Bridges Out Of Poverty Book Club Syllabus

Objective: Participants will read and discuss *Bridges Out of Poverty* by Ruby Payne, Ph.D., to develop a deeper understanding of the lifestyles, priorities, and behaviors of individuals experiencing poverty. By exploring the hidden rules and mental models associated with poverty, middle class, and wealth, participants will gain insight into the perspectives they bring into their work. This understanding will help educators reflect on how their own assumptions, as well as the cultures and policies of their schools and workplaces, may reinforce, support, or hinder the social norms and expectations of the students they serve.

Session 1 - Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 1-2

Themes:
- Purpose of Bridges framework
- Resources and defining poverty
- Causes of Poverty

Discussion Questions:
1. Think of a student you support, what resources do they possess in great supply? Where might they have room to grow, and how could you or systems in your school help fill those resource gaps?

2. As working professionals, our own resources may fluctuate. When have you experienced an ebb or flow in your resources, in your personal or professional life, and how did it influence your work with students?

3. Chapter 2 outlines multiple causes of poverty. Were any of the causes new or surprising to you? How has this chapter challenged your beliefs about poverty?

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will understand the Bridges definition of poverty, identify the 11 resources, evaluate the extent to which they or others may lack these resources, and develop a deeper understanding of the complex causes of poverty.

Session 2 - Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 3-4

Themes:
- Mental models of economic class
- Hidden rules
- Language registers
- Roles of relationships and support systems in navigating poverty

Discussion Questions:
1. What hidden rules were most present in your household growing up? How do those hidden rules still guide your behavior, shape your worldview, or influence your relationships?

2. What hidden rules do you observe in your school? How do these rules differ by group? Consider the hidden rules amongst your colleagues, and those you've seen developed by students or staff within your school culture. Who do these hidden rules benefit?

3. In what ways can language be weaponized? Conversely, how can language be used to build bridges, reduce conflict, or foster a sense of belonging?

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the mental models and hidden rules tied to poverty, middle class, and wealth. They will analyze which of these frameworks most strongly influence their own thinking and evaluate how these influences shape their interactions with others.

Session 3 - Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 5-7

Themes:
- Support systems and social capital
- Relationships, bonding and bridging capital
- Bridges constructs

Discussion Questions:
1. The average tenure of a superintendent is two and a half years. That is not nearly enough time for leadership to build a stable, achievement-based educational system. From your perspective, what contributes to leadership churn, and what can communities, school boards, and educators do to help build more stable, long-term educational leadership?

2. Reflect on your own professional relationships. Which ones feel transactional, and which ones are rooted in trust? How might educators move relationships with families or colleagues from transactional to transformational?

3. What strategies help ensure that "everyone is at the table" including students and families experiencing poverty, community partners, and staff with less institutional power? Where might your school's current processes excel and where may there be room for growth?

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will develop a clearer understanding of the role of relationships and social capital in poverty. They will learn communication methods and strategies that support stronger and more effective relationships with the students and families they serve. Participants will also explore

how the individual lens of the Bridges framework provides a foundation for broader change so they can carry this knowledge into their institutions, communities, and policy work.

Conclusion of Individual Lens

Individual Lens Reflection Questions:

1. How do poverty and economic class shape the daily lives, choices, stresses, and strengths of the students and families you serve? How has your perception changed since beginning this book?

2. In what ways do class differences show up in resources, language, hidden rules, or relationship patterns within your school?

3. What actions can individual educators take to support students experiencing poverty? Consider approaches such as relationship-building, instructional practices, advocacy, resource-sharing, and policy awareness. Which strategies offer the greatest immediate impact on students and which create the most meaningful long-term change?

Session 4 - Institutional Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 8-9

Themes:
- Organizational design
- Customer Lifecycle
- Theories of Change

Discussion Questions:

1.How would you describe the way information flows in your school district? Does communication tend to move top-down, or are there channels that allow information, concerns, and insights to flow in multiple directions?

2.What theory of change does your school operate under? From your perspective, is this theory of change intentional and understood by school administration?

3. If we view students and families as the "customers" of public education, how might this change the relationship between the institution and those it serves? Consider how this perspective might alter the flow of information and the communication styles educators use.

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will examine the customer life cycle and assess how school processes align with or create barriers for families experiencing poverty. They will generate strategies to improve engagement and reduce obstacles. Participants will also explore the theories of change in Bridges Out of Poverty, determine which are most present in their schools, discuss how these models are supporting students and families, and identify opportunities to apply them more effectively to enhance school practices and outcomes.

Session 5 - Institutional Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 10-11

Themes:
- The motivational approach
- Social capital for organizations
- Organizational hidden rules

Discussion Questions:
1. When students appear unmotivated what might they actually be motivated for? How can educators align classroom expectations with student values?

2. Does your classroom, school, and district lean more towards motivational or fix-it approaches? How does that tendency influence students' sense of ownership, agency, and trust?

3. How can educators create a classroom or school environment where differences in hidden rules can be named and understood without judgement?

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will understand and apply the motivational approach to support students in building stability and taking ownership of their learning. They will identify hidden rules within their school that may create barriers, examine policies and practices through the Bridges institutional lens, and develop strategies to retrofit their school or classroom to better meet students' needs.

Conclusion of Institutional Lens

Institutional Lens Reflection Questions:
1. What school practices have you seen (or would like to see) that help retain educators, especially those who may be new, under-resourced, or navigating unfamiliar hidden rules?

2. Where do you see motivational approaches and fix-it approaches in your school? How do each of these approaches influence students' and educators' willingness to engage?

3. Educators may not control organizational policy, but they influence culture. With that, what can teachers do at a school or team level to address the causes of poverty?

Session 6 - Community Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 12-14

Themes:
- Building Bridges communities

- Building a Bridges Collaborative
- Mental model of a Bridges Collaborative
- Common Bridges Barriers

Discussion Questions:

1. How well-connected are you and your school with community organizations that support students and families experiencing poverty? (Youth programs, mental health services, emergency shelters, etc.)

2. Are you, your school, or another organization in your community well-positioned to serve as a catalyst in your community? Why or why not?

3. Bridges cautions against rankism, false generosity, and transactional relationships. Why is it important for schools and community partners to avoid these pitfalls? What might genuine, respectful partnership look like for your students and families?

Learning Outcomes:

Participants will explore how to build a Bridges-informed community by engaging students, families, and community partners in decision-making. They will examine the mental models and roles of a Bridges collaborative, develop strategies for identifying and connecting with external resources, and leave with actionable ideas for creating or strengthening relationships with community organizations to support students' academic, social, and emotional needs inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusion of Community Lens

Community Lens Reflection Questions:

1. How can schools, community organizations, and other local leaders work together to address barriers that people experiencing poverty cannot overcome alone? What roles could educators play in these collaborative efforts, and which partners in your community would be the most beneficial in supporting this cause?

2. How can students, families, and community members experiencing poverty be meaningfully included in the planning and implementation of initiatives involving them and their communities? What strategies could your school use to ensure their voices are respected and influence outcomes?

Session 7 - Policy Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 15-17

Themes:
- Understanding the role of policy in poverty
- Advocating for policy change
- Tools and frameworks for advocacy

Discussion Questions:
1. How do relationships play a role in policy development and advocacy? How might educators use their relationships with students, families, colleagues, and community partners to influence policies that support students experiencing poverty?

2. How might educators take small, actionable steps to advocate for students at the school, district, or state level?

3. The "tyranny of the moment" often keeps educators focused on immediate problems. How can you balance responding to urgent issues with stepping back to identify root causes of challenges in your school or community? How could reflection and proactive discussion influence the development or improvement of policies affecting disadvantaged student populations?

Learning Outcomes:
Participants will learn about policy and the process of advocating for change. They will explore how to apply this knowledge at multiple levels in the education system, including school, district, and state. Participants will leave with actionable ideas for influencing policies that improve student outcomes and support families experiencing poverty.

Conclusion of Policy Lens

Policy Lens Reflection Questions:
1. How confident do you feel getting involved with policy and politics at a school, districts, state, and national level? What tools provided in the policy lens could you use to further your advocacy?

2. Educators are in a constant battle to maintain a work-life balance. What ways can you work to influence policy within your school or district without sacrificing valuable personal time?

3. How do, or can, schools promote involvement? Why might some schools be adverse to this authentic collaboration?

Bridges Out Of Poverty Book Club Agenda

Session 1 - March 4th, 2026 4:00PM
Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 1-2

Themes:
- Purpose of Bridges framework
- Resources and defining poverty
- Causes of Poverty

Discussion Questions:
1. Think of a student you support, what resources do they possess in great supply? Where might they have room to grow, and how could you or systems in your school help fill those resource gaps?

2. As working professionals, our own resources may fluctuate. When have you experienced an ebb or flow in your resources, in your personal or professional life, and how did it influence your work with students?

3. Chapter 2 outlines multiple causes of poverty. Were any of the causes new or surprising to you? How has this chapter challenged your beliefs about poverty?

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Session 2 - March 11th, 2026 4:00PM
Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 3-4

Themes:
- Mental models of economic class
- Hidden rules
- Language registers
- Roles of relationships and support systems in navigating poverty

Discussion Questions:
1. What hidden rules were most present in your household growing up? How do those hidden rules still guide your behavior, shape your worldview, or influence your relationships?

2. What hidden rules do you observe in your school? How do these rules differ by group? Consider the hidden rules amongst your colleagues, and those you've seen developed by students or staff within your school culture. Who do these hidden rules benefit?

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Learning Outcomes:
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Session 3 - March 18th, 2026 4:00PM
Individual Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 5-7

Themes:
- Support systems and social capital
- Relationships, bonding and bridging capital
- Bridges constructs

Discussion Questions:
1. The average tenure of a superintendent is two and a half years. That is not nearly enough time for leadership to build a stable, achievement-based educational system. From your perspective, what contributes to leadership churn, and what can communities, school boards, and educators do to help build more stable, long-term educational leadership?

2. Reflect on your own professional relationships. Which ones feel transactional, and which ones are rooted in trust? How might educators move relationships with families or colleagues from transactional to transformational?

3. What strategies help ensure that "everyone is at the table" including students and families experiencing poverty, community partners, and staff with less institutional power? Where might your school's current processes excel and where may there be room for growth?

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Conclusion of Individual Lens

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Session 4 - March 25th, 2026 4:00PM
Institutional Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 8-9

Themes:
- Organizational design
- Customer Lifecycle
- Theories of Change

Discussion Questions:
1.How would you describe the way information flows in your school district? Does communication tend to move top-down, or are there channels that allow information, concerns, and insights to flow in multiple directions?

2.What theory of change does your school operate under? From your perspective, is this theory of change intentional and understood by school administration?

3. If we view students and families as the "customers" of public education, how might this change the relationship between the institution and those it serves? Consider how this perspective might alter the flow of information and the communication styles educators use.

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Session 5 - April 1st, 2026 4:00PM
Institutional Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 10-11

Themes:
- The motivational approach
- Social capital for organizations
- Organizational hidden rules

Discussion Questions:
1. When students appear unmotivated what might they actually be motivated for? How can educators align classroom expectations with student values?

2. Does your classroom, school, and district lean more towards motivational or fix-it approaches? How does that tendency influence students' sense of ownership, agency, and trust?

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Conclusion of Institutional Lens

Institutional Lens Reflection Questions:
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2. Where do you see motivational approaches and fix-it approaches in your school? How do each of these approaches influence students' and educators' willingness to engage?

3. Educators may not control organizational policy, but they influence culture. With that, what can teachers do at a school or team level to address the causes of poverty?

Session 6 - April 8th, 2026 4:00PM
Community Lens
Readings Due: Chapters 12-14

Themes:

- Building Bridges communities
- Building a Bridges Collaborative
- Mental model of a Bridges Collaborative
- Common Bridges Barriers

Discussion Questions:

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Process, Inc.
A Ruby Payne Company

THIS CERTIFIES THAT

Christian Cabral

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED
18 HOURS OF

Bridges Out of Poverty
TRAINER CERTIFICATION

TRAINER CERTIFICATION
aha!
Process, Inc
A Ruby Payne Company
Bridges Out
of Poverty

July 15, 2025
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DATE
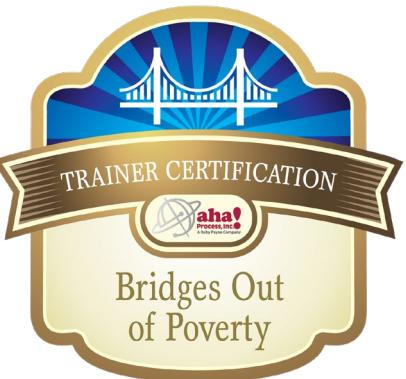
Ruby K. Payne
_____
CEO

Session 7 - April 15th, 2026 4:00PM
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Readings Due: Chapters 15-17

Themes:
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