Bridges Out of Poverty

Study Guide

Based on Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities

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PREFACE

Thank you for becoming part of the Bridges Out of Poverty movement. The part you play as an individual, as a professional, and/or as a community catalyst is the core of the initiative.

Our principal contribution to addressing poverty is to offer a common understanding of poverty and a shared language for all the topics that will arise when we come together to solve community problems.

This Bridges study guide has been developed for people who work for organizations or business that work with or employ individuals in poverty. It also is designed for those serving on community and sector committees, Bridges Out of Poverty Steering Committees, and Guiding Coalitions within the Circles® initiative. Finally, it is intended for individuals building relationships with others from diverse economic class settings, such as mentors or allies.

This guide is to be used as a companion piece to the Bridges Out of Poverty book, as well as the Bridges Out of Poverty DVD series, should that be available to you. Ideally, the study guide would be used in a group setting with an experienced Bridges-certified trainer, but it also can be used as an individualized learning experience. In some areas the Bridges content is provided by aha! Process consultants or Bridges-certified trainers. Where it isn’t feasible to bring in national trainers or send local trainers to be certified, this training solution was necessary.

When people from diverse economic settings work together to problem-solve the issue of poverty or other community concerns, individuals from different economic environments will be speaking a common language and using familiar terms. Everyone also will be aware of his or her own hidden rules of class, along with the hidden rules that others use.

Ruby Payne’s unique definition of poverty helps us understand that poverty is about more than finances. Economic class can be defined as the following:

- **Poverty** = Under-resourced “The extent to which an individual does without resources.”

- **Middle Class** = Stably resourced

- **Wealth** = Abundantly resourced

We anticipate that this learning experience will deepen the relationships that you develop with one another and make us all more effective at creating prosperous, healthy, sustainable communities.
Introduction

Economic realities of poverty, middle class, and wealth impact individuals, communities, systems, and structures. In order to positively impact the education and lives of individuals in poverty, we must explore the way we think and behave. This module offers a structure to help us assess the mindsets and world views we hold as individuals, institutions, and communities. It helps us define and visualize the experiences in economic-class environments in order to increase our understanding.

Social Class vs. Economic Class

When we judge ourselves against how others are doing, we are positioning ourselves on the ladder of social class. Economic class is different; it’s about how stable our life is. Looking at economic class in a nonjudgmental framework allows us to respect one another and evaluate the resources and choices available to us that may not be available to others. This work is based on the premise that everyone should have the resources to envision and develop a positive future story.

People living in poverty throughout the world, including the United States, are typically wrapped in the immediacy of trying to solve problems for today. It is the nature of life in poverty; tomorrow may not be a “given.” In fact, even having a sustainable today may not be possible. This experience has been described as living in the “tyranny of the moment.” The longer and deeper this moment-driven experience, the less likely it is that individuals will have access to or think in terms of “future story.” Many people live without the opportunity to make a difference in their communities. The community is often reluctant to value the experience and contributions of those in poverty. For the individual in poverty, that sense of powerlessness often makes it hard to get much traction to make necessary personal changes.

This work focuses on how a person can get to the point of having a future story through creating choices and developing his or her own power. Just as importantly, this module assists institutions and communities in avoiding the mindset that poverty is both inevitable and perpetual—and helps individuals, institutions, and communities move toward ending the powerlessness of the mindset that says “poverty will always be with us.” It is our contention that this change is impossible with the development of relationships of mutual respect, which also can be called “social coherence.” This is one of the key driving forces of Bridges Out of Poverty.

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.”

–Dr. James Comer
Key Points

The key points underlie Bridges Out of Poverty and aha! Process knowledge.

Key Point: The Bridges approach is about economic diversity, not racial or cultural diversity.

- Race, ethnicity, and gender inequities are major contributors to poverty.
- Bridges, coupled with your expertise on local racial and ethnic diversity, will improve our effectiveness.
- This work offers a new analytical category for economic class—that is, a lens to help us define and examine economic diversity.
- Bridges provides a new lens for seeing old problems—and offers new solutions. Our principal contribution to the discourse on poverty is the lens of economic class.

Key Point: Economic class 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. For example, poverty in less developed countries is a chronic lack of food, shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation, and the most basic healthcare. This is sometimes referred to as “absolute poverty.” It should be noted that poverty in developed countries may be perceived as wealth from the perspective of absolute poverty.

Key Point: Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.

- Individuals and families can “fall through the cracks” between classes.
- This work is informed by the fact that economic class is on a continuum—and that some individuals use the hidden rules of more than one class as they are making the transition from one class to another.

Key Point: Generational and situational poverty are different.

- Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer.
- Situational poverty involves a shorter time and is usually caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce).
- Sometimes generational poverty began with situational poverty. There may have been a series of life events that created a spiral-down effect.

Key Point: This work is based on patterns, and all patterns have exceptions.

- We cannot assume that individuals from a certain environment, such as generational poverty or generational wealth, will know and use the hidden rules of that environment. Each person’s story, internal resources, and experiences are different. However, we can say that, within that environment, there may be certain hidden rules that present themselves and “make sense.” These hidden rules may be accepted and effective in that environment but not in other settings.
Key Point: An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.
- We are this rich piece of fabric that is very different from person to person. We have a thread that came from our race, our religion, our gender, the region of the country we grew up in, aging, economics, and cross-cultural threads.
- Each of us here brings with us a whole set of hidden rules.

Key Point: Most schools, organizations, and businesses operate from middle-class hidden rules and norms.
- These rules are seldom directly taught by schools or businesses.
- In order to move from one class to another, one must often give up relationships for achievement for a period of time. To clarify: Although one may need to give up time spent with others, usually one doesn’t necessarily lose the relationships themselves.

Key Point: We must understand our clients’ hidden rules and teach them the hidden middle-class rules that will allow them to be successful at school and work.
- The basis of the work allows hidden rules to be respectfully shared. If service providers in middle class structures working with participants from poverty don’t understand the mental model and hidden rules of poverty, they lose credibility with their participants. Loss of credibility means “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You don’t know the way my life is and what’s important to me!” Not only the messenger, but the message loses credibility.
- If we’re respectful of the hidden rules of individuals in poverty, we have a better chance of building relationships of mutual respect. We set up an environment where hidden rules can be taught and shared.
- This work is not about stripping anyone of their hidden rules. Rather, it’s about adding the knowledge of different sets of rules. Many individuals who move out of poverty don’t “give up” all the hidden rules with which they were raised, but they reframe the hidden rules as a matter of choice, not identity.

Key Point: The more we understand how class affects us and are open to hear how it affects others, the more effective we can be.
- Blaming the poor for poverty is improper. Lowering expectations is insulting and unnecessary. Providing the resources and support for change—priceless!

Key Point: To move from poverty to middle class or from middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement.
- In poverty, giving up relationships for achievement (even for a time) is not widely accepted and encouraged. People are your primary resource, and there is a fear of losing people. This is understandable.

Application Exercise
1. Which key point means the most to you? Why?
2. What are the consequences of using only the lens of cultural diversity in solving poverty issues in your community? What are the consequences of considering only economic diversity when solving poverty issues in your community?
Research

The research in this module covers the causes of poverty, as well as sustainable communities. Please begin by answering the following questions:

1. What do people say causes poverty?
2. What do you say causes poverty?

It is generally believed that four principal factors cause poverty. Poverty research is on a continuum beginning with behaviors of the individual. Poverty is caused by the choices of the poor, and it is caused by political/economic structures, and everything in between. The four areas of research all contribute to poverty: It is not "either/or."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors of the Individual</th>
<th>Human and Social Capital</th>
<th>Exploitation</th>
<th>Political/Economic Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependency</td>
<td>Lack of employment</td>
<td>Dominated groups for profit</td>
<td>De-industrialization</td>
</tr>
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<td>Single parenting</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Raw resources or materials</td>
<td>Globalization</td>
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<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>Inadequate skill sets</td>
<td>Subprime lending</td>
<td>Race to the bottom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breakup of families</td>
<td>Declining neighborhoods</td>
<td>Rent to own</td>
<td>Increased productivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>Middle-class flight</td>
<td>Human trafficking</td>
<td>Shrinking middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness</td>
<td>Lack of affordable housing</td>
<td>Payday lending</td>
<td>Corporate influence</td>
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<td>Language</td>
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<td>Economic disparity</td>
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After reviewing the areas of research, ask the following questions:

1. At the beginning of this module, which category of research did you focus on the most in answering the question about what causes poverty?
2. In your experience, how does the prevailing focus on behaviors of the individual align with most anti-poverty efforts?
3. Describe the benefits of having all three classes—poverty, middle class, and wealth—represented when discussing causes of poverty in the community.
Community Sustainability Grid

The Community Sustainability Grid is:

1) A tool used to engage everyone in dialogue about community and future story
2) Used to address all causes of poverty, to broaden our efforts to end poverty, and to build sustainable communities
3) A concrete, measurable way to track efforts and make plans

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<th>Political/Economic Structures</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>Agency</td>
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<td>Community</td>
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<td>Policy</td>
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Application Exercise

Discuss causes of poverty in your community that fall under each area of research.

1) Behaviors of the Individual
2) Human and Social Capital
3) Exploitation
4) Political/Economic Structures

The following institutions are present in most communities. Check the area on which the following agencies focus the most:

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Behaviors of the Individual</th>
<th>Human and Social Capital</th>
<th>Exploitation</th>
<th>Political/Economic Structures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
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<td>Health Department</td>
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<td>Court System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Services Department</td>
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</table>
1. Which area do local agencies tend to focus on the most?

2. How and why is it helpful to know which area agencies focus on the most?

3. What are some possible implications of not addressing all four areas?

4. What impact might there be on those in poverty when exploitive businesses are reduced or eliminated in your community?

5. What community strategies would create an environment that helps someone build resources that would help him or her get out of poverty? Is stabilizing the environment enough? Why or why not?

6. What happens if a community focuses almost totally on an individual’s efforts, and does not also help stabilize the environment of people in poverty?

**Social Coherence: Does a person have a sense of being linked to the mainstream of society, of being in the dominant subculture, of being in accord with society’s values?”**

—Robert Sapolsky

**Notes:**

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Mental Models

A mental model is an internal picture, two-dimensional drawing, or representation of information that aids us in taking abstract information to a concrete level. Mental models are helpful when exploring the concrete experiences of people in generational poverty. Such models and images tend to exist below our awareness and can influence the way we think and act unless we consciously think about them.

Mental Model for Poverty

- Pawn shop
- Liquor store
- Corner store
- Rent to own
- Laundromat

- Fast food
- Check cashing
- Temp services
- Used-car lots
- Dollar store
Housing

“Housing is the engine that drives the chaos of poverty” – Paolo Friere

Housing is crowded and very costly – Many people have to double up, usually with family members but sometimes with people they don’t know very well. All of the elements in this mental model of poverty are interlocking: When the car won’t start, it sets off a chain reaction of missed appointments, being late to work, losing jobs and searching for the next place to live. In order to understand poverty, we also must address the larger elements that coexist with poverty in our communities. Many times families stay together to conserve resources; relationships are your resources.

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Housing policy has the ability to exacerbate or mitigate extreme income inequality in American cities. Where incomes are growing and inequality is increasing, cities like New York and San Francisco, rising prices and rents can displace poor families. But affordable housing secures a place for low-income people in communities with growing tax bases and improved services. Having access to better schools, good transportation networks, recreational facilities, and other community services enables families to improve their quality of life and provide greater opportunities for their children.

Unfortunately, affordable housing is a scarce resource in many cities. America’s housing policy has never fully met the demand for affordable rental housing, and the number of households served by federal rental assistance has essentially plateaued. Today, only 24 percent of the 19 million eligible households receive assistance—basically, only one in four households wins the housing assistance lottery.

Floor Plan of a House:
**Tyranny of the Moment**

The experience of poverty has been described (by Paulo Freire) as living in the “tyranny of the moment.”

> “The need to act overwhelms any willingness people have to learn.”
> 
> –Peter Schwartz

The circle of life for families at the bottom of the economic ladder is intense and stressful.

- Cars and public transportation are unreliable and insufficient
- Low-wage jobs come and go
- Housing is crowded and very costly – Many people have to double up, usually with family members but sometimes with people they don’t know very well
- Time and energy go into caring for the sick and trying to get health care
- Many of the interactions with the dominant culture are demeaning and frustrating

All of the elements in this mental model of poverty are interlocking: When the car won’t start, it sets off a chain reaction of missed appointments, being late to work, losing jobs and searching for the next place to live.

When one’s attention is focused on the unfolding crisis of the day, people in poverty fall into what Paulo Freire calls the Tyranny of the Moment. It robs people their future stories and a commitment to education. It requires them to use reactive skills, not true choice-making, to survive. It robs them of power – the power to solve problems in such a way as to change the environment – or to make future stories come true.

When listening to people in poverty, one learns that people survive these circumstances by developing relationships of mutual reliance and facing down problems with courage and humor. It is family, friends and acquaintances who give you a place to stay, food to eat, a ride to work and help with your children. People in poverty are masters at making relationships quickly. Above all – they are problem solvers – they solve immediate, concrete problems all day long.

**Application Discussion:**

**Wage Question:** If you did everything your caseworker told you to do—got a job and kept it for a year, never missing a day of work—how much closer (if at all) would you be to being out of poverty at the end of that year than you were at the beginning?

One mental model or paradigm we encounter in most communities is that people in poverty don’t work. The reality is that people in poverty do work (sometimes two or three jobs), but the work doesn’t help them achieve economic stability. Some economists say that economic stability is usually around 60–70% of the average household income in the U.S., which is currently about $34,000/year. In other words, just over $20,000/year would be considered the amount of household income that could result in minimum “economic stabilit
Mental Model for Middle Class

- Schools
- Social Services
- Police
- Church

Achievement

- Hobbies & Interests
- Education
- Family & Friends
- Clubs & Civic Groups
- Careers
- Cost of Education
- Housing & Assets
- Prevention
- Working Long Hours
- Debt
- Credit Card
- Retirement
- Cost of Childcare
- Mortgage Payments
- Children
- Vacations

Businesses

- Shopping/strip malls
- Bookstores
- Banks
- Fitness Centers
- Vet Clinics
- Office Complexes
- Coffee shops
- Restaurants
- Golf Courses
Mental Model for Wealth

CONNECTIONS

PRIVATE CLUBS & ASSOCIATIONS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL ADVISORS
LAWYERS & ACCOUNTANTS
TRAVEL
OVERSIGHT OF CORPORATE, PROPERTY, PERSONNEL CONCERNS
MEDIA & POLITICAL LINKAGES
SPONSORSHIP ATTENDANCE
VACATION
To explore the mental models at a community level, check the level of concern in the left-hand column (1 = not a concern; 5 = significant concern). In the right-hand column, check the level of effectiveness your community has in addressing each area (1 = not effective; 5 = very effective).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Concern</th>
<th>Effectiveness in Addressing Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transportation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Food</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Job</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Crime and Safety</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. In your community, what areas of the mental models (or “pieces of the pie”) are the biggest concerns?

2. Discuss the differences in amount spent on housing in poverty versus middle class. Compare and contrast differences in the housing experience between these two environments.

3. What are the biggest barriers to building resources with people in poverty in your community? Assess the barriers brought to the table by individuals, institutions, and the community itself.

4. How might the “tyranny of the moment” affect the interactions between those who identify with the middle-class circle and those who identify with the poverty circle?

5. How might growing up with fewer available resources and limited opportunities to build future story affect what people in generational poverty know about problem solving and making changes?

6. How might growing up with abundant access to resources and future story affect what people know about problem solving and making changes?

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Hidden Rules

Hidden rules are the unspoken cues or habits of a group that let you know if you do or do not belong. Here are some examples.

1) Hidden rules are about how well we navigate different situations and how we understand economic environments different from our own.
2) It is helpful to learn hidden rules in order to improve relationships, resolve conflicts, and design programs more skillfully.
3) Hidden rules come directly from the environment in which one lives. If one grows up in poverty, he or she will learn the hidden rules of poverty in order to survive.
4) Our work is not about making everyone middle class but about giving people choices so they can widen their responses if they so choose.
5) Most agencies base their work on the premise that people can plan, but it can be difficult for many individuals in poverty to plan because the plans are constantly being revised based on how quickly things change in the “tyranny of the moment.” Using mental models for planning, building relationships of mutual respect, and understanding the nature of how things work or don’t work in poverty are a few of the tools organizations and individuals in poverty can use to create a real-time, authentic planning process. You can find more information how the Getting Ahead™ process utilizes comprehensive and self-driven plans by logging on to www.gettingaheadnetwork.com.

Some examples of the hidden rules of economic class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Middle Class</th>
<th>Wealth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRIVING FORCES</strong></td>
<td>Survival, relationships, entertainment</td>
<td>Work and achievement</td>
<td>Financial, political, and social connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESTINY</strong></td>
<td>Belief in fate; cannot do much to mitigate change</td>
<td>Belief in choice</td>
<td>Noblesse oblige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONEY</strong></td>
<td>To be used or spent</td>
<td>To be managed</td>
<td>To be invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME</strong></td>
<td>Present most important</td>
<td>Future most important</td>
<td>History and traditions most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE</strong></td>
<td>Casual register; Language is about survival</td>
<td>Formal register; Language is about negotiation</td>
<td>Formal register; Language is about networking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observations About Hidden Rules

- Don’t criticize another person’s hidden rules; instead, talk about additional hidden rules that might be effective in certain settings.
- All of us bring with us the hidden rules of the class in which we were raised.
- One set of rules is not necessarily better or worse than another.
- We use hidden rules to thrive in the environment in which we find ourselves.
- Everyone, regardless of economic class, can benefit from knowing the hidden rules of the other two socioeconomic classes.
  - People in poverty can benefit by knowing the hidden rules of school, work, and community planning groups—which usually are based on middle-class hidden rules.
  - People in middle class can design programs more skillfully if they understand the environments of people from the other two classes.
  - People in wealth who want to participate in building sustainable communities can benefit by knowing hidden rules of the others coming to the planning table.

Application Exercise

1. Give examples of how schools, businesses, and organizations use the driving forces and hidden rules of middle class. What expectations of one another are generated by this middle-class environment?
2. What happens if you work with an organization that uses middle-class hidden rules, whereas you personally are accustomed to using the hidden rules of a different economic class?
3. Noblesse oblige is literally translated as “obligation of the nobility.” It is the mission of those who are better off to promote certain causes or assist those who may not be as well off. How could community sustainability be enhanced if people who have a noblesse oblige sensibility are part of the coalition team?
4. How might relationships be more important than achievement for individuals in poverty? For individuals in other economic classes?
5. Considering that hidden rules are about belonging (who belongs and who does not) …
   - List and discuss situations where people in poverty may feel as if they don’t belong.
   - List and discuss situations where middle-class people may feel as if they don’t belong.
   - Where might people from wealth feel as if they don’t belong?
6. Which hidden rules do you feel most strongly about? Have you ever found yourself expecting others to use these same hidden rules?
7. Which hidden rules of other classes might you have the most trouble accepting? Are you at risk of being judgmental when someone uses one of these hidden rules?
8. What are ways in which hidden rules are most likely to be broken in groups when a diverse gathering of economic classes is present?
Discuss how the following hidden rules impact problem-solving strategies when all three classes are present in developing community sustainability. How can we expect that there will be divergent perspectives, and how can we learn from one another?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hidden Rule</th>
<th>Effect on Problem-Solving Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DRIVING FORCES</td>
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<td>TIME</td>
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<td>LANGUAGE</td>
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The Role of Language and Story

Our use of language can influence heavily how we are perceived, thus influencing our relationships with others. Knowing the registers of language, discourse patterns, and story structures can allow us to understand ourselves and others. This is crucial when developing relationships. Knowing the research on language experience by economic class can allow us to better understand the importance of language in a child’s cognitive development. This information is linked to future modules. In addition:

1. Significant learning and change require a relationship of mutual respect.
2. Relationships begin and end with language; that is why registers of language and discourse patterns are beneficial to know.
3. Language development birth to age 3 is associated with cognitive development, school readiness, and school and workplace success.

Hidden Rules of Language

- Middle class—use of formal register for negotiation; verbal, abstract, and proactive skills are necessary
- Poverty—use of casual register for survival
- Wealth—use of formal register for networking

Eighty percent of our communication in any register is nonverbal.

Language and Power

- Casual is more accurate.
- Formal has more power.
- Communication problems can be a balance-of-power problem.
- When the balance of power is relatively equal, candid communication can take place.
- Listening is an attitude more than a skill.

“When cultures break down, and parents can’t mediate the world for their kids, then it’s a broken culture.”

—Reuven Feuerstein

People in poverty are problem solvers. The Bridges work is based on this construct.
Application Exercise

1. What is the importance of being "bilingual" or "bi-dialectical," that is, having the ability to go between casual and formal registers?

2. What is the role of verbal and nonverbal communication, and what impact could each have when solving community problems?

3. What are effective ways to teach formal register to those who generally have access only to casual register?

4. What are the possible benefits and costs of learning and using formal register? Conversely, how can we help people from middle class realize the importance of relaying information in casual register?

5. Discuss language and social advantage/disadvantage. How might casual register be advantageous in poverty?

6. When communicating about mutual expectations, how might language-use differences help and hinder the process?

7. If someone who is making the transition from poverty to middle class has and uses the formal register, how will this impact that person's journey?

8. How do you prepare middle-class agencies to communicate effectively (regarding nonverbal communication and language registers) with those in poverty?

9. What role might language registers and story structure play during organizational and community meetings (such as a Bridges Steering Committee meeting) which include individuals from all economic classes?

10. What impact would overuse of formal register have at organizational or community meetings where not everyone uses formal register and its story structure?

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Resources

Resources

- Financial—having the money to purchase goods and services
- Emotional—being able to choose and control responses in negative situations without engaging in self-destructive behavior
- Mental—having the cognitive abilities and acquired skills to deal with daily life
- Spiritual—believing in divine purpose and guidance, having hope; our cultural base may also be a part of what we consider “sacred”
- Physical—having physical health and mobility
- Support Systems
- Knowledge of Hidden Rules
- Relationships/Role Models
- Formal Register
- Motivation and Persistence
- Integrity and Trust

Definition of poverty: the extent to which an individual does without resources

Communities can help families build resources, families can help their children build resources, and individuals can build their own resources.

Resources can be built by learning hidden rules and through connections.

Social Capital

- Social capital involves networking, norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness
- According to Robert Putnam (1995), social capital has been decreasing since the 1960s
- Bonding capital—cultivated from personal and peer relationships: people who help me “get by”
- Bridging capital—developed from relationships of mutual respect established across different economic groups: people who help me “get ahead”

NOTE: In Getting Ahead™ the investigators do an extensive self-assessment of their resources and decide which resources are needed. Next, the investigators make a 10-step SMART (specific, measureable, attainable, realistic, and time-specific) plan regarding how to build the chosen resources.
Middle-class systems often diagnose situations, express motivation for change, and make a plan. In this model, however, individuals decide which resources they want to build for themselves and are encouraged to start with their strengths.

**Principles for Change**

- Recognize that people in poverty are problem solvers. Listen. You will hear what someone in poverty knows that others may not know.
- Bridge distrust between classes: Teach the Bridges concepts.
- Reduce communication “noise” by using mental models.
- Provide social support at the workplace with economic opportunities and benefits.

**Points to Remember**

- Resources define a large measure of the quality of life for an individual.
- Bring all three classes to the table to create the community’s future story.
- Create strategies for dealing with all causes of poverty.
- Stabilize the environment of those who are at the bottom of the economic ladder.
- Build resources.

**Application Exercise**

1. Why might an economically stable life be difficult without a significant number of resources?

2. Why is knowledge of the hidden rules a resource?

3. Who built your resources? Stated differently, how were your resources built?

4. What is the community’s role in helping people build resources?

5. What is the difference between stabilizing daily life and building resources?

6. In some initiatives, a great deal of work is done to stabilize the environment. If that is all that was done, would a person get out of poverty? Why or why not? What if you added in the creation of bonding and bridging social capital to the process?

7. Why is it largely ineffective for agencies to make plans for those in poverty?

8. Why might there be distrust between economic classes?

9. Why is systemic change necessary to address poverty?
10. What is your community's plan for building resources so that more people can access economic stability? How do you involve people in poverty in designing this community-level plan?

11. Can all individuals in your community count on your community to deliver a fair shot at a well-paying job, a fair shot at a good education, a fair shot at healthcare, and a fair shot at credit?

12. Discuss bonding and bridging social capital in your personal life and in your community. Below, use the mental model of social capital.

Social Capital
NEXT STEPS

1. Design/Redesign: Growing Sustainable Organizations and Communities

NOTE: Most of the information in this section can be found in the *Bridges Out of Poverty* book, Chapters 13–14.

This is a good time to check in on the principal purpose, goal, or mission of your organization—and what occurs to achieve success toward this purpose. An effective manager will seek to embed this purpose every day. It should flow naturally through all individual and group encounters. Yet many of us have not thought very much about our organization’s theory of business. This is the purpose of your business or organization, including your ideas about what is happening or what is needed, why it is important, and how change will occur.

**Application Exercise**

Fill in the blanks to identify your theory of business.

If our organization changes/builds PROVIDES

Possible responses:

- external resources
- asset-building tools
- a quality education
- skill building
- increased neighborhood safety and support
- social capital
- a larger framework of understanding
- affordable housing
- relationships of mutual respect
- quality patient care
- the opportunity to co-investigate economic class
- etc.

... then our clients/customers will gain/have/ACHIEVE

Possible responses:

- quality of life
- economic stability
- increased mental health
- sobriety
- increased nutritional skills
- safety
- sustainable income
- health and wellness
- a seat at the community decision-making table
- etc.

Is your organization building or bringing resources? The bringing-resources model is needs-based. The building of resources is an initiative-based model (such as Getting Ahead™)—a process in which individuals are making their own arguments for change under their own power for their transition out of poverty.

**Application Discussion**

1. What do you think about the excerpt on page 162 in the *Bridges* book that tells of the agency administrator who could not identify the theory of business (how his agency went about helping troubled teens) without first checking with the program director?

2. How does this address communication, as well as our understanding of our multiple roles within the institution?

3. Could the opposite be also true? If the administration has the vision, but front-line staff persons have no idea about the theory of business and their important role in that process, how will that affect the institution’s outcomes (health, sobriety, education, job skill development, sustainable income, etc.)?

4. How does the driving force of an organization impact the theory of business/change?

**Application Exercise**

**THE CLIENT LIFE CYCLE**

Draw the client/customer life cycle of your organization from the client or customer point of view—from the initial contact he or she has with the organization. If possible, do this with another person who works at your organization. Be sure to include each step, including each person in the organization who is part of the journey.

1. Assess the points where your organization excels at building relationships of mutual respect.

2. Identify those points of contact where it’s possible that relationships of mutual respect are possibly or even likely broken.

3. What can be done to redesign the client/customer life cycle to make it more effective in aligning with the theory of business/change?
Once organizations have assessed and redesigned their policies and procedures to align with Bridges Out of Poverty constructs, an assessment of community collaboration is provided in Chapter 14 of the *Bridges* book.

Review the five features of the community plan on page 179 of the *Bridges* book. Assess your community in light of these practices.

1. How does your collaborative group utilize these structures?

2. Describe how you engage all sectors—public, private, not-for-profits, etc.—as you target specific outcomes.

3. How does your collaborative group use shared goals, shared strategies, and shared measurements of success?

4. Assess the benefits derived from this type of collaborative process.
CLOSING THOUGHTS

It is our hope that this Bridges Out of Poverty study guide has helped to prepare you for your efforts to build social cohesion between economic classes and create relationships of mutual respect in your organization and community.

While you have been using this study guide to prepare yourself, there may be individuals in poverty in your community who have been engaged in the Getting Ahead™ program. It may be that soon you will be working together to end poverty in your community. The work will start with relationships of mutual respect as the foundation and grow from there to bring about systemic change to create a sustainable community.

We trust that the process itself will be transformative for you and that your initiative will help to transform your community.

Thank you in advance for all the time and effort you are putting into this endeavor. Best wishes!

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