

## Worked for Me!

In the Winter 2006 issue of the *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, readers were asked to respond to the question *How do you address the special needs of students living in poverty?* Here is a sampling of the responses.

I teach at an inner-city middle school in South Florida where many of my students are living in poverty. Because living in poverty brings with it so many other adverse affects on their lives, such as low reading abilities and behavior problems, many students are unfortunately given up as “hopeless.”

Before these children can be taught—or before they will allow the teacher to teach them—they must be sincerely loved. Not just any teacher can do it. The teacher must have heart for these children and go the extra mile to meet them where they are. Getting to know them as individuals and not just students is number one. These children have an innate ability to detect when a teacher doesn’t like them or has an air about him or her that says, “These children are hopeless.” Believe me, the children know when the teacher doesn’t expect much and doesn’t really care about them. This leads to a barrier that they put up between themselves and the teacher who quips, “They’re bad!”

The teacher’s negative attitude has a domino effect: the children don’t and won’t learn. Many times, the road is long even to get to the door of helping them want to learn. With these students, the teacher has to be everything and then a teacher. The teacher has to be parent, counselor, caretaker, friend, and confidante. The teacher must love the heart of these children. The teacher must reach the core of these children or they won’t learn. They won’t let the teacher teach them.

I have found that once these children sense in their hearts that you love them, then and only then do you see a glimpse of hope that says, “Okay, I guess I’ll let you teach me. I guess I’ll let myself learn.”

Janine Y. Ross  
Miami, FL

Patience. Teachers of children in poverty must possess this attribute.

Teachers usually begin most lessons by building on students' prior knowledge about the subject matter. But what does a teacher do when students have no knowledge of the content? For example, before beginning a lesson on the rain forest, most teachers would have to introduce the concepts of canopy, deforestation, and equator. My students, who attend a school in a neighborhood in poverty, also need to understand the concepts of rainfall, heat, bushes, and poisonous.

Concepts that usually are understood or believed to be part of "common sense" are foreign concepts for children in poverty. Teachers of these students need to have patience when explaining to a third grader the definition of the word "speak" or when working with children who never do homework because it is not valued at home.

Teaching in poverty is not an easy job, but it is rewarding. Those teachers are truly making a difference.

Keira Bauer-Severy  
Second Grade Teacher  
Waco, TX