literacy skills (Shippen, Houchins, Crites, Derzis, Patterson 4). Not only do incarcerated persons have lower reading skills, but they share a poor educational experience that leads to dropping out of school. Students from “low-income families being 2.4

times more likely to drop out of high school than middle-income students” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 326). “According to the KDE, high schools in the state averaged a 3.91% dropout rate” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 327). However, I found that the Kentucky Department of Education’s website to be less than forthcoming and the numbers given did not add up. In my research, the KDE lists the dropout rate for four-year students at 1.1% and for five-year students at 1.4%. These dropout rates appear low until they are compared to the graduation rates, where a discrepancy seems to occur. KDE lists the four-year graduation rate at 90.2% and the five-year graduation rate at 92.3% (<https://www.education.ky.gov/comm/edfacts/pages>). One study said that school failure was documented as a cause of dropout and “a strong positive relationship between poverty and school failure has been documented in numerous studies, and our research corroborated this research” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 333). To further the connection between dropout rates and prison, a study done found that “students who dropout of high school are more likely to be unemployed, to earn less than those who graduate, to be put on public assistance, and to end up in prison” (Christle, Jolivette, Nelson 325). Another statistic to consider is that “high school dropouts are 63% more likely to be incarcerated” and “85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally low literate” (<https://www.literacymidsouth.org/news>). It is evident that low literacy is linked to poverty, which increases the risk of dropout rates and possible incarceration, but how does that affect people economically? According to McLaren, although Kentucky “has not conducted its own economic impact study, nor has it studied the connection between literacy and its incarceration rates,” an analysis done in 2020 found that “getting all adults across the U.S. to be proficient readers would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion in annual income-10% of the country’s gross domestic product” (<https://courier-journal.com>). A Stanford economist, Eric Hanushek, estimated that Kentucky “could secure a \$335 billion windfall of its own-172% of the state’s GDP-by getting all students to basic proficiency” (<https://courier-journal.com>). McLaren notes that adults who are illiterate struggle to find jobs and earn much less than their peers. This is in addition to those who are receiving government assistance, struggle with health issues and care, and those who end up incarcerated.

Even though “there is an unprecedented emphasis in the United States on improving the teaching of reading in elementary classrooms, and the press for improvement has been increased by the Reading First provisions of Title I, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002),” there is still a scarcity of research done on the impact of poverty on reading proficiency (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 3). Some school districts and teachers are implementing new teaching methods to try to close the achievement gap and meet the needs of students (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, Rodriguez 22). Some schools are attempting to combat socioeconomic factors by structuring their teaching based on “students’ current sociocognitive schemes” (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 48). Many of the concepts are based on sociocultural theory and “most educators agree that reconstructing education to make schools more equitable for poor and minority groups is a moral imperative” (McIntyre, Kyle, Hovda, Stone 49). Although some school districts are pushing to make changes in order to meet the needs of their

economically disadvantaged students, studies have found that “70 percent of children born into poverty experienced severe academic problems during their early elementary grades” (Dupper, Poertner 416). In many cases, schools become as impoverished as the communities around them and lack the resources to ensure academic success. There is a movement taking shape to bring communities together to provide children with the chance to “grow and develop in a safe family home, acquire essential education in a normal school setting, and become productive members of the community” (Dupper, Poertner 417). However, for this movement to be successful, there needs to be more awareness, and that requires further research to be done.

When it comes to state test scores, it is evident that poverty plays a significant role. Even on International test scores, poverty is a factor. Stinnett quotes C.H. Tienken in saying, “A contention by some is that if our country wishes to improve the rankings of U.S. students on International tests, we need to advocate for a reduction in childhood poverty” (Stinnett 68). Not surprisingly, it was found that “every country that outranked the U.S. in aggregate terms had significantly lower percentages of poverty” (Stinnett 66). If we want to address the issue of poverty and the issues associated with poverty, it is imperative to bring awareness to the issue. With increased research and funding, it may be possible to implement the programs necessary to provide a safe learning environment capable of closing the achievement gap. And if we close the achievement gap, we may be able to see more students heading to college instead of to prison.

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