

## A Cultural Experience: Poverty 101

We have all heard the phrase that you do not know what someone's life is life until you "walk a mile in their shoes", well that is exactly what Poverty 101 was designed to do; put us in the shoes of another person. Poverty is defined as the state of being extremely poor and in 2011 there were 1.2 million people living in poverty here in Arizona. This event is important to future educators in this state to be able to put ourselves in the positions of those living in these conditions. My eyes were opened to the struggles that children and adults face every day. My purpose is to offer insight into the life of Monica Rodriguez, a woman living in poverty as well as explain how I will handle having children living in poverty in my classroom as a future teacher.

My name is Monica Rodriguez and I am a soon to be mother and a wife to my hardworking husband. My husband works as a landscaper to pay our bills but I am fearful that we will not have the proper finances once the baby comes. My family is still in Mexico and I have been sending money to them every month in hopes to better their lives because I know they yearn to have what we have here in America. I am unable to receive government aid because I am not a legal citizen in this country and being 8 months pregnant I cannot afford to be deported back to Mexico.

My living conditions are very tough and we are just getting by living paycheck to paycheck. We live in a studio apartment and I am worried that we will not have enough room for the baby to grow and play. I have no form of transportation and no money for a bus pass so I am not sure how I am going to take my daughter to doctor's appointments or other important things. My number one priority is my family...I love my husband and I am so thankful for how hard he works for what we have although I do get lonely since he is always at work and I am home alone. I just hope and pray that my husband and I will be able to provide our daughter with the proper nutrition, education, and childhood that we did not have ourselves. I just want her to have a normal life.

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In my future classroom I will more than likely be faced with children like Monica's daughter who is living at home with parents who are struggling everyday to make ends meet. I understand that it is not that the parents don't care...the reason they do everything that they do in life is to create a better lives for their children. I also understand that children living in poverty might be counting on school to be the only guaranteed meals they get that week. I will keep snacks in my classroom because I realize that students simply cannot function if they are hungry. Children like those in Monica's family might be having a lot of emotional distress. First, she might be scared that her parents will be sent back to Mexico, she might also not get to see her father as much as she would like because he spends so much time at work. This could result in behavioral issues at school or being withdrawn. Being understanding and allowing my students to trust me will be the biggest help that I can offer. I will do my best as a future teacher to know what is going on at home with my students and most of all hold all of my students to the same, high standards because we have learned that if we lower the standards for students they will only do what we expect of them and not achieve any higher.

It is not unknown to anyone that there are people living in poverty, many of those being school aged children...but to be put in the position of someone living this way or to "walk a mile in

their shoes” really gives you a completely new perspective. I realize that unfortunately some of my future students will be living in poverty and I will do everything in my power to understand, communicate with their parents who may or may not speak the same language, provide adequate nutrition and all the while maintaining high expectations for them so they know that they can strive to be anything they want to be and just as successful as their peers. I hope to impact all of my students in a positive way and especially those who need me most, as a role model, as someone who will listen, someone they can trust, and most of all someone who will never give up on them and give them a fighting chance.