

**Motivational Factors for the Success of
High ability- Low Income Students**

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Abstract

Throughout my educational career, I have been surrounded by gifted students who obviously belonged in higher learning, however I recall knowing and meeting many gifted students in my elementary and high school years who simply dropped out before they could fulfil their academic potential. It was during a road trip with a friend that he and I began discussing another mutual friend who had come from poverty but went to university to become a lawyer and then a judge. I then considered my father, who also came from a low income household and was the first from our family to attend post-secondary education. I began to wonder what it was that gave these people the resilience to finish their post-secondary education. This paper will explore the literature on education pioneers and then discern what it is that they believe helped give them the resources and confidence to continue with higher education. By looking at the resources, programs and other factors that worked for these students, I hope to determine the main factors involved in creating academic success in Education Pioneers from low income households. I believe this study will enable teachers from all levels to help create a system wherein students from low socioeconomic households can feel supported and achieve their academic goals as they move through the stages of education to the highest levels.

Key Words: gifted, high-ability, low income, First Generation Students (FGS), low socioeconomic status

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction.....	4
The Genesis of the Idea.....	4
Presenting the Argument.....	7
Overview of Paper.....	9
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	10
The Research.....	10
Definition of the terms:	
Gifted or High Ability Students.....	10
First Generation Students (FGS).....	12
Retention of Low Socioeconomic Status Students.....	13
Excellence Gaps.....	14
Programs in Place.....	15
Summary.....	17
Chapter Three: The Application.....	18
Application.....	18
Who needs this research.....	20
An increasing poverty gap.....	23
Summary.....	25
Chapter Four: Conclusion.....	26
Summary.....	26
Implications.....	27
References.....	29

Chapter One: Introduction

In this paper I explain my interest in the topic of my Capstone paper by first reviewing the genesis of the idea for the paper, next I explain how I began my research into the topic of high ability low Socio Economic Status (SES), First Generation Students (FGS) and the facilitating factors for their educational success. Finally, I will illustrate my claim that there is a lack of research into the factors for academic success in high ability low SES, First Generation Students (FGS).

The Genesis of the Idea

A number of years I was on a road trip with a friend and we drove through a small village where there was a road named after a mutual friend's family. This road led to a tiny dirt floor shack, in which our friend had grown up. The size of the shack and the look of the building made it obvious to us that our friend, who is now a judge, had grown up in poverty. This moment reminded me of my father as I recalled visiting the shack he grew up in in small town Ontario, where an uninsulated plywood wall closed in the porch to allow them to have another bedroom for my father and two of his brothers. It is not unusual for people to have grown up in poverty, but what was unusual about both of these cases is that they both went on to become successful FGS's and then move on to post-graduate work, with my father earning a Masters of Education, and my friend graduating from law school and becoming a judge. Both of them are exceptionally intelligent people, but if intelligence were the only factor to their educational success, then many of the other exceptional minds I have met in my life and in my career would have moved on to post-secondary success as well. There have to be other contributing factors to the retention of these high ability low SES students, that allow them to achieve post-secondary success. There are many proven

connections between education and higher Socioeconomic status (Wamba, 2012), and so in order to allow opportunities for people to move out of poverty, we must provide supports to help those high ability, low-SES students move through the education system; however, without further study into what the stakeholders believe helped them, educators and policy makers are making educated guesses at best.

I had been teaching at schools in low-income areas for several years and after thinking about these two cases, I began to wonder, what I could do in my classroom to help facilitate the progression through the levels of education for my students? Previous to this moment in time I had not considered returning to school to achieve a Master's Degree, but it was then that I finally had a question to answer for myself, and decided to enroll in the Master's program.

Throughout the Master's program I had an opportunity to delve deeper into pedagogy, and what I learned gave me a firm background of understanding of why my own approach to teaching works. Without getting into too much description about my own teaching philosophy, I developed a program wherein students are put in positions to solve problems daily, think outside the box, take risks and work as part of a team. Using these four ideals as pillars for my curriculum delivery, I found I am able to engage students quite easily as I allow them to show their learning according to their own sensibilities and intelligences. As I read more literature on the subject of pedagogy, I found evidence that my approach is sound. When I took the course on diversity, what came even more into focus was the fact that the world views education as a panacea for bringing people out of poverty and even more prevalent is the intergenerational transmission of poverty (ITP), which shows that people who grow up in poverty are more likely to end up in poverty and that the best way to

mitigate this connection is to educate the parents (Duarte et al., 2017). We can see the path to closing the poverty gap is through education, but there is not enough research into how to make it easier for a high ability, low income child to achieve continued academic success through each level of education.

I began to research the idea by focusing on three areas: One, what are gifted or high ability students and First Generation Students? Two, what are the factors that influence the retention of low-income students? And three, what programs supporting Low Income high-ability students are already in place? To begin with I restricted my search to studies done within the past five years, however I soon found I needed to expand the constraints of my search because of a lack of current research in the area. Second, there are studies such as Bailey's 2006 study, which looked at factors for early reading success for low SES students, but they did not examine high school or post-secondary success factors. Duarte's 2017 study of FGS looked at how to best prepare students for graduation, from a primary source perspective, however the sample size of this study was only six students, which also illustrates my point that there needs to be further research into this field.

Finally, Wyner et al. (2009) examined and compared university graduation rates between low (Socio-Economic Status) SES students and higher SES students, and one by Renbarger and Long (2019) which focuses on supports for students feeling overwhelmed, either personally or academically, during Post-Secondary schooling. However, these studies do not involve education pioneers as primary sources, by taking their views on the subject into account. Therefore I conclude that there is a lack of research regarding what high ability, low SES, First Generation students view as the main factors that contributed to their academic success.

Presenting the Argument

In this paper I argue that there is not enough research into the area of the facilitating factors for educational success for high ability, low-SES, FG Students. Determining a usable measure for success can be difficult and although I am going to use the term success, I realize that success can look very different for each person; however, in this case, I focus my research on high ability low-SES graduates of university or college to determine if there are any studies into which factors they believed were most important in motivating them as students. According to Renbarger and Long (2019) “Success in college could relate to students’ ability to attend, stay, and finish their postsecondary education.” Their 2019 study focused on supports for students feeling overwhelmed either personally or academically during post-secondary schooling, and determined the measures needed to support these students involved providing access to academic support and counselling. “In elementary and high school, lower-income students neither maintain their status as high achievers nor rise into the ranks of high achievers as frequently as higher-income students” (Wyner et al. 2009). In their 2009 study, Wyner et al. examined the university graduation rates between low SES students and higher SES students and their research shows a drop off in school success for low SES, high ability students compared to their counterparts; however, what the research is failing to explore is the similarities in positive experiences that allowed students to have the resilience to graduate.

I believe that more study involving a survey of questions for graduates of university or college who were low-SES throughout their educational journey, is required. Studying and then focusing on the motivational factors for these students to find similarities in their experiences would benefit educators at every level as the data collected would enable

educators to understand how to target the needs specifically determined to be important by the main stakeholders. In my search of the literature, I found a lack of research into the topics involving classroom engagement, school supports, home supports, community involvement, and personal financial experiences for high-ability, low SES students. I believe it is important to begin research in this area because finding similarities in experience or inspiration can help inform best practice and allow policy-makers, administrators, and educators to better understand how they can facilitate student development on the whole and specifically for gifted low-SES students. Research has shown that the dropout rate comes from two major areas, loss of interest and the ability to cope (Vantassel-Baska, 2017), however, as yet there has been little research into what students believe helped them the most.

Perusing the research I found that high ability low-SES students fall out in the years of transition between elementary and high-school, or between high school and university (Renbarger & Long 2019), but there is not enough research on best practice to help facilitate this process for these students. Gibbons and Borders (2010) did explore what six FGS's thought future students would need to know to help prepare them for college, however the sample size in this study is only six, which is too small to determine any major trends. The gap in the research is in looking at the personal experiences that have contributed to overall educational success for high ability, low SES students, as well as the supports received and which ones they felt worked for them as they transitioned between academic levels. Looking into the motivational factors for successful gifted students will, I believe, help inform policymakers, administrators, and classroom teachers about best-practice to help facilitate

student transition to higher academic levels which is relevant to all teachers, especially those teaching in low-SES status schools.

Overview of Paper

After this introductory chapter, the next chapter is my review of the literature regarding the development and retention of high-ability, low SES students and what they believe helped facilitate their educational success. In the third chapter I will be looking at the importance of education, especially higher education as it allows people to move out of the poverty cycle and show the importance of the information that is currently missing. Finally in the last chapter, I will summarize my findings and review the larger implications of ignoring this particular area of study.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

In this chapter I begin by explaining my research process, followed by a definition of the terms I will be using in the chapter. Next I outline the research on retention of high ability low-SES students and the Excellence gap that exists between them and high SES students. Finally I explore the programs in place that support low SES and high ability students, where it becomes evident there is a lack of research in this area.

The Research

My original intention was to stay with research papers published in the past 5 years, however, I found as I expanded the scope of my understanding, that there were relevant and necessary articles that were older, and so I expanded my criteria to allow for older relevant research. Using ERIC, my search began with Gifted + Low income as well as First Generation Students (FGS). Through this initial search, I was able to navigate to other relevant studies using the reference list. Through my reading, I determined I needed to focus my research on three areas: 1. What are gifted or high ability students and what are First Generation Students? 2. What are the factors that influence the retention of low-income students? and 3. What programs supporting low-income high-ability students are already in place? Reviewing the literature on these three aspects exposed the need for data involving the views on which supports high ability low-SES graduates saw as most important in their development as students.

Definition of the Terms: Gifted or High Ability Students

“Gifted students are generally considered to include those with above average ability in an academic field such as language arts, mathematics, and science. These students can also include those with exceptional intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership skills

(National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC], n.d.-a). High ability students have been defined as students who are able to consistently perform well on standardized tests and maintain a high grade point average (Briggs, Reis, & Sullivan, 2008, as cited by Hodges et al., 2017) as well as performing at a level higher than one would expect for their peer group (Burney & Beilke 2008). However, it was revealed in a blind study done by Elhoweris in 2008, wherein teachers were asked to recommend students for gifted programs from two similar cohorts whose only difference was that one was labeled as high-income and the other low-income, that teachers were more likely to refer a student to the gifted program when they were from a high-SES than from a lower-SES. (Elhoweris, 2008). If however, like Hodges et al. (2017) suggested, “students from low-income families who scored at or above the 75th percentile in achievement tests were geographically and demographically similar to students from non-low-income families who scored at or above the 95th percentile” (Hodges et al., 2017) then there need to be other standards by which to measure someone as gifted or high-ability when they come from less privileged circumstances. To illuminate the potential of low-income students, there must be other ways to allow students to show their potential.

One study that showed potential was of 6th-grade students from two schools and looked at the potential of Problem Based Learning (PBL), which allows students to learn through inquiry-based exploration while the teacher guides students rather than disseminating information, (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013, p.125) showed potential for finding high-ability students. “Findings suggest that a well-designed, engaging curriculum such as Problem Based Learning (PBL) can create a learning context that encourages more students to reveal academic potential” (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013, p.125). However, more study needs to be done in this area because the limitation of PBL so far is the inability to establish

with certainty whether these students are gifted (Gallagher & Gallagher, 2013). Morgan (2020) argued for Universal screening for gifted students, but the article does not speak to the differentiated process by which a low SES student may need to be examined to determine if they are on the gifted scale. It becomes clear that there is a need to re-examine our criteria for what constitutes a high-ability student because even when high-ability or gifted students are properly identified, “in elementary and high school, lower-income students neither maintain their status as high achievers nor rise into the ranks of high achievers as frequently as higher-income students” (Wyner et al. 2009, p. 5) This incites an inquiry into how to help lower-SES students maintain their status as high achievers throughout the entirety of their educational careers?

First Generation Students

First Generation Students (FGS) can be defined as students whose parents or guardians do not have a bachelor’s degree. This group on the whole is shown to be less likely to enroll in university than their peers whose parent or guardian do have a bachelor’s degree (Brookover et al, 2022). In a study of FGS it is shown that they are also less likely to finish their degrees than their counterparts who have a parent or guardian with a degree, even when controlling for family income, academic preparation, and ethnicity (Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Whitley et al., 2018). According to scholars, FGS generally are minorities, women, immigrants, parents, low income, and above the age of 24. The question however, about how to facilitate the education process for those high ability students as they make the transition to university or college remains. Moreover, in looking at the challenges of coming from a low SES household combined with the difficulties of being an FGS, it

becomes evident that there is a need for more study to determine how to best help these students achieve continued academic success.

Retention of Low Socio-Economic status students

Over the past 50 years, there has been a significant increase in the achievement gap between high-SES students and low-SES students (Chmielewski, 2017).

The level of income does not adequately capture all of the differences between those who have resources and those who do not. The length of time the family has been in poverty, other family assets such as home-ownership or a college savings account, and the poverty level of the family when the child was younger than age 5 all influence achievement preparation and performance (Rothstein, 2004 as cited by Burney & Beilke 2008, p. 180).

In their long term study, Burney and Beilke (2008) reflect the idea that there are many factors influencing poverty. The study, which involved students who were guaranteed their educations would be paid for if they were accepted to university, showed that even with that support, “poverty proved to be a burden simply too heavy to shoulder for most. The sobering conclusion was that money, in and of itself, cannot cure the ills of poverty, nor does money alone define the condition of poverty” (Burney & Beilke 2008, p. 181).

Roska and Kinsey (2018) examined the importance of family support for educational success in college by looking at emotional and financial supports and how they facilitated low-income student success in college; however, they did not explore any strategies for how to support those students whose family is unable, or unwilling to support them in their educational development nor does it explore how to support high-ability students in elementary or high school. Bilodeau and Meissner (2016) showed the effectiveness of combined academic and personal counselling for retention of at risk University students. In their study, they examined students who were emotionally overwhelmed, academically overwhelmed, or both academically and emotionally overwhelmed, and placed them in

tutoring or counselling as needed (Bilodeau & Meissner 2016). However, this study did not examine the effectiveness of this program for gifted low-income students. The gap continues to grow between high ability, low-income students and high ability higher-income students because even when a lower-income student has been identified as high potential, research has shown that “in elementary and high school, lower-income students neither maintain their status as high achievers nor rise into the ranks of high achievers as frequently as higher-income students” (Wyner et al., 2009, p. 5). If this is the case, then exploring the factors that enable high-ability low-income students to maintain their status through high school and university is imperative. Frazier et al. (2021) determined one of the contributing factors inhibiting high-ability, low SES students is the presence of bullying in their school environment, however the study did not look at which experiences mitigated their education journey.

Excellence Gaps

The Jack Kent Cooke Foundation developed a method to look at what they call the Excellence Gap (Plucker et al., 2018), the difference in the achievement of high ability low-SES students and that of high ability high SES students, and they have found that the gap is increasing as the Socioeconomic Gap in our society continues to grow. They looked closely at all of the States to determine the support levels of high ability or Gifted students. “States are more likely to have policies that support excellence overall, rather than those that support the closing of excellence gaps” (Plucker et al, 2018, p 29). Literature has shown there is a direct link between poverty and literacy (Wamba, 2012) and “... available research evidence in this area shows that poverty is the biggest single indicator of underachievement” (Demie, 2021, p. 98). Moreover, it is even more likely that there will be Intergenerational

Transference of Poverty (ITP) for students whose parents do not have a university or college degree (Duarte et al., 2017). In order to help close this excellence gap, it is important to look for input directly from those who came from low SES backgrounds and have successfully navigated the education system.

Programs in Place

In their review of the literature on the constraints that poverty places upon high-ability students, Burney and Beilke (2008) concluded that more information is needed about each student exhibiting high achievement to determine if they are living in a low-income household so that they can be provided “long term consistent support from caring committed persons” (Burney & Beilke, 2008, p.305). One program, the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) is a “comprehensive and cohesive curricular framework which employs good curricular design, considers features of the disciplines under study and is differentiated for gifted learners” (VanTassel-Baska & Wood, 2009, p. 346). This program focuses on 3 areas: 1. Emphasizing advanced content knowledge that frames disciplines of study. 2. Providing higher-order thinking and processing and 3. Organizing learning experiences around major issues, themes, and ideas that define understanding of a discipline and provide connections across disciplines (VanTassel-Baska & Wood 2009). In a six year study on the development and implementation of the ICM, the authors looked at the effectiveness of this approach in heterogeneous and in homogeneous settings and it has been shown that forming instructional groups of gifted students for implementation of the ICM curriculum is the most effective and efficient way to deliver the ICM (VanTassel-Baska & Wood, 2009). However, this study does not differentiate for, or keep track of, low-income students and does not address the specific special needs that high-ability low-income

students in the program may have, nor does it speak specifically about retention of the low-SES students in their program.

Inclusion in a gifted program for low-SES students is shown to provide opportunities, however, even after 3 years in a gifted program, low SES students still lacked a sense of belonging (VanTassel-Baska, 2017). Having students involved in out-of-school enrichment programs was seen to help with this sense of belonging (Hodges et al, 2017). These “out-of-school enrichment program formats include summer camps, Saturday programs, and after-school activities. Out-of-school programs such as these may be short in duration, but they can improve student target outcomes dramatically (Makel et al., 2012, as cited by Hodges et al., 2017). Renbarger and Long (2019) closely examined 16 studies and the interventions available to support college success for low-SES students including financial support, access to information on different institutions, and the positive effect of dual credit programs on graduation rates of low-income college students and they determined that more study was needed because “there are few reviews on what works for serving high-potential, low-income students”(Renbarger & Long, 2019, p. 178).

Those who have studied high ability or gifted student achievement have noted the need to focus more closely on how to help low SES students. “Although some states have impressive outcomes for their high-performing students, no state can claim impressive performance outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds.” (Plucker et al, 2018) Few programs exist specifically with high ability, low SES students as the focus. There remains a need to examine more closely exactly what high ability low-SES students as stakeholders, believe helped facilitate their education success in order to help close this Excellence gap.

Summary

The topic of high ability, low SES, First Generation Students has not had enough intensive study. The literature I reviewed looked at how to help low SES students in Elementary school, and showed that there is a drop off in achievement levels of low SES students as they move up through education levels. The literature shows that even though education is extremely important in helping break the poverty cycle, there are still many prohibitive factors for high ability, low SES students, especially when they are FGS. This literature review provides evidence that the motivating factors for high ability, low SES FGS's have not been sufficiently studied and that more study in this area is needed.

Chapter three begins by exploring the implications and pitfalls inherent in ignoring the problem of how to help High Ability, low SES, First Generation students as society attempts to close both the poverty gap and excellence gap through education. After it looks at the implications for educators at all levels of the education process and how information such as this is important. Finally, the chapter will illustrate why having more information on how to help high ability, low SES students matters to students, educators and society.

Chapter Three: The Application

This chapter explores how research in this area is important to the closing of both the Excellence Gap and the Poverty gap, as well as showing how a lack of research and understanding of high ability, low-SES students is detrimental Canadians. I start by explaining the major areas of drop off for these students, and discuss the dangers of these high dropout rates for high ability, low-SES, FGS's and I explore why the world has determined that higher education is important in closing the poverty gap. Next I illustrate the problems with a continuing increase in both the Poverty and Excellence gaps as well as how low SES students are susceptible to the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty (ITP). I bring this information together to help explain why a lack information on how to help these students, from the perspective of successful FG students is so important and should matter to both educators and policy makers worldwide as we move forward.

Application

The research that has been done does show that there are two major areas of drop off for high ability, low SES students. First, when they make the transition from elementary to high school, and then again when they move into university or college (Burney & Beilke, 2008). There is however no research on how to help these students maintain their high achievement status through each education level from the perspective of successful FGS. "In elementary and high school, lower-income students neither maintain their status as high achievers nor rise into the ranks of high achievers as frequently as higher-income students" (Wyner et al., 2009, p. 5). Creating a strategy to facilitate development from the perspective of high achieving low SES students is especially prevalent for FGS, as they attempt to make their way through the myriad of choices and pitfalls presented to a new

university or college student without the guidance of someone who has been there before (Duarte et al., 2017). Knowing these facts it seems apparent that there needs to be exploration in the area of how to facilitate the process of moving through higher education for high ability, low-SES students because education has been shown to be imperative for closing both the Excellence Gap and the Poverty Gap (Duarte et al., 2017).

In my career as an educator, I have had positions at schools in every socio economic demographic, and I have found that there is often a disconnect between the feelings of self-efficacy between the higher SES students and the low SES students. When low SES students are faced with an intellectual problem, often they will shut down, not trusting they are able to think through their problem, however in their home lives they solve problems extremely well. I had a grade four student one year early in my career, who on a Wednesday, informed me that her mom had driven her dad to work. I asked where he worked, she said a town that was a three day drive away. When I explored further, it came to light that her mom had left on Sunday night to make the drive north with her father, leaving their ten year old daughter to take care of her three younger siblings until mom returned. If this child had not told me that her mom was away, there is not a person in our school who would have known they were living without an adult in the house, because this child was taking care of all of them. They were fed supper each night, they were clean, and at school on time with lunches each day their mother was away because she took care of them all. This is the same child who felt she was not a good student because she had trouble figuring out a math problem she was seeing for the first time. The high intelligence she showed in caring for the family, immediately made me realize that this student is definitely a high ability student and so, after this episode, I began to raise the bar of expectation for, not just this student, but for

the entire class. I had grossly underestimated the abilities of children of that age, and if not for this episode, I might never have realized that this child was high ability.

In the high SES schools I have taught in, there is a definitive difference in the perception of abilities of the students compared to those in low SES areas. In my higher SES demographic classes, I have been more likely to see children whose academic abilities are quite high, who are able to solve intellectual problems quite well, are able to answer read and respond to questions about what they have read and show depth of understanding of academic topics. However, when I give these same children tasks involving independent thinking and work arounds to accomplish tasks, such as using available recycled materials to build a simple machine, or think of an original idea that will make a job easier, I will often find these same students who have been showing high ability traits in pure academic areas, frozen in indecision, unable to start. As Hodges (2006) mentions in their study, there needs to be more ways to identify those students who are high ability, especially when they are low SES; furthermore, there needs to be more research into how to help these low SES students maintain their high ability status as they climb their way through the education process.

Who Needs This Research

In their 2021 paper, Sharp determined that the education department for teachers needed to foster FGS and low SES students to a higher self-efficacy through feedback, experiences and exemplars. This study determined that utilizing the same scale to evaluate low SES students was perpetuating the increase we have seen in the Excellence gap. It becomes evident that there need to be other ways to support these students as well as new ways to determine a measure of success for high ability, low SES, First Generation Students until they are able to close this Excellence gap. If I had only viewed my exceptional grade

four student with an academic, intellectual lens, I may never have seen her potential, which illustrates my point that educators need to find more ways to determine high abilities, and develop more ways to support those high ability low SES students.

In order to help answer this question, it is important that educators begin to look at how high ability, low SES, FG students viewed education for themselves through the entire process. By starting with their thoughts on early academic development, it can be determined which early interventions and supports may be necessary in order to facilitate the process of moving up through the education system. As research shows, high ability, low SES students do not maintain their status as high ability as easily as they move through education levels (Burney & Beilke, 2008), and so it becomes imperative to begin looking at all of the stages of academia for these students to help determine which experiences or interventions helped them to understand or realize their own academic potential. It is, I believe, important for high ability, low SES students to highlight the moment, or moments, when they realized they were high ability students and that they may be able to expect more from themselves when it comes to their academic goals. By reviewing their early education years, I believe it will be possible to help illustrate moments when students realized their own potential was beyond what they had believed previously. Moreover, once these moments have been shared, it will be possible for early educators to help recreate those moments for their students on a more regular basis.

One of the major drop off areas in achievement for high ability, low SES students is in their transition to high school (Burney & Beilke, 2008). There are few studies that show how to support high ability students, though there are studies such as Frazier et al. (2021) that show which factors are prohibitive for student development in high school. Bullying

and feeling disconnected have been shown to be major inhibiting factors for students maintaining, or moving up to high ability status (Frazier et al., 2021), and so it becomes evident that school culture can play a large role for these students.

In my experience, educators do their best to help create inclusive, supportive school environments where students are able to thrive to the best of their ability, however there are still areas where schools fall short, especially when it comes to supporting high ability, low SES students. Morgan (2020) focused on how Universal screening for high ability students may help to close the gap in gifted education by allowing access to gifted education to more students, especially those in low SES households, however if we are to believe the research from VanTassel-Baska (2017), then even when students are placed in a gifted program, they still experience a disconnection from their peers, and they lack a sense of belonging within the group. By examining the beliefs of high ability, low SES, FG students about what they feel were the most important factors that allowed them to complete their education, it will be possible to more specifically target those areas of most efficacy, and move the focus away from areas like gifted education programs, that may have garnered attention previously, but have been shown to be less effective in creating self-efficacy in low SES students because of the disconnections spoken of by VanTassel-Baska in his 2017 study of gifted programs.

If, as Duarte (2017) suggests, education is the best way for those in poverty to break out of the poverty cycle, then is it imperative that the education system is able to provide what people in poverty need so they are able to navigate their way through to higher education. Without a clear picture about what it is that high ability, low income, FG students believe helped them, it is impossible to predict the needs of the next generation of FGS's, making their journey out of the poverty cycle even more difficult.

An Increasing Poverty Gap

Literature has revealed that those who grow up in poverty are more likely to be in poverty as adults (Duarte et al., 2017); moreover, it has been shown that the best way for someone to climb out of poverty is through education (Whitley et al., 2018). However, the journey through the education system to graduation from university or college for someone who is from a low income background is one that is fraught with difficulties. The likelihood that someone will attend higher education when their parents have not earned a Bachelor's degree is extremely low. The focus on education worldwide has increased as more people attempt to move out of poverty into a middle class lifestyle, but the factors involved for many FGS's however are prohibitive. Navigating the rigours of university or college without any foreknowledge of what to expect, or how to do things those things they need to do to be a student such as register for classes (Duarte et al., 2017) proves to be so difficult for many that they drop out soon after arriving on campus, perpetuating the poverty cycle.

The potential of these high ability students, to this point in time, has not been reached. The continued high rate of drop out for high ability students from low SES backgrounds shows just how difficult it is to move out of the grip of poverty. There is currently a system wherein those whose parents have achieved a Bachelor's degree are more likely to achieve a Bachelor's degree as well, and those whose parents do not have any higher education are more likely to drop out of college or university, or even decline to enroll. This system perpetuates the poverty cycle and as yet there are no answers about how to fix it. In looking at the experiences of successful high ability, low income FGS's, it will be possible to learn more about how educators at all levels can facilitate the academic development of more low SES students.

A comparison of the typical achievement of a low SES student to that of a high SES student, indicates that across the board low SES students score at the 36th percentile for reading compared to the 68th percentile for high SES students (Isenberg et al., 2022), and the numbers for math achievement are similar. However as research has shown, students from low SES who score at or above the 75th percentile, are equal to higher SES students who score at the 95th percentile (Hodges et al., 2017), which means that educators must begin to consider students from low SES households who consistently score in the mid-seventies as being high ability. The problem still persists however, that even when a student from a low SES family is able to show high ability, there are many challenges and inhibitors that will continue to block their progress. Further study involving those students who were able to successfully navigate their way to academic success would only serve to help policy makers at all levels be able to create programs and supports that contribute to the success of these high ability low income students.

Policies and procedures need to be developed at all levels of the education process to help those in poverty gain access to university or college, otherwise the poverty gap will continue to widen, and we will see even more inequity in our society. Education is seen as the answer to the poverty crisis, a way to level the field for all, however the difficulties and challenges faced by low income students are much wider and more complex than a simple lack of money (Burney & Beilke, 2008). More research into these high ability low SES successful graduates will help information about how to mitigate their circumstances emerge. These circumstances create situations where they may feel unsupported or alone in their journey, which can create an easy path to dropping out. Finding ways to support high ability, low income students that have been endorsed by similar students who have

successfully completed a Bachelor's degree could influence the education system in many positive ways, from early education, to high school, then through university and beyond. Creating more university and college graduates will help to mitigate ITP (Castañeda & Aldaz-Carroll, 1999) and create a society of educated people, whose children are also more likely to be university or college graduates. This illustrates why it is imperative that this valuable resource of high ability, low income, FG students is studied to help create a world filled with people who through higher education are able to climb out of poverty.

Summary

In summary, this chapter applies the current research to analyze the gap in the literature on facilitating the education process for high ability, low SES, students as they attempt to become successful First Generation Students (FGS). I looked at how difficult it is for low SES students to reach or maintain high ability status, as they move through the education system. The studies available on high ability, low SES students show the importance of higher education in moving out of the poverty cycle, but they also show how easy it is for low SES students to fall out of high achievement because of factors larger than simple poverty. When we consider the repercussions of having higher education be so difficult for high ability, low SES, FGS's to navigate, it is easy to determine that more primary source study is needed in order to facilitate their journey to graduation and help to close the poverty gap worldwide. In my final chapter, I will summarize the previous chapters and discuss the implications of my argument.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that there is a lack of primary source research into the best ways to facilitate educational success in high ability, low SES, FG students as they make their way through the education system. This lack of research is contributing to the growth in both the excellence gap, and the poverty gap in Canada and the need for more research into this area is imperative so that educators are able to understand which supports and strategies work best in helping low SES students achieve and maintain high ability status as they make their way through the education system.

Summary

In the first chapter of this paper I explain how my interest in the subject of how to help high ability, low SES students was piqued. I then explain how I began my research into this topic, by examining first what constitutes a gifted or high ability students, as well as what makes someone a First Generation Student. Next I looked at the factors that influence the retention of high ability, low SES students as they make their way through the education system, and then I examined the programs that are already in place to support these students. Finally, I make my claim that there is a lack of research into how to facilitate the education process for high ability low-SES students, especially from the perspective of successful students from the same background.

In the second chapter I review the current literature on the subject, beginning with defining the terms high ability, and First Generation students, as well as examining the excellence gap and its link to the poverty gap. I then looked at the strategies currently in use to support high ability, low SES students as they progress through the education system

where it was revealed that the drop off rate occurs at two moments in the education process, when students move from elementary to high school and then again when they start university or college, however it was also revealed that there is simply not enough research into this area.

In the third chapter I examine the connection between the poverty gap and education and bring to light the inherent problems a lack of support for high ability, low SES students can create. I show the connection between poverty and education and how education is viewed as a way to break the poverty cycle, which reveals that even though this belief is rampant, there is still little research on how to facilitate the education process for high ability, low SES students as they attempt to break out of the poverty cycle. This chapter ties together my claim that there is not enough research into how to help high ability, low SES students as well as explains the dangers of allowing these students to drop off in performance, or drop out of university or college.

My research shows the dangers of ignoring this research by illuminating how a lack of education is connected to poverty and to the Intergenerational Transference of Poverty. Continuing to work with the status quo will only continue to perpetuate the expanding poverty gap, because it has come clear that high ability students from low SES backgrounds need different supports to help them navigate the education system through to a Bachelor's degree. What also becomes evident is that there is not enough research from the perspective of successful high ability, low SES students to create any semblance of a template as yet for supporting them through academia.

Implications

This paper reveals how difficult the journey through education is for high ability, low SES students as well as illuminating a need for more research into the most effective strategies to help these students. Research shows that early recognition of high ability, low SES students is important in order to set up supports to facilitate their progress through elementary school and set them up to be prepared for high school. Next, there needs to be more research into which experiences, programs or supports they successful FGS's believe helped them the most as they made their way through to graduation from university or college.

Research in this paper indicates that finding new ways to ease the education process for high ability, low SES students must become a priority in the education system. Education has never been considered more important than it is now, and a continued gap in the research when it comes to helping to decrease the dropout rate for high ability, low SES students will only perpetuate the poverty cycle. My paper has illuminated not only the lack of, but also the need for, research into this area of study. By seeking to understand what successful high ability, low SES students believe were mitigating factors in their educational journey, educators at all levels will be able to provide meaningful supports for these students so they are more able to break out of the poverty cycle.

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