

Additive Model: aha! Process's Approach to Building High-Achieving Schools

by Philip E. DeVol

The mission of aha! Process, Inc. is to positively impact the education and lives of individuals in poverty around the world. This mission is informed by the reality of life in poverty, research on the causes of poverty, and Dr. Ruby K. Payne's research and insights into economic diversity. The issues that aha! Process addresses are economic stability; the development of resources for individuals, families, and communities; and community sustainability. aha! Process provides an additive model that recognizes people in poverty, middle class, and wealth as problem solvers. The focus is on solutions, shared responsibilities, new insights, and interdependence. This work is about connectedness and relationships; it is about "us."

Using the Knowledge of People in Poverty to Build an Accurate Mental Model of Poverty

Going directly to people in generational poverty, the people working the low-wage jobs, and listening to them talk about their concrete experiences is to learn from the experts, the people with the knowledge. The circle of life for a family 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, time and energy go into caring for the sick and trying to get health care, and many of the interactions with the dominant culture are demeaning and frustrating. For people in poverty, the arithmetic of life doesn't work. Housing costs are so high and wages so low that people have to double up, usually with family members, but often with people they may not know very well. All 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. Vulnerability for people in poverty is concrete. When the price of gas goes to \$2.20 a gallon it can mean having to work half a day to fill the tank. 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. Adds Peter Swartz: "The need to act overwhelms any willingness people have to learn." In this way poverty robs people of their future stories and the commitment to education. It requires them to use reactive skills, not true choice making, to survive. And finally, 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.

By continuing to listen, 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. It's not Triple A that you call when your car breaks

down; it's Uncle Ray. People in poverty are the masters at making relationships quickly. Above all, they are problem solvers; they solve immediate, concrete problems all day long.

Unfortunately, the current operating mental model of our society appears to be that people in poverty are needy, deficient, diseased, and not to be trusted. Again, this can be learned by simply listening: listening to policymakers, commentators, and taxpayers who don't want their tax dollars to go to someone who isn't trying, isn't motivated, is lazy, and so on. Another way to discover the underlying mental model is to observe its programs in action and work backwards. Three- to five-year lifetime limits for assistance, 90 days of services, work first ... These policies point to frustration felt by those whose mental model of the poor is that they are needy, deficient, and diseased.

This inaccurate mental model is fed by media reports that favor soap operas to conceptual stories and individual stories to trends and the broader influences. The public hears about a fictitious "welfare queen" but not comprehensive studies. What is needed is a thorough understanding of the research on poverty.

Studying Poverty Research to Further Inform the Work of aha! Process

David Shipler, author of *The Working Poor*, says that in the United States we are confused about the causes of poverty and, as a result, are confused about what to do about poverty (Shipler, 2004). In the interest of a quick analysis of the research on poverty, we have organized the studies into the following four clusters:

- *Behaviors of the individual*
- *Human and social capital in the community*
- *Exploitation*
- *Political/economic structures*

For the last four decades discourse on poverty has been dominated by proponents of two areas of research: those who hold that the *true* cause of poverty is the behaviors of individuals and those who hold that the *true* cause of poverty is political/economic structures. The first argues that if people in poverty would simply be punctual, sober, and motivated, poverty would be reduced if not eliminated. For them, the answer is individual initiative. Voter opinion tends to mirror the research. Forty percent of voters say that poverty is largely due to the lack of effort on the part of the individual (Bostrom, 2005). At the other end of the continuum, the argument is that globalization, as it is currently practiced, results in the loss of manufacturing jobs, forcing communities to attract business by offering the labor of their people at the lowest wages, thus creating a situation where a person can work full time and still be in poverty. In a virtual dead heat with the countering theory, 39 percent of voters think that poverty is largely due to circumstances beyond the individual's control. Unfortunately, both two sides tend to make either/or assertions as if to say, *It's either this or that—as if "this" is true and "that" is not.*

Either/or assertions have not served us well; it must be recognized that causes of poverty are a both/and reality. Poverty is caused by both the behaviors of the individual and political/economic structures—and everything in between. Definitions for the four clusters of research and sample topics are provided in the table below.

CAUSES OF POVERTY			
Behaviors of the Individual	Human and Social Capital in the Community	Exploitation	Political/Economic Structures
<i>Definition:</i> Research on the choices, behaviors, characteristics, and habits of people in poverty.	<i>Definition:</i> Research on the resources available to individuals, communities, and businesses.	<i>Definition:</i> Research on how people in poverty are exploited because they are in poverty.	<i>Definition:</i> Research on the economic, political, and social policies at the international, national, state, and local levels.
<i>Sample topics:</i> Dependence on welfare Morality Crime Single parenthood Breakup of families Intergenerational character traits Work ethic Racism and discrimination Commitment to achievement Spending habits Addiction, mental illness, domestic violence Planning skills Orientation to the future Language experience	<i>Sample topics:</i> Intellectual capital Social capital Availability of jobs Availability of well-paying jobs Racism and discrimination Availability and quality of education Adequate skill sets Childcare for working families Decline in neighborhoods Decline in social morality Urbanization Suburbanization of manufacturing Middle-class flight City and regional planning	<i>Sample topics:</i> Drug trade Racism and discrimination Payday lenders Sub-prime lenders Lease/purchase outlets Gambling Temp work Sweatshops Sex trade Internet scams	<i>Sample topics:</i> Globalization Equity and growth Corporate influence on legislators Declining middle class De-industrialization Job loss Decline of unions Taxation patterns Salary ratio of CEO to line worker Immigration patterns Economic disparity Racism and discrimination

Typically, communities put a great deal of effort into the first area of research: the behaviors of the individuals. “Work first” was one of the key themes of the welfare reform act of 1996. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) organizations focused on getting people to work. The idea was that getting a job, any job, and learning to work were more important than going to job-training classes or receiving treatment. Community agencies offered treatment for substance abuse and mental-health problems, money-management classes, and programs to address literacy, teen pregnancies, language experience, and more. The mission of these agencies is not to work directly on poverty issues but to deal with co-existing problems. All of these agencies encourage their clients

to change behaviors, recording and managing the changes through the use of plans and contracts, and often sanction clients who fail to adhere to treatment plans.

Community efforts to enhance human and social capital include the strategies found in Head Start, WIA programs, One-Stop centers, Earned Income Tax Credit, and other anti-poverty programs. In this area too, accountability and sanctions are used to measure and motivate community organizations. Schools that don't meet certain benchmarks are taken over by state departments; TANF organizations that don't meet certain benchmarks don't receive incentive funds. This isn't to make a blanket criticism of any of the programs that serve low-wage workers. In fact, many programs have great value to those who have used them. Rather, it's the almost exclusive focus on these two areas of research that is the problem.

Communities rarely develop strategies to restrict, replace, or sanction those who exploit people in poverty. Even those organizations charged with fighting poverty sometimes neglect this cause of poverty. In part, this comes from departmentalizing community services. People who work in organizations charged with serving those in poverty don't think of exploiters as their responsibility. That falls to law enforcement and policymakers.

Departmentalizing is even more pronounced when it comes to the causes of poverty that arise from political and economic structures. Community economic development is left to the market system, developers, businesses, corporations, the Chamber of Commerce, and elected officials. People who typically work with those in poverty don't see a role for themselves in the debate on economic development issues any more than those who are engaged in business ventures make a direct connection between their work and the well-being of people in poverty. And yet, in concrete terms, there is a direct connection between quality of life and the actions of government and business. For the person in poverty it comes down to this: A person can get vocational training in a particular skill, get a job, and still be in poverty.

This all-too-common reality is the reason why communities must develop strategies across all four areas of research, not just the first two. To continue to focus exclusively on the first two areas of research is to invite more of the same—in short, more poverty. There is good research in all four areas; communities must develop strategies in all four areas if they are going to build resources and sustainability.

Alice O'Connor, author of *Poverty Knowledge*, says our society has typically looked at poverty through the prism of race and gender. She suggests that another analytic category is needed, that of economic class (O'Connor, 2001). In her seminal 1996 work *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Ruby Payne offered that prism. Since then aha! Process has published many books and produced many videos and workbooks that are used to address poverty across all four areas of research.

The Need for Change: Naming Problems and Finding Solutions

Any community or organization that sets out to address poverty, education, health care, justice, or community sustainability must acknowledge that it seeks change: change in the individual's behavior, change in community approaches, and/or change in political/economic structures. Put another way, there is no agency that receives money—be it federal, state, or private—to keep behaviors and conditions exactly as they are. We seek change because we perceive something to be wrong.

Naming the problem is the first step toward a solution, and the most important step, for if the problem is not named accurately the course of action based on that faulty assumption will only lead further and further from a solution. So naming problems accurately—making the correct diagnosis—is crucial because it is on those definitions that the theories of change and program activities are based.

But naming the problem isn't as simple as it seems. If a problem exists, is it due to something that is lacking, a shortage, a disadvantage, a handicap? It is here that planners, providers, and problem solvers tend to slide into what often is referred to as the deficit model. This model seems to derive from what William Miller calls the righting reflex. He says, "Human beings seem to have a built-in desire to set things right" (Miller, 2002). We see something that is wrong; we want to fix it. This tendency is all well and good as long as it's confined to one's own problems, but as soon as our fix-it intentions are focused on others, this approach quickly loses its charm and questions arise. Who is it that names the problem? Who is it a problem for? What evidence is provided? How broad or deep is the investigation? People from minority cultures and dominated groups are the first to ask these questions, for it is often their ways of raising children, their language uses, and their problem-solving strategies that are being labeled as having deficits by the mainstream culture. Nobody likes deficit labeling. So it is that the righting reflex leads to deficit models that few of us like—and even fewer defend, for good reasons.

There is no known father or mother of the deficit model. Nobody claims it, but the title or slur gets hung around the neck of those who use it, or appear to use it. Some people hold that James Coleman, who has been called the "father of busing," proposed a deficit model. A review of the body of his work would refute that label. His research on education, one of the largest research projects ever undertaken, discussed economic class and achievement in its complexities. It was legislators, businesspeople, school administrators, and others who were under pressure to "Fix it!" who simplified Coleman's work when they turned it into policy. There are two things to be learned from this. First, the deficit model is simplistic; it oversimplifies the research and applies the righting reflex. Second, there is research—and then there are those who use the research.

It's important to take a closer look at how problems get named and what the distinction is between naming problems and deficit labeling. The deficit model names the problem and blames the individual; the individual must change, whereas society can be left unaltered. It is, however, possible to name problems and not blame the individual. For example, Dr. James P. Comer, not by any stretch a proponent of the deficit model, does identify the

family environment as crucial to a child's academic success. He points to hard science—brain research—that confirms the interactive process between the mediation (interpretation of reality) that children receive from caregivers before they come to school with the continuous mediation when children enter school. Quoting Comer: “Without [mediation] children can lose the ‘sense’—the intelligence potential—they were born with. Children who have had positive developmental experiences before starting school acquire a set of beliefs, attitudes, and values—as well as social, verbal, and problem-solving skills, connections, and power—that they can use to succeed in school. They are the ones best able to elicit a positive response from people at school and bond with them.” Read another way, this could appear as labeling low-income families with deficits. Of course, it isn't that because Comer acknowledges the problems that exist across the system; it's never as simple as the fault of a single person or group. The body of Comer's work reveals the true nature of his model (Comer, 2001).

Despite the fact that the deficit model seems to have no father or mother and is the work of policymakers more than researchers (and gets confused with the naming of problems), the deficit model is still for real. Its features are that it fixes the problems on the individual and therefore focuses on fixing the individual. Environmental conditions are translated into the characteristics of the individual and gradually turn into negative stereotypes. The talents, gifts, and skills of an individual get lost. In the deficit model the “glass is seen as half empty.” The message becomes “you can't,” and the impulse to care for and protect arises. Thus we have “special needs,” “special programs,” “special rooms,” and “special personnel,” all of which can lead to and foster dependency.

The lack of staff training can result in the deficit model appearing in the attitudes of the professionals, in individual bias, and inaccurate assumptions. Notes Comer: “Many successful people are inclined to attribute their situations to their own ability and effort—making them, in their minds, more deserving than less successful people. They ignore the support they received from families, networks of friends and kin, schools, and powerful others. They see no need for improved support of youth development” (Comer, 2001). Without training, staff members are likely to see deficits where there are none. A child who comes to school after getting up early to pump water from an outside well and whose mother hand-washes clothes once a week may be seen as dirty, less presentable, more lacking in physical resources than children who can shower in their own bathroom before coming to school and whose mother uses a washer and dryer. The first child has the resources and skills but isn't readily able to demonstrate those capabilities.

The lack of understanding on the part of the staff can lead to labeling that is hard to shake. If the school or agency doesn't provide some way for individuals to demonstrate their skills and resources, the glass will always appear to be half empty.

Problems are identified with student performance, drug use, teen pregnancy, inadequate skill sets, job retention, criminal behavior, poverty, and so on, all of which gives rise to fix-it programs. One Teacher Leaders Network online discussion participant offered this analogy about deficit-model programs: “We call it the ‘chicken inspector’ mindset. You see, the chicken inspector has been trained to look for something that isn't right, so that's

his focus and that's what he finds—the things that are wrong. The more things he finds wrong, the better he feels he is doing his job.”

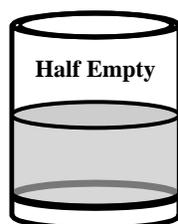
The deficit model finds its way into the design of programs. Legislators and professionals set policy and create departments and programs. Each department is expected to fix the piece of the pie that falls under its purview. These reactions to the latest problem set up a random approach to problem solving and result in remedial programs focused on the behaviors of the individual while losing sight of the whole system made up of families, neighborhoods, communities, and sociopolitical/economic structures.

This isn't to suggest that policymakers and program designers set out to apply the deficit model. It's more likely that they select some other approach but for any number of reasons fail to adhere to their espoused theory (what is said) and slide into a “theory of use” (what is done) that resembles the deficit model (Senge, 1994). Perhaps the most common reason for this slip is that it's easier to describe, plan for, monitor, and sanction the behaviors of individuals than it is to hold organizations, communities, and systems accountable in the same way (Washburne, 1958). The fact is that the deficit model is resilient, and we slide back into it easily.

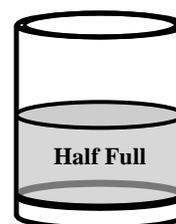
Opposite the deficit model are many models that offer what the deficit model does not. They go by many names: positive model, developmental assets, competency, value-based, and strength-based ... to name a few. Other models have been assigned names by their developers: Health Realization, Resiliency in Action, Comer Model, and Motivational Interviewing to name but four. Each of these models has its distinct theory and practices, but the one thing they have in common is that they see “the glass as half full.”

Positive models too are not without their critics. For example, child-protection workers point out that reframing the behaviors and characteristics of victims of abuse into strengths is naïve. No matter how resilient the child, the fact remains that the child has very little control over his/her environment and the behaviors of adults. Educators note that children in poverty have been exposed to more in their few years than many adults. In some ways they seem to have adult capabilities; they take care of themselves and feel confident they can handle big decisions. But the educators caution against accepting this claim. According to a recent piece by Craig Sautter, “We as adults need to remember that they are not adults. They still have a lot of growing and developing to do and still need the guidance of adults who can be there to help them through their growing-up period” (Sautter, 2005).

Deficit Models

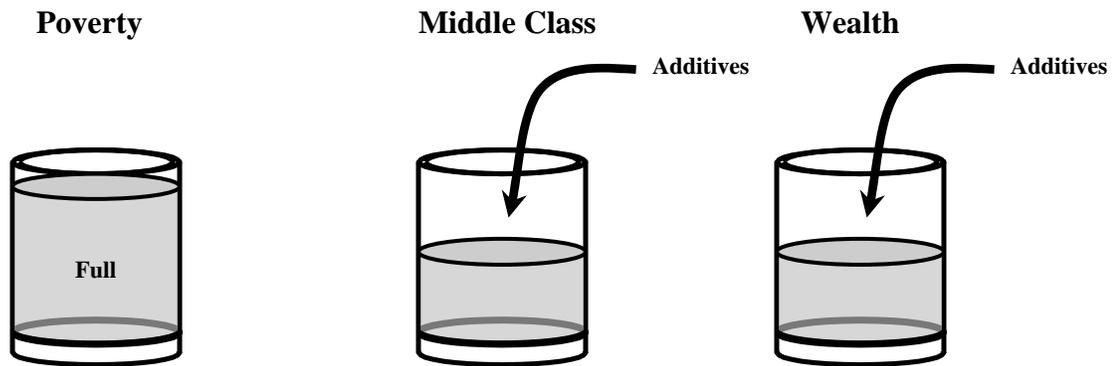


Positive Models



The additive model, a term used by Ruby Payne to describe the work of her company, aha! Process, combines the value of accurate problem identification with a positive, strength-based, communitywide approach to change. Applying the glass half empty/half full model to the three economic classes and the work of aha! Process would look like this:

For the Person in Poverty

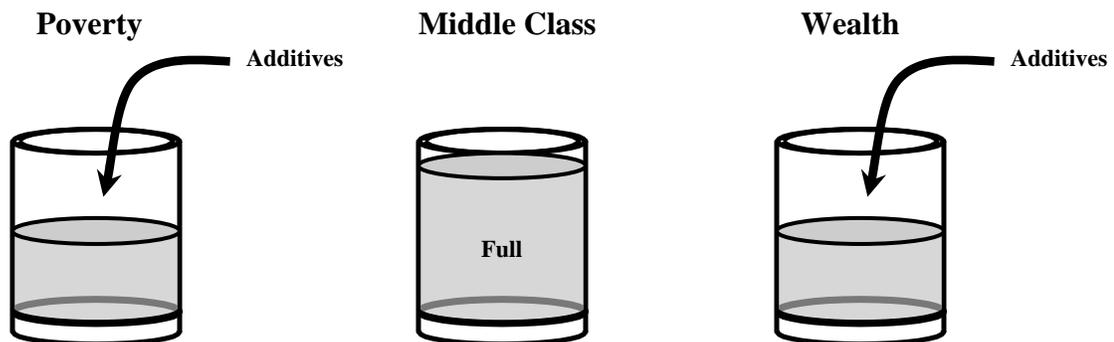


To survive in poverty, individuals must have reactive, sensory, and non-verbal skills. This means they have the ability to read situations, establish relationships, and solve immediate and concrete problems quickly. In that environment, individuals have a full glass; they have the assets and strengths to survive.

When individuals in poverty encounter the middle-class world of work, school, and other institutions, they do not have all the assets necessary to survive in that environment because what is needed there are proactive, abstract, and verbal skills. The additive model offers insight into how hidden rules of economic class work, along with a framework for building resources, a way to fill up the glass.

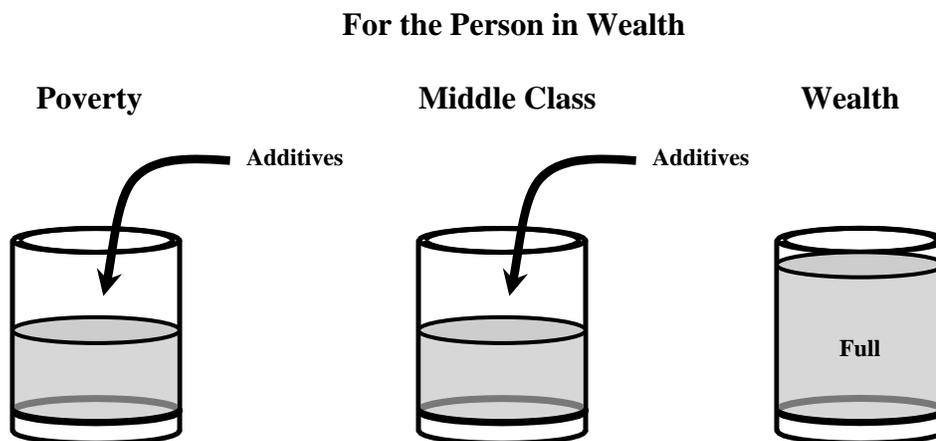
When the person in middle class encounters wealth, the same is true—but to a greater extent.

For the Person in Middle Class



Individuals raised in a middle-class environment learn the hidden rules, mindsets, and means of survival the same way persons in poverty or wealth do: through osmosis. To learn the survival rules of one's environment, virtually all one has to do is breathe. So the glass is full so long as individuals remain in their environment. But should those persons suddenly find themselves in poverty—or even in a poverty neighborhood—would they have the assets needed to survive there? The glass would be half empty. But there is a more common scenario that brings people in middle class and people in poverty together; that is in the institutions run by middle-class people. In this scenario both groups come with a glass half full because they may not understand the rules or value the assets of the other person or the other class. Here is where the additive model can help. It names the problem and offers insight and awareness; it opens the way to build relationships and eventually to better outcomes for both.

As middle-class individuals interact with people in wealth they may not know any more about the rules of survival in wealth than the person in poverty knows about the rules of middle class (and how the values of the additive model apply).



The additive model has something to offer people in wealth as well. Where the worlds of wealth, middle class, and poverty intersect, the additive model can assist. Due to their connections, influence, and power, people in wealth often are in the position to design the policies and directions of the institutions that the middle class run and that the people in poverty use. If wealthy individuals' poverty and middle-class glass is only half full and all they know is their own rules of survival, then it can result in policies that are ineffective and counterproductive.

To better understand the additive model, we must consider aha! Process definitions and core concepts.

Resources

Resources: The following resources are quality-of-life indicators that are described in almost all aha! Process publications.

Financial	Physical
Emotional	Support systems
Mental	Relationships/role models
Spiritual	Knowledge of hidden rules

Poverty: the extent to which an individual or community does without these resources.

Prosperity/sustainability: the extent to which an individual or community has these resources.

By these definitions it is easy to see that an individual may have low financial resources and at the same time have other resources that are very high. Of course, the opposite is true too: One can have high financial resources and be impoverished in other ways.

This approach emphasizes that every individual's story is different and takes into account the culture in which one lives. And yet, as a general rule, the additive model holds that to have high resources is better than to not have high resources. It's preferable to have financial stability than to be unable to pay for basic needs. It's preferable to have many positive relationships than to live in isolation. It's preferable to be able to identify feelings, choose behaviors, and get along with others than to be emotionally destructive.

The additive model holds that:

- Resources are to be developed by communities, families, and individuals. In fact, it is the appropriate role, or "job" if you will, of individuals, families, and communities to grow resources for oneself, one's family, and the community.
- The optimal way to build resources is to build on one's strengths. Focusing on low resources, weaknesses, and what is absent not only is no fun, it simply isn't effective.
- We must develop resource-building strategies across all four areas of poverty research. The deficit model is at work when a community focuses its anti-poverty strategies on the behaviors of the individual.

Ruby Payne's research on the hidden rules of economic class is another key component of the aha! Process approach. It is this analytic category that provides a new lens through which to examine poverty and prosperity issues. Again, some definitions will help clarify the additive model.

Hidden Rules of Economic Class

Hidden rules: the unspoken cues and habits of a group. All groups have hidden rules; you know you belong when you don't have to explain anything you say or do. These rules are held by racial, ethnic, religious, regional, and cultural groups ... to name a few. An individual's cultural fabric is made up of many threads, one of which is economic class. Where the threads are woven together the different cultures act on behaviors of the individual and group. Of these rules, economic class is a surprisingly strong thread, one that is often overlooked—or at least minimized.

The additive model holds that:

- The hidden rules arise from the environment in which a person lives, that they help persons survive in the class in which they were raised. This means that the rules of class are not to be criticized, but that we simply add options, new rules, a wider range of responses, an ability to negotiate more environments. While these are framed as choices and not identity, any individuals who begin to work on achievements—such as economic stability, education, or getting sober—are changing their identity. How they make the transition is a choice: Will they stay connected with people from their past, or will they move into new circles? This is an individual and often painful choice/process. Being aware of the choice can smooth the process, whatever the decision.
- It is beneficial for middle class people to learn the hidden rules of poverty—and not just so they're able to help people in poverty make changes, but because the hidden rules of poverty have value in their own right. Perhaps first among these is the value of relationships and the time given to them. The ability people in poverty have to establish quick but intimate relationships is an asset. In the additive model, change takes place, not just in the individual but in the theories of change and program designs of organizations. Middle-class organizations often have based their work on middle-class mindsets without an adequate mental model of poverty or knowledge of the hidden rules of the people they serve.

It is by adding to the hidden rules that one is raised with that people develop a range of responses that will give them control over their situations and open doors to new opportunities.

Language Issues

The aha! Process approach calls for an extensive discussion of language issues, including definitions of the registers of language, discourse patterns, story structures, language experience in the first three years of life, cognitive issues, and strategies to deal with all of these. As a body of work, aha! Process's many books, workbooks, videos, classroom strategies, program design strategies together make up a remarkable representation of the additive model. It is here that the model calls for an accurate naming of problems where the word deficit is used.

The additive model holds that:

- People build relationships by using the registers of language and discourse patterns skillfully.
- The strengths and uses of each register are encouraged where they can be most skillfully applied.
- Classroom interventions and agency strategies must be based on a clear understanding of the issues and a clear definition of the problems.
- The interventions themselves are built on the assets of the individual and the necessary changes fall as much on the professionals as on the individuals in poverty.
- Learning structures in the brain can be enhanced, but only by knowing the exact nature of the thinking that is occurring. In school settings the intervention cannot be random or general. The strategies offered by aha! Process are grade- and subject-specific.
- A rich language experience benefits children and prepares them for the world of work and school.
- Teachers value the language experience that children bring with them to school and prepare students to be able to skillfully navigate a wide range of language situations.
- In social service settings with adults, the additive model calls for the staff to become bilingual (able to translate from formal register to casual register).
- Change messages—be they about cardiovascular disease, breast feeding, birth weight, or the prevention of drug use—often taught in the formal register are now taught through a self-discovery process and by using mental models. Communication is meaningful and not just what Robert Sapolsky calls middle-class noise (Sapolsky, 1998).

Family Structure

Matriarchal structure: All families have capabilities and strengths, and all families are faced with demands. In the course of life all families must face suffering and hard times, but some families seem to have more than their share of suffering to contend with. Under ordinary demands and stressors, families will become stronger as a result of their struggles. But there are some things that can overrun and overwhelm a family's capabilities; those include chronic addiction, mental illness, physical illness, and poverty (Henderson, 1996). People in poverty sometimes contend with more than poverty alone, and poverty itself is so stressful that there is a direct correlation between poverty and stress-related illnesses (Sapolsky, 1998). In high-demand conditions, families take on a structure that fits the survival needs of the family. In that context, the matriarchal structure and associated patterns of behavior are assets, but if viewed in light of a deficit model are often seen as negative or even as lacking in morals. A matriarchal family is not synonymous with a dysfunctional family. As in all economic classes, dysfunctional things may happen, but living in poverty does not equate with dysfunctional behaviors. The additive model provides an understanding and appreciation of matriarchal families and offers new information and ways of increasing resources.

The additive model holds that:

- Family structures evolve to meet the survival needs of the family and that they are strengths.
- As with aha! Process knowledge, awareness gives people optional ways to stabilize the chaotic circle of life, to envision new patterns and stories, to practice choice, and to build new resources.

Sharing aha! Process Knowledge with Adults in Poverty

Co-investigation: Sharing aha! Process knowledge with people in poverty is done through a group investigation of the causes of poverty, examining the impact of poverty on the individual, and exploring new information. Individuals in the group assess their own resources and make plans to build their own future story. Here's one way of articulating the challenges faced by people in poverty:

Poverty traps people in the tyranny of the moment, making it very difficult to attend to abstract information or plan for the future (Freire, 1999; Sharron, 1996; Galeano, 1998)—the very things needed to build resources and financial assets. There are many causes of poverty, some having to do with the choices of the poor, but at least as many stemming from community conditions and political/economic structures (O'Connor, 2001; Brouwer, 1998; Gans, 1995).

The additive model holds that:

- People in poverty need an accurate perception of how poverty impacts them and an understanding of economic realities as a starting point both for reasoning and for developing plans for transition (Freire, 1999; Galeano, 1998).
- Using mental models for learning and reasoning, people can move from the concrete to the abstract (Freedman, 1996; Harrison, 2000; Sharron, 1996; Mattaini 1993; Jaworski, 1996; Senge, 1994).
- People can be trusted to make good use of accurate information, presented in a meaningful way by facilitators who provide a relationship of mutual respect and act as co-investigators (Freire, 1999; Sapolsky, 1998; McKnight, 1995; Pransky, 1998; Farson, 1997).
- Using Ruby Payne's definition of the resources necessary for a full life, as well as her insights into the hidden rules of economic class, people can evaluate themselves and their situation, choose behaviors, and make plans to build resources (Miller, 2002).
- The community must provide services, support, and meaningful opportunities during transition and over the long term (Putnam, 2002; Kretzmann, 1993).
- In partnership with people from middle class and wealth, individuals in poverty can solve community and systemic problems that contribute to poverty (Phillips, 2002; Kretzmann, 1993).

aha! Process Knowledge and Community Sustainability

Community sustainability: This is an issue that all communities, states, and nations must now face. The world has seen several revolutionary changes: the change from hunter/gatherer societies to agriculture, the industrial revolution, the information age, and now the era in which we must determine how to use our resources and live in our environment—and yet retain vital resources for our children and grandchildren.

The mission of aha! Process—to directly impact the education and lives of individuals in poverty around the world—leads to a role in this revolution. Communities are awakening to the reality that they do not offer a sustainable way of life to their children and are looking for direction. Equity and critical mass impact the changes that are taking place. If a community allows any group to be disenfranchised for any reason (religion, race, class), the entire community becomes economically poorer (Sowell, 1998). When poverty reaches the point of critical mass in a community and efforts to reverse the problem don't succeed, the people with the most resources tend to move out of the community, leaving behind enclaves of poverty. At this point the community is no longer sustainable.

Responding to the impending crisis with the mindset that created it and with the strategies that have been used to address poverty to date is to invite more of the same results: more poverty and more communities at risk.

aha! Process defines community as any group that has something in common and the potential for acting together (Taylor-Ide 2002). The rich social capital that peaked in the post-World War II era—and that has been on the decline since—must be restored (Putnam, 2000). The barn-raising metaphor for communities where citizens contribute to the building of the barn with their particular skills, gifts, and talents must replace the vending-machine metaphor, which is currently in use. The vending-machine metaphor reduces community members to consumers or shoppers who put 75 cents into the machine expecting 75 cents of goods and services in return. With that mindset, it's no surprise that we find people kicking, shaking, and cursing the vending machine.

The additive model holds that:

- It's better to be a barn raiser than a consumer.
- All three classes must be at the table.
- Communities must have a shared understanding and a common vocabulary to build critical mass that is willing and motivated to make the necessary changes.
- Strategies must cover all the causes of poverty—from the behaviors of individuals to political/economic structures.
- Communities must build intellectual capital.
- Long-term plans of 20 to 25 years are needed.
- Quality-of-life indicators must be monitored and reported regularly in the same way that economic indicators are monitored and reported.

Conclusion

aha! Process offers a unique understanding of economic diversity that can give individual, families, and communities new ways of solving problems. It is the hope of aha! Process that 100 years from now poverty will no longer be viewed as economically inevitable. Two hundred years ago slavery was thought to be an economic necessity. It was not. One hundred fifty years ago it was believed that women were not capable of voting. That also was not true. We fervently hope that by 2100 individuals and society at large will no longer believe that poverty is inevitable. It is only by applying an additive model that we will understand and address both poverty and the underlying factors that have perpetuated it.

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