

What Can Legislatures Do to Address Poverty? They Can Use a Human Development Model That Results in the Development of Resources

by Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D.

A key issue for communities, countries, and the world today is this: ***How can we address the needs of the under-resourced without destroying the resourced?*** Community sustainability depends on some resolution of this issue.

The continuum from poverty to wealth is the extent to which you have or can access the following nine resources:

FINANCIAL: Having the money to purchase goods and services.

EMOTIONAL: Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. This is an internal resource and shows itself through stamina, perseverance, and choices.

MENTAL: Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, computing) to deal with daily life.

SPIRITUAL: Believing in divine purpose and guidance.

PHYSICAL: Having physical health and mobility.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS: Having friends, family, and backup resources available to access in times of need. These are external resources.

RELATIONSHIPS/ROLE MODELS: Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, who are nurturing, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.

KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES: Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.

LANGUAGE: Ability to use formal register, which is the language of work and school, in writing with specific word choice.

Adapted and reprinted with permission from *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 1996, 2005

The extent and degree to which you have these resources determines your ability to negotiate an environment—and to take care of yourself and others. For a long time in social policy, poverty and

wealth have been defined against only one resource: financial. **Money does not build human capacity, and money does not change thinking.** The things that change thinking are: (1) Relationships with people different from you (bridging social capital); (2) emotional personal experiences; (3) education; (4) spiritual awakening, which often comes from 1, 2, and 3; and (5) employment.

What Causes Individuals to Be Under-Resourced?

Therein lies the rub and the basic debate about poverty. Alice O'Connor, in her book *Poverty Knowledge*, states that one of the reasons poverty has been such a difficult problem to solve is that there is little agreement on the cause of poverty. In the research, there are four basic causes given for poverty: individual choices, the extent to which community resources are available, exploitation, and economic/financial/government systems.

In the early 1800s the prevalent theoretical construct in the United States was **genetic** determinism, i.e., who you were and what you could become were determined by what you had inherited. With the socialist movements in government and the women's movement came the theoretical construct of **social** determinism, i.e., who you were and what you could become were determined by systems and social access. Social determinism also became the underlying theoretical construct for many social justice and multicultural studies. Concomitantly, colonialism largely came to an end throughout much of the world.

From the 1960s to 1980s in the United States, many systemic, social barriers were removed through legislation—but not all. Starting in the 1970s, as the U.S. moved from industrial to knowledge-based economies, economic well-being increasingly was and is connected to education, social capital, and knowledge—i.e., human capacity. We talk about privilege being related to social class, race, or gender, and it is. Privilege also is heavily linked to the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. (1)

For the last 30 years in social policy, social determinism has been the underlying theoretical construct for legislation, and so a huge amount of blame has been placed on the “system,” which, by definition, is bad. All organizations and all systems have at their very essence two things: relationships and information (Wheatley, 1992). The human body is a system based upon the information (DNA) and the subsequent relationships (circulatory, muscular, nervous, etc.) to form the “system” that becomes your body. **All systems are limited by the capacity of the information and relationships within that system.** In other words, a system is only as strong as the individuals within the system and is dependent upon human capacity.

Furthermore, all beginning learning occurs at a personal level in a “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where we find context, relationships, tasks, and language. Human capacity development begins in a “situated learning” environment and depends on the relationships and information within that environment.

Human capacity development (in this article) is also limited in this way: Some individuals will always need to be cared for; their human capacity cannot be developed to the extent that they can be self-sustaining (mental illness, physical illness, handicapping conditions, age, etc.).

The issue for any community is this: What percentage of poverty can you afford? If too many individuals become under-resourced, eventually the resourced leave, and then virtually everyone is under-resourced. An example of this would be the country of Haiti.

What Is Human Capacity?

When individuals have these resources, they then have human capacity as defined by these characteristics:

- The ability to create/enhance their own resource base: to be self-sustaining
- The ability to make choices that promote dignity, well-being, and continued development
- The ability to give back to others
- The tools to negotiate almost any environment to promote self-preservation, personal well-being, and the well-being of others
- The ability to grow spiritually

What Are the Characteristics of a Human Capacity Development Model?

In short, a human capacity development model is an interactive model of one-on-one relationship building, within a co-investigative knowledge experience, that results in the development of additional resources.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a cognitive model that focuses on knowledge, thinking, and understandings. All learning is double-coded: both cognitively and emotionally (Greenspan & Benderly, 1997). The emotional coding comes from the relationship.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a co-investigative, interactive approach that builds one-on-one relationships of mutual respect with individuals who are different from you.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It assigns a language to talk about the experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It mediates (tells <i>what, why, how</i>).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It relates to and reframes the individual's personal life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It provides the tools to move from a sensory, physical understanding to an abstract, representational concept through stories, parables, metaphors, analogies, drawings, and movement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows for personal choice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It always has a future story at an individual level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It results in the development of resources.

For example, Habitat for Humanity is a human capacity development model. In the Habitat for Humanity program members of a family are given the ability to have their own home if they help build/rehab it. In the process, they develop one-on-one relationships with people different from themselves, they gain a knowledge base (how houses are built, how to repair/fix household items, how someone different from them thinks, etc.), they learn about money, and so forth. It builds human capacity and, in the process, develops relationships.

Another example is what members of a church in East Texas did: In their larger community, when a child was born to a young woman under the age of 21, someone in the church would call the mother and tell the mother the church had a gift for the baby—and could she bring it over? The woman from the church would talk to the baby and the mother. Then the woman would ask if she could come back the next week to see the baby even though she didn't have a gift this time. The church woman continued to come every week. In a three-year time period, the babies who had had that visitation were significantly superior cognitively to the babies who had not had the intervention, and each young mother had a mentor and friend. Both the mother and her baby had developed human capacity.

This Texas church worked at developing what Robert Putnam (2000) calls “bridging” (people different from you) social capital, not just “bonding” (people like you) social capital. Some churches and other religious organizations exclude—by design or default—individuals because of their differences. (2)

Why Do We Need a Human Capacity Development Model?

Many people believe that the world's first major revolution was the development of agriculture, when some individuals ceased their nomadic existence and began to farm in one place. Many also believe that the second major revolution was industrial, when individuals began using machines to do their work. The next major revolution may well be the development of sustainability—the ability to use resources (education, money, water/land/natural resources, etc.) and still have them for the next generation. Moving to sustainability requires a human capacity development model. When individuals have limited resources, they need to develop them. The good news, according to the research, is that resources can be developed—at any stage of life. Yet the very nature of resource development is such that most people can't do it on their own. That's why the expression “Pick yourself up by your own bootstraps” tends to be a contradiction in terms. The larger community is needed. However, that community may have limitations of its own. When a society has a critical mass of individuals in need of resource development it may not be possible for those who are resourced to continue to give indefinitely without depleting their own resource base. What the resourced individual understands is that, as one human being, he/she cannot generate enough resources to maintain everyone. Again, here is where the larger community or religious body enters the picture because the resourced individual necessarily isolates himself/herself from the demands and needs simply for self-preservation. This dynamic is most common in large cities around the world where poverty is widespread and often quite visible. As a result, there is little community sustainability.

Another reason we need a human capacity development model: our young people. This is the model they have grown up with on the Internet—an interactive model of one-on-one relationship building within a co-investigative knowledge experience, e.g., Facebook and My Space. They will settle for nothing less.

A third reason is this: The primary model for the development of human capacity has historically been the family. In post-modern society, for numerous reasons, this form of development occurs less and less. The institution that makes human capacity development its mission will be the institution that rules the next century. Right now human capacity development happens primarily through the media, with very mixed reviews. Is that the model that will develop the capacity we need for sustainability?

Why Do We Need the Resources and Prosperity This Model Develops?

One of the most damaging assumptions among some individuals is that prosperity, by definition, is bad. How shortsighted. The fact is that one person's prosperity helps another prosper and, furthermore, serves as a model for what is possible. Why would anyone want to move out of poverty if there were no better models to move to? I will argue that it's better to have food than to starve. It's better to have shelter than to have no protection. It's better to be healthy than to be ill. It's better to have relationships than to be alone. Quite simply, the better resourced a person is, the more the whole community is sustainable. There is greater opportunity for learning and development because you can focus time on that and not constantly on survival.

Furthermore, a basic rule in nature is this: To receive you must give—and vice versa. The ocean ebbs and flows. Plants take in the air and water and give back food. Prosperity allows for the process of giving and receiving. That includes the giving and sharing of information.

What Does the Larger Community Have to Offer Individuals from Poverty?

The larger community has a huge pool of individuals with incredible human capacity—knowledge bases, talents, understandings, language, and resources. This community has the potential, if the human capacity development model is utilized, to provide the cognitive, spiritual, and emotional tools for individuals in poverty to become resourced. People ask, *Should I give money?* Money gets you past survival (shelter, food, health), but it doesn't change thinking, and it doesn't develop capacity. I recommend that resources be provided when it's about survival, but all of these resources come with a required component of human capacity development. Knowledge bases are lost over generations. You cannot teach what you do not know. The only way you can get that knowledge and language is for it to be taught by someone who knows.

For example: *food*. Many resourced individuals become frustrated in the grocery store when they see individuals with food stamps or electronic cards buying prepared, expensive food. But to prepare food from scratch requires the following: electricity, the ability to plan, pots and pans, a knowledge base

about preparing food, measurement tools, math and reading skills, time to prepare foods, a working refrigerator, utensils, plates, and recipes. If you've moved three times in the last three months or you are homeless, you don't have most of these basic resources.

Does the Human Capacity Development Model Work to Help Adults Make the Transition Out of Poverty?

Yes, in our work at aha! Process we have been successfully using this model for five years. We find that it takes two to five years for an individual in poverty to successfully build a resource base that is self-sustaining. We call such resource bases Bridges Communities; they're built on "Getting Ahead" training. This training provides the knowledge bases and bridging social capital relationships for the development of resources. If you wish to know more about it, go to our website: www.ahaprocess.com. The YWCA announced that a Bridges Community was its model women's empowerment program of the year in 2008. In Youngstown, Ohio, 300 adults in poverty went through the program and, within six months, 58% had gone back to either technical school or community college for more training and development.

Conclusion

The brilliance of the human capacity model is that it develops resources, provides empowerment, and fosters community sustainability. From that development, we have "systems" and communities that are truly responsive to human needs.

ENDNOTES

(1) Increasingly, research is looking at the intergenerational transfer of knowledge. A study done in Australia, which followed the children of more than 8,500 women (mostly from poverty) from their first clinic visit for pregnancy, again at age 5, and again at age 14 (Najman et al., 2004), found that the child's maternal grandfather's occupational status independently predicted the child's verbal comprehension levels at age 5 and his or her verbal reasoning scores at age 14.

(2) The stages of community building generally include (M. Scott Peck, <http://communityx-roads.org/about>):

Pseudocommunity

An initial state of "being nice." Pseudocommunity is characterized by politeness, conflict avoidance, and denial of individual differences. Let's be honest; most of us can't keep this up for long. Eventually someone is going to speak up, speak out, and the dam breaks.

Chaos

In the stage of chaos, individual differences are aired, and the group tries to overcome them through misguided attempts to heal or to convert. Listening suffers, and emotions and frustration tend to run

high. There are only two ways out of chaos: retreat into pseudocommunity (often through organization), or forward, through emptiness.

Emptiness

Emptiness refers to the process of recognizing and releasing the barriers (expectations, prejudices, the need to control) that hold us back from authentic communication with others, from being emotionally available to hear the voices of those around us. This is a period of going within, of searching ourselves and sharing our truths with the group. This process of “dying to self” can make way for something remarkable to emerge.

Community

In this stage, individuals seek to accept others as they are—and are themselves accepted. Differences are no longer feared or ignored, but rather are celebrated. A deep sense of peace and joy characterizes the group.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- DeVol, Philip E. (2006). *Getting ahead in a just-gettin'-by world: Building your resources for a better life*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process.
- Greenspan, Stanley, & Benderly, Beryl. (1997). *The growth of the mind and the endangered origins of intelligence*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Lave, Jean, & Etienne Wenger. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Levite, Allan. (1996, December 19). The "ism" that isn't. (Why social determinism cannot mean what it says). <http://www.independent.org>.
- Najman, J. M., Aird, R., Bor, W., O'Callaghan, M., Williams, G. M., & Shuttlewood, G. J. (2004). The generational transmission of socioeconomic inequalities in child cognitive development and emotional health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 58(6), 1147–1158.
- O'Connor, Alice. (2001). *Poverty knowledge: Social science, social policy, and the poor in twentieth-century U.S. history*. Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press.
- Payne, Ruby K. (1996, 2005). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process.
- Peck, M. Scott. (1987). *The different drum: Community making and peace*. New York, NY: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster.
- Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Wheatley, Margaret (1992). *Leadership and the new science*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.