Breaking the Boundaries Education

For the past year I have been working at a nonprofit organization that specializes in achieving equality and equity in early education for all children. Over the course of this year, I read various studies that show how crucial your early years (between ages 3-6) can be for your life not only in education, but career and socioeconomically as well. Many parents may not realize that even though they are striving to give their child the best life they can, if they are not receiving quality education at this age, their future is still a toss-up. A recent study conducted by Waterford Institute shows that if a child is not reading by 3rd grade, they are over 75% more likely to drop out of high school than their other literate peers.

At the Waterford Institute, I am able to work with young children to ensure that they can overcome the boundaries that they are predisposed to. In fact, about 75% of the children that the Waterford Institute serves are either ELL (English as a Learning Language) , SPED (Special Education), or living in state-classified poverty households. For these types of students, the educational experience is one of the many disadvantages that they are facing. Many of these students are forced to start school without any social or economic resources that many other children at their school have.

For Hispanic or ELL students, one of the unfavorable circumstance they are faced with is the lack of cultural knowledge by their parents. This leads to issues with navigating through the U.S. education system, as well as lack of communication between the teacher, parent, and student. Most schools are also not equipped to properly educate ELL students, causing them to fall further behind their peers and putting them on the track for dropping out.

Given the growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S., it is imperative that companies, like the Waterford Institute, attempt to bridge the learning gap between multicultural students compared to traditional U.S. born students. However, despite their efforts Hispanic students are one of the least educated ethnicities in the U.S. Eleven percent of those over the age of 25 have obtained a Bachelor’s degree or higher compared to a rough 20% of African Americans, 30% of Caucasian, and 49% of Asian Americans. In fact, about half of all Hispanic adults have less than or equivalent to a ninth-grade education.

Due to these circumstances, parents of young minority children often cannot afford the same quality education that their child needs. This is not only a disadvantage to the child, but to the parent as well. Parents with low-income jobs will have to struggle to help support their children for longer periods of time compared to if their child received a better education. Without a proper education, the child will have no interest in pursuing a career or even a higher education for that matter, leaving both the child and their future progeny stuck in a cycle of poor education and poverty.

It is because of these statistics that I would like to conduct further research about the education barriers of Hispanic and impoverished children. I would like to identify what factors contribute to these barriers, and if early education programs dedicated specifically to children like this can bridge those gaps, or if they are in fact a waste of time. This could also mean that there is another solution out there that is more effective than these educational technology programs, and if so, I would like to figure out: what it is, what can be done to procure it for the general public, is it affordable, and why isn’t it already in effect?

There are also issues that occur later on, schools in these impoverished areas often suffer from lack of funding. Student achievement gaps result in a lower quality education throughout the K-12 years. In fact, the percentage of Hispanics with a high school diploma was about 52.4 percent in the 2000 census. While there are exceptions to these statistics, students from poor family backgrounds tend to do poorly in school. Usually, they are forced to attend schools with inferior resources, lack of access to health care, and often have families that can’t or refuse to advocate for them.

Education companies such as the Waterford Institute have created educational software to help close the achievement gap for impoverished children. Reports show that by providing impoverished children specifically Latino children with software that adapts to their various linguistic and cultural needs helps diminish dropout rates to less than 10 percent.

While there are many people that may argue that low income students are in fact minorities in the education, that is highly inaccurate; a recent study conducted in 2013 showed that 51% of the nation’s public schools were low income. Additionally, in 40 of the 50 states, low income students comprised no less than 40 percent of all publich schoolchildren and in 21 states, children who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch made up the majority of the students in that state.

Poverty, especially within the educational system, is not equitable, and not productive for society. If we choose to become ignorant to these “Corrosive effects of poverty” (Charles Bow), then our nation’s children will not be able to continue the legacy of education that their ancestors have left for them.

While working for the Waterford Institute I have come across an interesting funding program that provides supplemental funding to school districts that cannot afford high-quality education. Educational companies like Waterford, have made partnerships throughout all 50 states to use Title 1 dollars in order to purchase educational software

Many schools throughout the country are implementing strategies to meet the unique needs of underprivileged children. The use of sensitive planning, cultural understanding, community outreach, greater parent involvement and awareness, as well as appropriate pedagogy are helping schools conform to the many needs of these children.

I believe that there is a solution out there that can be used to help students in substandard situations receive the same quality education that their affluent peers do. I believe that there is something more that we can do to help these communities, whether that be through humanitarian trips, or if these educational technology companies can truly be an advantage.

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