

BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY

A SEMINAR ON CLASS DIFFERENCES

Though the idea that U.S. society is classless is central to American cultural mythology, the subtle yet powerful dynamics of social class permeate everything we are and do. Based on 35 years of research into the differences between poverty, middle class, and wealth cultures by nationally recognized educator Dr. Ruby Payne and social scientists Phil DeVol and Terrie Dreussie Smith, **BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY** offers a paradigm for understanding and addressing the dynamics which characterize life in poverty – and make it so difficult for people to break out of poverty.

BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY, Part 1 - Class Matters opens up the different world of people in poverty, revealing how the survival-based mentality of poverty impacts learning, work habits, and decision-making. Recent research has provided a deeper understanding of how people in poverty face challenges virtually unknown to those in middle class or wealth – challenges from both obvious and hidden sources. You will learn the “hidden rules” of poverty, middle class, and wealth – and the assumptions which people in middle class bring to encounters with people in poverty. You will discover how grief and trauma keep many people locked in poverty. And you will begin to explore practical yet compassionate strategies for engagement that can have positive impact on people’s lives.

Over 12,000 people from congregations, nonprofit organizations, social service agencies, businesses, and educational institutions have participated in **BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY**. Some reactions from participants:

I had no idea about these distinctions! I began to be aware of my own values and where they came from.

This was the best training we’ve had since I joined the agency.

(I have) a much better perspective on life’s challenges for people in poverty...very helpful.

I feel sure my work at Crisis Assistance Ministries will be positively affected. I have a new appreciation of the complexity of “survival living.”

Challenging people’s way of viewing the world is hard, so I guess if you can get half the room’s “light bulbs” to go off you’ve done an amazing job. (I take with me) an understanding of the clients I work with now, clients I’ve worked with in the past (I wish I knew then what I know now), and a better understanding of myself.

SEMINAR LEADERS

Wanda Anderson is volunteer coordinator for Charlotte Family Housing. Wanda grew up in generational poverty and brings deep personal experience to Class Matters. She has worked with hundreds of people in poverty since 1993 and has been a certified trainer in Bridges Out of Poverty for the past five years.

Rev. Dr. Paul A. Hanneman serves as Program Director of the Urban Ministry Center. He works directly with people who are homeless and also coordinates the Center’s Servant Leadership School. He is a certified trainer in Bridges Out of Poverty and has been teaching with Wanda for the past seven years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SCHEDULE A SEMINAR,

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BRIDGES OUT OF POVERTY

SOME KEY POINTS

- **We cannot continue to support stereotypes and prejudices about the poor.** There are many forms of welfare, but the poor are the only ones who are labeled "undeserving." others who receive welfare are students with government fellowships, homeowners with federal-tax and mortgage-interest deductions, corporations with governments subsidies, and military bases that are kept open to prevent job losses.
- **Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.** Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter time and is caused by circumstance (eg., death, illness, divorce, etc.).
- **We cannot blame the victims of poverty for being in poverty.** Economic systems are far beyond the reach of most people to control. Factories close, small farms fold, racism persists, and the economy fails to provide enough well-paying jobs. What we offer is a way for individuals to do better.
- **Poverty is relative.** If everyone around you has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague. Poverty or wealth exists only in relationship to known quantities or expectations.
- **An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.** For example, the hidden rules of poverty center around survival, relationships, and entertainment; the hidden rules of the middle class center around work, achievement, material security, and self-governance; the hidden rules of the wealthy center around political and social relations. Even though the income of the individual may rise significantly, many of the patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain with the individual

These hidden rules affect how members of each class understand and respond to the world. For example:

time	poverty	the present is most important - decisions made for moment based on feelings and survival needs
	middle class	the future is most important - decisions made in terms of future ramifications
	wealthy	history is most important - decisions on the basis of tradition and decorum
money	poverty	to be used and spent
	middle class	to be managed
	wealth	to be conserved, invested
possessions	poverty	= people – kids are assets, because the more people who are attached to me, the more assets I have
	middle class	= things
	wealth	= one-of-a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees
destiny	poverty	fate – <i>I can't do much to integrate change</i>
	middle class	choice – <i>I can change my future with good choices now</i>
	wealthy	noblesse oblige – <i>I'm obliged to behave honorably and generously</i>
language	poverty	casual register (<i>about survival</i>) vocabulary @400 words - more gestures/looks – <i>you're supposed to know</i>
	middle class	formal register (<i>about negotiating</i>) – <i>middle class child will use more words than a poverty class adult</i>
	wealthy	formal register (<i>about networking</i>) – private, inclusive language

- **Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.** These norms and hidden rules are not directly taught in schools or in businesses.
- **For our neighbors to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school, at work, and in the community.**