

The Family Environment: The Most Important Factor on Success

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Abstract—Detroit faces economic distress and must find a way to fix it. The best way to fix this issue is for Detroit to produce its own innovative workers through education. Many Detroit schools, however, are on track to close if they are unable to meet the standards expected of them. Most people choose to blame the staff of these schools, and others blame a lack of funding. They expect that closing these schools, and sending the children that attend these schools to more successful schools, will fix the educational dilemma Detroit faces. This is not the case. The problem does not lie completely with the schools but in the family environment of the children attending the schools. The family environment is the number one deciding factor for a child's success, and, as a community, a school's success. Therefore, it is important to understand how the family environment affects kids and what we can do to improve it.

Index Terms—family environment, economic crisis, academic success, brain science

DETROIT is currently facing an education crisis. This year alone, twenty-four schools are set to be shut down in Detroit due to the continuation of poor test scores[1].

The economy in Detroit is also poor and has been since the early nineteen seventies. Detroit is severely short of skilled laborers and innovative workers. Strong economies, however, attract more innovative workers, but innovative workers are necessary for the fabrication of a strong economy. Therefore, Detroit cannot attract workers that can build a strong economy without a strong economy first, but cannot create the necessary economy without these workers. The revitalization of Detroit's economy is an cyclical enigma that has yet to be solved.

The cycle could be broken if Detroit produced its own innovative workers and skilled laborers. To do so, the education in Detroit schools must be improved. This, however, proposes its own problem: How can students in Detroit schools excel academically? To answer this question, we must understand the largest decider of success in school and how it affects academic success.

Academic success is determined by many factors, but the most prominent factor is the family environment. Parents control their children's environments, and the environment set up by the parents affects how their children's brains develop. Children also tend to emulate their parents. Parents are uniquely positioned to be able to decipher right from wrong for a child, teach a child basic skills, and motivate a child.

The family environment is composed of four main factors: the family structure, the family income, the education level of the parents, and the criminal records of the parents. While each factor is an individual topic, they are all interconnected. For example, the education level of the parent may also affect the family income, or the family income may affect the criminal records of the parents.

I. FAMILY STRUCTURE

The marital status of two parents is a major influence on the development of a child. The environment of a child with parents that are together can be very different from the environment of a child with divorced parents or only a single parent.

In families with both parents involved in their child's life, both parents are able to make contributions toward their child's education and to the household. In addition, both parents spending time with the child will bring different influences to their lives. The child will receive input and help from both parents in this scenario. Overall, the child with two parents living together typically receives more help than children with one parent or two parents living separately.

Children with single parents may have to help more around the house or possibly take on a job in order to make up for the missing parent. This means that they cannot spend as much time studying as children with two involved parents. Someone could argue that children in this scenario learn better time management than all the other children, but they are only able to do so if they are motivated to work hard in school by their parent. In many cases, the child's parent may not be able to spend time as much time with their child, instilling in them the importance of education, because they may have to take on greater responsibility as the sole provider to pay their bills.

Environments where the parents are split, but both involved in their children's lives, may affect their children's academic success similarly to the environment of those with only a single parent. While the children can receive multiple points of view on any issues they are having, they are limited in the time they get with each parent. This is because both parents are basically operating as single parent households. Also, being involved with both parents when they aren't parenting cohesively could lead to confusion about what to do with important life decisions. For example, one parent could tell the student to focus hard in school while the other parent tells the child that school doesn't matter. The student would have to decide for themselves whether they think school is important or not.

II. FAMILY INCOME

High income families are able to seek out more opportunities for their children outside of school, and pay for a furthering of their child's education. These families can provide music lessons, summer camps, and other activities that aid in the development of their children's brains. They can also get help for their children strictly academically by hiring tutors. Comparatively, children of lower income families

do not have access to such opportunities. Since high income families are typically not as stressed about finances, they may be able to spend more quality time with their kids teaching them how to be successful. Because families with higher incomes are usually more educated, these families also tend to stress more importance on education, and their money is more likely to go toward their child's education.

On the contrary, low income families do not have equal access to the opportunities and help that higher income families have and, therefore, they may not be able to promote brain development the same way high income families can. Low income families are not able to do so for two reasons: lack of time and lack of money. For example, preschool may not be affordable for a low income family. They may not be able to start formal education until their child is old enough for public education. Low income families are not only unable to pay for activities that promote brain development, but with added stress and responsibilities, they may not be able to spend as much time with their children teaching them, enhancing their learning, and instilling the importance of education in them. The children of these families are forced to make their way through school alone if their parents do not motivate them to do well in school and do not help them with their school work. Because of this, children from low income families may struggle academically.

Family income also influences the quality of the neighborhoods people live in. High income families are able to seek out better neighborhoods that hold more opportunities for their children with better schools and safer places to play and grow. In addition, their neighborhood is likely filled with other successful families that will influence their children. Children in these neighborhoods learn the importance of education and get involved in activities that aid in their brain development. The neighborhood not only offers these activities, but also motivates kids to get involved in them. This furthers their ability to succeed.

In Detroit, this leads to successful families settling in more affluent areas outside of Detroit while low income families are stuck in worse neighborhoods in Detroit. This leads to a gap in the educational success of schools between inner city schools and suburban schools.

III. EDUCATION LEVEL

Parents must show their children the importance of learning so that their children will seek out learning opportunities. They can do so in a variety of ways. For example, they can play board games with their children, read to their children, or ask their children to do mental math. There are many more things parents can do, and it is important that both the parents and the children are engaged in the activity.

Highly educated parents are able to model the importance of education as they are able to lead by example. A 1998, the US census showed that 85 percent of kids with parents that graduated with college degrees also go off to college [2,3]. On the contrary, only 30 percent of children with parents that did not finish high school end up reaching the college level.

One important ability, which is key to success and can only be taught by parents or other key influencers, is the ability to

self-motivate. Children model the mindsets of their parents and certain mindsets lead to more success. For example, the want or need to be successful is a mindset modeled by some parents while others show a lack of motivation. The child with parents that are always pushing themselves to be more successful will follow their lead and push for success, just as its parents do. The child with parents that lack the motivation for success will likely also lack any motivation to succeed. Therefore, the child will not be successful. This is because he or she does not want to be successful and his or her parents do not care about their child's success. This is one of the reasons it is so difficult to pull out of poverty. The bad habits of the parents carry over to their children. The children that do escape have to find a way to learn successful habits and learn how to motivate themselves. This, however, is rare. The family environment has such a massive effect on a child's success that most children with a poor family environment cannot find a way to succeed.

The most motivated parents are often those who have gone to college and received a higher level of education or those who have taken on a skilled trade. They were motivated to do better than their parents before them. They were self-motivated enough during high school to get into college and self-motivated enough to graduate from college. The higher their level of education, the more likely they are to stress the importance of education.

IV. CRIME

Detroit is one of the most crime filled cities in the United States. In fact, Detroit is in the top four percent of cities in the US for the worst crime rates[4]. Because of this crime, affluent families are usually unwilling to move to Detroit, preferring safer neighborhoods for their children. Many students in Detroit schools also have to deal with crimes and gangs everyday. While these hurt their ability to learn, having a parent with a criminal record or in jail is just as bad if not worse.

Parents with active criminal records are often poor examples for their children. Their kids are more likely to grow up and obtain criminal records of their own, and are more likely to get involved in in criminal activities early in life [5]. They are not taught that there is any other way.

Statistics show that people that have been to jail are much more likely to return than people who have not been to jail are likely to go [5]. This means that parents that have criminal records are more likely to be taken away from their family to be put into jail. This causes, at a minimum, the same stress that single parent families have, as I talked about earlier, as well as more stress from the trauma involved in having a parent imprisoned.

V. WHAT CAN WE DO?

As was discussed above, the family environments in Detroit must be changed for Detroit to produce innovative workers and pull itself out of its economic crisis. If the parents lack the ability to develop a child to be successful, the child will remain unsuccessful. Is there, however, a way the child can still succeed? It is possible. Schools must create new

programs to either change the family environments or simulate an environment to act as and add to the family environment.

One possibility is that schools should emphasize the importance of what they are teaching to the families as well as the students. They should communicate with families about the importance of education and ask parents individually to acknowledge hard work put in by their students to obtain better grades. However, even with the school encouraging reinforcement for good grades, many parents will continue not to listen, and this method will not work.

Another possible solution to help Detroit produce its own influential people is to distribute scholarships to students that do well. This would serve as incentive for these kids. Most will not care about getting the scholarship, but the kids that receive scholarships will obtain more motivation to continue their great work. The scholarship would not have to contain much money because the influence originates from the acknowledgment of good work and the idea that they received money for it. The amount of money would not matter to a child. The money would also run through the school and go to buying better school supplies for the child or a special treat at lunch. With this process, the child will seek after more by working hard in their classes, and this will lead to the creation of good habits.

The best possible answer to the question of how to get Detroit schools to produce more innovative workers is the creation of mentorship programs. In many cases, the parents fail to teach their children how to succeed in school. The children need other older figures that they can model themselves after. They need people that they can look up to, and these people should teach them the things their parents are unable to that will help lead to success. Teachers are not able to provide this because they must focus on many kids at once. It is necessary that fewer children be taken on by one person. Children should be paired up with, and work with, successful people, so that the children can learn from these people and model themselves after their mentors. While it is rare, some students are able to exceed expectations and succeed academically when the odds are against them. These students should become the mentors in this program and take on a younger student to teach him or her how and why they did it. The younger students should be picked as students that show great potential especially when

compared to their circumstances at home. These students, with proper development, will become the innovative workers of Detroit's future.

Other kids may not show potential academically, but that does not mean they should be forgotten. They should be given apprenticeships so they can become skilled laborers and help improve the economy of Detroit. After all, Detroit needs both skilled laborers and innovative workers to improve their economic situation. In some countries, for example Germany, students are split into different schools based on their test scores. Some kids go to college preparatory school while other go to trade schools. In Detroit the situation can be split the same, but the mentorship programs can be split instead of the schools because that is not how the US school system works.

The revitalization of Detroit is set to be a long process, but with the help of brain science, this process can be catalyzed. If Detroit produces innovative workers and skilled laborers of its own, its economic problem can be solved. The process begins with the family environments and how they affect academic success in Detroit.

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