

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center

Blog from the Executive Director

Education: The Big Divide

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Disparity begins at birth, is perpetuated in early childhood, and continues through school and life. Poverty affects everything...access to health services, access to high quality early childhood education, access to good schools and ultimately one's ability to earn a college degree. A recent article in the Wall Street Journal profiles this difference. By the age of 24, 77% of twenty-four year olds from families in the top quartile of earnings had completed a baccalaureate degree, while only 9% of this age from the bottom income quartile had earned a degree. A college education has always been the ticket out of poverty; it's just that few are getting that ticket.

We also know that the best investment we can make is providing poor children access to very high quality early care and education. One of the most critical components to this high quality is the knowledge and skills of the teachers in those classrooms. Yet in some communities not a single early childhood teacher has even a two-year degree in early childhood education. Many early childhood teachers lag in basic reading, writing and math skills...skills they need to be effective in teaching those skills to young children and in communicating with their families. A recent article in the Washington Post profiles the extensiveness of this challenge, with surprisingly large numbers of teachers not even having high school level math, reading and writing skills.

Our work with the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® (T.E.A.C.H.) scholarship initiative over the last 25 years has confirmed this as well. So many of our T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients have to take multiple developmental courses at their community college to be able to meet basic college entry standards. The good news, however, is that many of our recipients are quite capable of gaining that proficiency, doing really well in their college coursework, and completing two- and four-year college degrees. Often they, like the children they teach, came from poor communities with low performing schools. They were never given a fair chance. But now, with their college degree in hand, they are giving that chance to the children in their classrooms and in their own homes. Wonder Woman pales in comparison to these women. They are my heroines.

Sue Russell

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2015/02/16/the-famous-word-gap-doesnt-hurt-only-the-young-it-affects-many-educators-too/>

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/big-gap-in-college-graduation-rates-for-rich-and-poor-study-finds-1422997677>



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