This essay will study the links between primary education and livelihood strategies used by those living in marginalized areas in cities of developing countries. The questions addressed will be as follows: How do the livelihood strategies of households living in low-income urban areas figure into the effectiveness of primary education? How can primary education be more effective in serving the poor?

I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POVERTY AND EDUCATION

Access to education is often mentioned as a motivating factor by households migrating from rural to urban areas, both in terms of a step towards improved socio-economic status, in addition to being an end in its own right. (Chant, 2003) Even if parents themselves cannot read or write, most recognize the value of education and express their desire for their children to have the benefits of it. Poor countries have been encouraged to invest in education as a means for development and modernization. The human capital theory suggests that ‘investment in education increases labor’s productivity by embodying in that labor increased skills and knowledge.’ (World Bank, 1974) In regards to the poor as individuals, the policy implication of the human capital theory would see increased amounts of schooling for low-income groups as a means to increase their wages, and reduce social inequality. This theory assumes that children receive skills at school that will lead to higher wages. However, poor urban households have difficulties in gaining access to education that is structured to recognize and address not only the education of their children, but the conditions under which they live. A primary reason the poor do not escape from poverty is that they do not acquire basic cognitive skills in school. Investment in formal education was considered a major engine of economic growth, and for the poor, more years of schooling were perceived as the only hope for their children, the second generation of rural-urban migrants, to join the urban middle class. (World Bank 1974). However, significant investments in education have been made in cities in India, for example, yet large percentages of children living in poor areas do not even finish primary school. (Banerji, 1997) In the event that they do finish primary school, many times they are only semi-literate. (World Bank 1974). Figure one, below, maps out several factors that bear on the ability of children to learn. This essay will study the last two categories, termed ‘Family’ and ‘Non-family’, linking these factors to livelihood strategies of the urban poor, and their relationship to accessing education.
II. URBAN LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AND EDUCATION

The economic benefits that education can bring are why many poor households are willing to spend large proportions of their meager incomes on educating their children. Where education falls within the livelihood framework of individual households may be critical in understanding how it can be more effective in addressing the needs of the urban poor. Although the most frequently noted reference to education and the urban poor is the opportunity cost to poor families (Boyden, 1994, Leonardos, 1995, Rakodi, 1995) and the subsequent result of removing children from school in order to conserve limited resources, additional dimensions to the relationship between education and livelihood strategies remain. Many families choose to send their children to school largely to relieve themselves from providing at least one meal a day for the child. The (free) midday meal, which was implemented in Indian primary schools in the 1980s, has been repeatedly cited as a motivating factor for children attending to school. (Banerji, 1997) Some families send their children to municipal schools during the morning session to take advantage of the free meal, while also sending their children to private school in the afternoon, recognizing that the quality of the education there as superior. (Banerji, 1997) Boyden notes that also in Peru, mothers who work as housemaids in middle and high-income areas send their children to school to the areas in which they work, as opposed to where they live. The reason is that they believe the schools that serve the households that employ
them in the middle and high-income neighborhoods to be of better quality. This strategy also allows children to be accompanied by their mother to and from school each day, although it also involves more time and expense in traveling. (Boyden, 1994)

Another way in which educational aspirations can affect a household is the choice of who is sent to school. Most often, boys are sent to school because it is believed that their ability to increase their earning capacity is higher than that of girls. Additionally, many families consider girls more reliable in effectively caring for younger siblings while parents are away working, and consequently they are required to stay home for this purpose. Children of both sexes are often removed from school after they reach the age of 12, when they are able to earn more than younger children, and also able to go further from home to work. However, the connection between child labor and education need not necessarily be exclusive. For example in Kerala, the work of children is organized into short-term tasks that can be easily coordinated with the school day. (Boyden, 1994) Also in Delhi, the school day is divided into a morning session and an afternoon session. (Banerji, 1997) These kinds of arrangements recognize the necessity of some families to send their children to work. However, combining school and work has its disadvantages as well. In Brazil, where classes are divided into three shifts to allow for work, children who went to school in the evening shift complained of fatigue, which is hardly a revelation considering their day began at 6am and ended at midnight. (Boyden, 1994) The connection between the economic value a child contributes to the household and their education remains an important, and in many cases a determining factor, in regards to access and effectiveness of education. Most children living in low-income areas are proud of the economic gains they bring home. Also, child-breadwinners have fewer conflicts with their parents and are less frequently punished than their non-working siblings. Working children in Brazil, for example, have reported that as a result of working they have more status among their peers, and are also more independent than schoolchildren. (Boyden, 1994) Their work often takes them outside of their immediate communities, giving them a sense of autonomy not possible within the framework of a typical school day. In has been noted that particularly in urban areas, the contrast between the social attributes connected to going to school and to working create a conflict with many children. Urban children tend to be more aware of the need to go to school in order to get the better jobs in adulthood. However in the short term, many want to actively contribute to the well being of the household.

One way in which education can be more effective in serving the urban poor is to make constructive connections between children’s need to work and their need to be educated. The nature of a child’s work bears a direct correlation to their success at school. For example, children engaged in working with the family-owned business are more likely to stay in school and do well, as are children employed as apprentices in a workshop in which they are learning a specific skill. Children involved in illegal activities connected with drugs and prostitution are the least likely to be enrolled at school.
(Boyden, 1994) If children from this last group are enrolled, their attendance is more likely to be irregular and their participation low.

The way that primary education is financed often has a direct impact on its effectiveness. During structural adjustment programs, the first sectors budgets are taken from are social services. Primary education also tends to be cut before higher education, because governments do not receive immediate economic benefits of primary education. (Sukla, 1998) In response to this situation, many communities take it upon themselves to build schools, pay teachers and contribute to other running expenses. (Boyden, 1994) This lack of financial support then translates into increased work and expense for the poorest groups. For example in India, which has a policy of free primary education, households in the poorest urban areas spend significant proportions of their incomes on education in several states. (Tilak, 1996) The economic contribution of households often includes labor (as in building schools, as noted above), providing furniture for schools, uniforms, books, etc., adding to the household expenditure on education. Another hidden cost is in additional tutoring that is often needed in order to make-up for the deficiencies of the public school system, as in Egypt, where school fees are high in comparison to other cities of developing countries and offer little educational return for a households’ initial investment. (Boyden, 1994)

III. ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN LIVING IN LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

Among the many factors that contribute to children’s poverty in the cities of developing countries, Blanc (1994) has noted the following factors in *Urban Children in Distress*:

1. A diminishing fabric of social support for children within the family and community
2. Decreasing opportunities for socialization
3. Lack of opportunities to consolidate one’s self-worth in the broader social sphere
4. Experiences of marginalization and uncertainty of the future
5. Poorly planned urban environment

The reasons listed above contribute both to the reproduction of poverty and the hurdles to acquiring a quality education that can break the cycle of poverty. Many have suggested that a child’s labor is more important to the survival of a household than the education of that child. However, Banerji (2000), in his study of a school serving an informal settlement in peri-urban areas of Delhi and Mumbai show children who do not complete primary school are not necessarily working either. Although Banerji states that most respondents in his survey reported that their children were not engaged in regular paid employment, he does not indicate the fact that many parents do not view unpaid work within the home as ‘work’ or the role that children may play in informal labor activities.
What other factors prevent children from gaining the cognitive, reading and writing skills that are a precursor to finding well-paid jobs in the urban environment? Education experts claim that it takes five years of continuous schooling for a child to achieve permanent literacy and numeracy skills. (Banerji 1997) Understanding environmental factors that the children of poor households in the city live with are important when designing educational programs intended for them. Although the detrimental conditions resulting from living in informal and/or low-income settlements may appear obvious, their relation to children attending school may not be. For example, in a study conducted in Delhi, the municipal school serves a resettlement community of approximately 50,000 households. The researchers described densely packed houses, with sub-standard sanitary conditions. The poorest sections of the community consist of recently arrived migrants from the rural areas, and the vast majority of men and women living there are not literate. (Banerji, 1997) Because both the women and men need to travel long distances to work and leave very early in the day, no one is present to insure that children go to school. Additionally, children living in this particular settlement needed to cross a major highway to get to the school. Some mothers pointed out that they would prefer to have young children stay home rather than risk a dangerous route to school, unaccompanied by a guardian. It was further noted in the study that the health and hygiene conditions in these areas were particularly horrendous during the monsoon season, when clean drinking water is extremely scarce and health-related absenteeism was likely to be quite high. (Banerji, 2000). Conditions within individual houses are also not likely to be conducive to completing homework assignments and studying. Due to the overcrowding common in squatter and informal settlements, there is often no physical space for a child to sit and work.

Another environmental factor that influences a child’s ability to be successful in school is the composition of the household. A study conducted in Bangalore found that a significant proportion of children living in lone and female-headed households were more likely to be working, whereas households with two parents were more likely to have their children go to school. (Krishnakumari, 1985) Household size also impacts whether or not children work and go to school. For example, younger children living in large households in the city are more likely to work for longer hours, inhibiting their ability to go to school. Additionally, insecurity of tenure is often associated with high dropout rates in some localities. In Mumbai slum surveys, researchers found that portions of the settlement that were unauthorized were regularly demolished, which forces some families to move away or relocate, disrupting the continuity of their child’s schooling. (Banerji, 2000) Saxena has also noted landlessness and insecurity of tenure as obstructions to literacy. (Education of the Poor – A Pedagogy of Resistance, 1998) Environmental changes, leading to increased travelling distances for water, for example, have also impacted the ability of children to attend school regularly. A correlation between environmental degradation that increases children’s work burden (particularly girls) and diminished school participation has been noted in the Himalayas. (Boyden, 1994)
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Education programs that address environmental difficulties are more likely to be effective in serving the needs of the urban poor. Where other social service programs and safety nets do not exist, primary schools have the possibility to make meaningful contributions to the city by utilizing a more holistic approach. Training teachers not only teach reading and writing, but to recognize and address problems children may be having that inhibits the learning process would prove to be an investment with high return in the development of the city. Schools must also have access to the tools and resources needed to take on these additional responsibilities to do their job well.

In addition to the urban environment at large, the environment that exists within schools is also important. Social organization and hierarchy within schools can prove difficult for many children to enter into and perform successfully. For example, it has been shown in one low-income area of Delhi that teachers were consistently of a different caste than that of their students. When asked what caste and class they belonged to, all of the teachers in the school claimed to belong to a higher caste and class background compared to that of their students (Talib, 1998) At another school in Delhi, the children were of the Scheduled Castes, and the teachers clearly regarded them as inferior. The teachers did not live in the community they taught in, and regarded their assignment to a slum area as a personal burden. (Banerji, 1997) In one case, a boy’s teacher frequently told him that his head was so tiny that he in fact had no brain, and that his head was full of ‘chaff.’ (Talib, 1998) Teachers would frequently have their students run personal errands for them such as buying cigarettes and water during class time. Additionally, the way in which the class was taught related in no way to the daily lives of the children. Thus, being told they were stupid and taught without regard to their actual learning in relation to daily experiences familiar to them, most children left the school resigned to their low lot in life and at best, semi-literate. (Talib, 1998)

The ability of urban schools to absorb children from the poorest households in an effective way while maintaining a formal, Western style of teaching is very limited. Often, children who have never attended school cannot easily ‘catch up’ in schools that are already overcrowded. The already overworked teachers in the municipal schools do not have the time or the motivation to devise creative methods for keeping such children interested in learning. A disjunction between the reality of children living in poverty and the formal classroom system appears to exist in many cities of developing countries. Primary education that effectively serves both the poor and the city as a whole requires an approach that allows for livelihoods and education to exist in recognition of one another.
IV. HOW CAN SCHOOLS ADAPT TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN FROM POOR HOUSEHOLDS?

Several strategies can be used to provide a meaningful education to children living in low-income areas of the city. Generally, decentralization of the school system and demand-driven models can address the needs of those living in marginalized areas of the city. A broader approach, as indicated above, must also figure into solutions for education. For example, Blanc has recommended shifting from an exclusive focus on ‘the child’ to a broader focus on the child, family, school and community. Further suggested is reinforcing childrens’ coping strategies, involving them in the elaboration of more affordable approaches to family preservation, school, and community development. (Blanc, 1994) In turn, the broader approach will also require corresponding partnerships and self-managing networks to support this model of a decentralised education system. In recognition of livelihoods, comprehensive strategies should integrate educational and human needs of street and working children with community development, health, and employment programs. (Blanc 1994)

Efforts to maintain the interest of children in their learning process can also contribute to its success. Helping children to participate in the programme design, as well as administration, can build a strong learning environment that serves educational as well as social needs. (Easton 1994) This is particularly important for children who only have tenuous ties to their families and need additional support to gain a foothold in school, and later in the world of work. Programs that foster constructive linkages with employment (Blanc 1994) have proven effective, as described earlier, with programs that combine formal education with apprenticeships and other technical skills. Reducing the opportunity costs of schooling, non-formal programmes that provide learning through work (Boyden, 1994) contribute to the development of education systems appropriate to the needs of children living in low income households living in the poorest areas of the city.

Education should teach not only children reading and writing, but educate the community including the police, merchants and church groups about children’s plight, their potential, and the roots of their problems. (Blanc 1994) These strategies illustrate how urban schools can serve a broader civic responsibility. Schools that devise creative methods to serve children and the communities they live in serve two important functions. First, they have the power to make immediate contributions to the community through the incorporation of broader social goals that are imperative to the success of children’s learning. Lastly, educating children contributes to positive social reproduction and to the development of the city in the long term.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY