

ct members at the University of Houston-Clear Lake
ncouragement.

ayne, my husband and son, whose patience, support,
ve have allowed this book to happen.

Introduction

This book came to be because so many people were asking questions that, finally, I promised to put things in writing. My name is Ruby Payne, and I never realized that the information I had gathered over the years about poverty, middle class, and wealth would be of interest to other people.

It wasn't until an assistant principal, Judy Duncan, came to me and asked about a staff-development program for her faculty on discipline – and referenced the number of student referrals they were having – that I even began talking about the differences. She noted how the population in the school had changed over the past three years from 24% low income (as measured by the number of students on free and reduced-price lunch) to 60% low income. As she described the kinds of discipline situations they were experiencing, I would explain why those behaviors were happening. Finally, she stopped me and asked where I was getting my information. It was at that point that I realized that I had been gathering data for 24 years.

Where had I gotten the data? First of all, I have been married since 1973 to Frank, who grew up in poverty because his father died when he was 6. Though it was situational poverty, he lived for several years with those who were in generational poverty. Over the years, as I met his family and the many other players in the “neighborhood,” I came to realize there were major differences between generational poverty and middle class – and that the biggest differences were not about money. But what put the whole picture into bas-relief were the six years we spent in Illinois among the wealthy. It was the addition of the third dimension, wealth, that clarified the differences between and among poverty, middle class, and wealth.

As the principal of an affluent elementary school in Illinois, I began to rethink so much of what I had thought about poverty and wealth. The Illinois students had no more native intelligence than the poor students I had worked with earlier in my career. And I noticed that among affluent black, Hispanic, and Asian children, their achievement levels were no different from the white children who were affluent.

So, at Judy Duncan's request, I shared the information with her faculty members. They were very interested and thought the information was helpful. One teacher told another, and soon I was doing several workshops in other districts. Sara Hector, a field service agent with the Texas Education Agency, attended a workshop and told many people about it. Then Jay Staley, another principal, asked me to come with him to the University of Houston-Clear Lake to meet with a grant consortium, of which he was co-chair. This session led to more meetings and conversations.

So this information has spread more quickly than I could have ever anticipated. I just hope this data will be helpful to you, the reader, as well.

SOME KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. **Poverty is relative.** If everyone around you has similar circumstances, the notion of poverty and wealth is vague. Poverty or wealth only exists in relationship to known quantities or expectations.
2. **Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries.** The notion of middle class as a large segment of society is a phenomenon of this century. The percentage of the population that is poor is subject to definition and circumstance.
3. **Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.** In 2001, the poverty line in the United States was considered \$18,104 for a family of four. Just 6% of the population earned over \$100,000 per year. Individuals are stationed all along the continuum of income; they sometimes move on that continuum as well.
4. **Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.** Generational poverty is defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer. Situational poverty is a shorter time and is caused by circumstance (i.e., death, illness, divorce, etc.).
5. **This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.**

6. **An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.** Even though the income of the individual may rise significantly, many of the patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain with the individual.
7. **Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.** These norms and hidden rules are not directly taught in schools or in businesses.
8. **For our students to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school and at work.**
9. **We can neither excuse students nor scold them for not knowing; as educators we must teach them and provide support, insistence, and expectations.**
10. **To move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time).**
11. **Two things that help one move out of poverty are education and relationships.**
12. **Four reasons one leaves poverty are: It's too painful to stay, a vision or goal, a key relationship, or a special talent or skill.**

SOME CURRENT STATISTICS ABOUT POVERTY

1. In the United States in 2001, the poverty rate for all individuals was 11.7%. For children under the age of 18, the poverty rate was 16.3%, and for children under the age of 6, the rate was 18.2%.
2. There were 6.8 million poor families (9.2% in 2001, up from 6.4 million (6.7%) in 2000).

3. The foreign-born population in the United States has increased 57% since 1990 to a total of 30 million. In 2000, one out of every five children under age 18 in the U.S. was estimated to have at least one foreign-born parent. Immigrant children are twice as likely to be poor as native-born children. Among children whose parents work full time, immigrant children are at greater risk of living in poverty than native-born children (National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 2002).
4. Regardless of race or ethnicity, poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to suffer developmental delay and damage, to drop out of high school, and to give birth during the teen years (Miranda, 1991).
5. Poverty-prone children are more likely to be in single-parent families (Einbinder, 1993). Median female wages in the United States, at all levels of educational attainment, are 30 to 50% lower than male wages at the same level of educational attainment (*TSII Manual*, 1995, based on U.S. Census data, 1993). See 2001 U.S. census data on page 151.
6. Poor inner-city youths are seven times more likely to be the victims of child abuse or neglect than are children of high social and economic status (Renchler, 1993).
7. Poverty is caused by interrelated factors: parental employment status and earnings, family structure, and parental education (*Five Million Children*, 1992).
8. Children under age 6 remain particularly vulnerable to poverty. Children living in families with a female householder and no husband present experienced a poverty rate of 48.9%, more than five times the rate for children in married-couple families, 9.2%. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001).
9. The United States' child poverty rate is substantially higher – often two or three times higher – than that of most other major Western industrialized nations.

10. In the 2000 census, the following ethnic percentages and numbers of poor children were reported.

United States	Number of Children in Poverty in 1999	Percentage of Children in Poverty
All Races	12,109,000	16.9%
White	7,568,000	13.5%
African-American	3,759,000	33.1%
Hispanic *	3,506,000	30.3%
Asian-American	361,000	11.8%
Native American**	260,403	39.8%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

* Hispanics may be of any race.

** Native American numbers from 1990 (not counted in 1999).

11. While the number of white children in poverty is the largest group, the percentage of children in poverty in most minority groups is higher.



CHAPTER ONE
DEFINITIONS AND RESOURCES

To better understand students and adults from poverty, a working definition of poverty is "the extent to which an individual does without resources." These resources are the following:

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 to the child, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.

KNOWLEDGE OF HIDDEN RULES

Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.

Typically, poverty is thought of in terms of financial resources only. However, the reality is that **financial resources**, while extremely important, do not explain the differences in the success with which

individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty. The ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources. Each of these resources plays a vital role in the success of an individual.

Emotional resources provide the stamina to withstand difficult and uncomfortable emotional situations and feelings. Emotional resources are the most important of all resources because, when present, they allow the individual not to return to old habit patterns. In order to move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must suspend his/her "emotional memory bank" because the situations and hidden rules are so unlike what he/she has experienced previously. Therefore, a certain level of persistence and an ability to stay with the situation until it can be learned (and therefore feel comfortable) are necessary. This persistence (i.e., staying with the situation) is proof that emotional resources are present. Emotional resources come, at least in part, from role models.

Mental resources are simply being able to process information and use it in daily living. If an individual can read, write, and compute, he/she has a decided advantage. That person can access information from many different free sources, as well as be somewhat self-sufficient.

Spiritual resources are the belief that help can be obtained from a higher power, that there is a purpose for living, and that worth and love are gifts from God. This is a powerful resource because the individual does not see him/herself as hopeless and useless, but rather as capable and having worth and value.

Physical resources are having a body that works, that is capable and mobile. The individual can be self-sufficient.

A **support system** is a resource. To whom does one go when help is needed? Those individuals available and who will help are resources. When the child is sick and you have to be at work – who takes care of the child? Where do you go when money is short and the baby needs medicine? Support systems are not just about meeting financial or emotional needs. They are about knowledge bases as well. How do you

get into college? Who sits and listens when you get rejected? Who helps you negotiate the mountains of paper? Who assists you with your algebra homework when you don't know how to do it? Those people are all support systems.

Relationships/role models are resources. All individuals have role models. The question is the extent to which the role model is nurturing or appropriate. Can the role model parent? Work successfully? Provide a gender role for the individual? It is largely from role models that the person learns how to live life emotionally.

"No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship."

Dr. James Comer

Knowledge of hidden rules is crucial to whatever class in which the individual wishes to live. Hidden rules exist in poverty, in middle class, and in wealth, as well as in ethnic groups and other units of people. Hidden rules are about the salient, unspoken understandings that cue the members of the group that this individual does or does not fit. For example, three of the hidden rules in poverty are the following: The noise level is high (the TV is always on and everyone may talk at once), the most important information is non-verbal, and one of the main values of an individual to the group is an ability to entertain. There are hidden rules about food, dress, decorum, etc. Generally, in order to successfully move from one class to the next, it is important to have a spouse or mentor from the class to which you wish to move to model and teach you the hidden rules.

SCENARIOS

These scenarios have been written to portray the cases with which I have become acquainted. These scenarios have deliberately omitted most of the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that can be present so that the discussion can be about resources.

After each scenario, identify the resources available to the child and those available to the adult.

SCENARIO #1:



JOHN AND ADELE

BACKGROUND

John is an 8-year-old white boy. His father is a doctor and remarried but does not see his children. He pays minimal child support. The mother, Adele, works part time and is an alcoholic. One younger sibling, a girl who is mentally and physically handicapped, lives with the mother and John.

You are Adele, John's mother. You are a 29-year-old white female. You quit college your sophomore year so that you could go to work to support John's father as he went through medical school. You were both elated when John was born. During the time your husband was an intern, you found that a drink or two or three in the evening calmed you down, especially since your husband was gone so much. When your second child

was born, she was severely handicapped. Both of you were in shock. A year later your husband finished his residency, announced that he was in love with another woman, and divorced you. Last you heard, your husband is driving a Porsche, and he and his new wife spent their most recent vacation in Cancún. Your parents are dead. You have a sister who lives 50 miles away. Your weekly income, including child support, is \$300 before taxes. Your handicapped child is 3 years old and is in day care provided by the school district.

CURRENT SITUATION

You have been late to work for the third time this month. Your car broke down, and it will take \$400 to fix it. Your boss told you that you will be docked a day's pay – and that if you're late again, you will be fired. You don't know how you're going to get to work tomorrow. You consider several choices: (1) You can go car shopping, (2) you can put the car in the garage and worry about the money later, (3) you can invite the mechanic over for dinner, (4) you can get mad and quit, (5) you can call your ex and threaten to take him back to court unless he pays for the car, (6) you can get a second job, or (7) you can get drunk.

Your daughter has had another seizure, and you took her to the doctor (one of the reasons you were late for work). The new medicine will cost you \$45 every month.

John comes home from school and announces that the school is going to have a reading contest. Every book you read with him will earn points for him. Each book is one point, and he wants to earn 100 points. You must do physical therapy with your daughter each evening for 30 minutes, as well as get dinner. For John to get his books, he needs you to go to the library with him. You have only enough gas to go to work and back for the rest of the week, maybe not that. He also tells you that the school is having an open house, and he will get a pencil if you come. But John is not old enough to watch your daughter. Your ex has already threatened to bring up in court that you are an unfit mother if you try to get more money from him.

The mechanic calls and invites you out to dinner. He tells you that you might be able to work something out in terms of payment. It has been

a long time since you have been out, and he is good-looking and seems like a nice man.

What are Adele and John's resources? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #2:



OTIS AND VANGIE

BACKGROUND

Otis is a 9-year-old black boy. His mother conceived him at 14, dropped out of school, and is on welfare. Otis has two younger siblings and one older sibling who is a gang member.

You are Otis's mother, Vangie. You are a 23-year-old black female. You were the oldest of five children. You had your first child when you were 13. You have received welfare and food stamps since the birth of your first child. You lived with your mother until your fourth child was born when you were 18. Then you got your own place. You dropped out of school when you were pregnant with Otis. School was always difficult for you, and you never did feel comfortable reading much anyway. Your current boyfriend comes often and he works sometimes. Your mother lives down the street. Your weekly income (including food stamps) is \$215. You move a lot because there are always more bills at the end of the month than money.

CURRENT SITUATION

Your sister calls and tells you that her boyfriend has beaten her again, and she needs to come spend the night at your house. The last time she came she stayed for two weeks, and her 12-year-old handicapped son would not leave your 5-year-old daughter alone. You have several choices: (1) You could take her in and make her pay for her meals, (2) you could not take her in and have the whole family mad at you, (3) you could tell your daughter to hit her cousin when he comes close, (4) you could make Otis take care of the handicapped son, (5) you could slap the fool out of the handicapped son, (6) you could use the rent money to pay for the extra food, (7) you could go partying together and let Otis take care of the kids, or (8) you could move to a bigger place.

Otis comes home from school and announces that the school is going to have a reading contest. For every five books you read to him, he will receive a coupon to get \$2 off a pizza. To obtain his books, he needs you to go to the library. Also, you aren't sure you can even read to him because your skills were never good, and you haven't read for a long time. Getting to the library requires that you walk because you don't have a car. There have been two drive-by shootings last week. He also tells you that the school is having an open house and is sending a bus around the neighborhood to pick up parents. He gives you a note that you can't read.

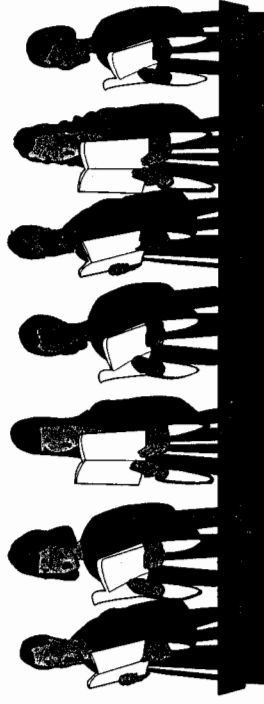
You are probably going to have to move again. This week Otis got cut badly at school, and the school nurse took him to the emergency room; they want \$200. Rent is due for the month, and it's \$300 for three bedrooms. Sister is coming, and that means extra food because she never has any money. Your boyfriend got arrested and wants you to get him out of jail. He was arrested for assault. The bondsman wants \$500. Your ex-boyfriend knew better than to come around. You need your boyfriend because his money makes it possible to keep from going hungry.

The teacher calls and tells you that Otis is misbehaving again. You beat the fool out of him with a belt and tell him he better behave. But that night you fix him his favorite dinner, then you tell everyone you talk to how Otis is misbehaving and what a burden he is to you.

What are Otis and Vangie's resources? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #3:



OPIE AND OPRAH

BACKGROUND

Opie is a 12-year-old African-American girl and the oldest of five children. She runs the household because her mother, Oprah, works long hours as a domestic. Grandmother, who is 80, is senile and lives with them, as well as an out-of-work uncle.

You are Opie's mother, Oprah. You are a 32-year-old black female. You were married for 10 years to your husband, and then he was killed in a car accident on the way to work two years ago. You work long hours as a domestic for a doctor. You go to the Missionary Baptist Church every Sunday where you lead the choir. Your employer treats you well and you take home about \$300 every week. You ride public transportation to work and the church bus on Sunday. You want your children to go to college, even though you only finished high school.

CURRENT SITUATION

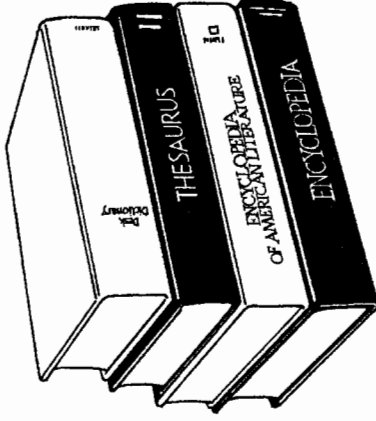
Your employer gives you a \$400 Christmas bonus. You thank the Lord at church for the gift. After church, three different people approach you privately. One asks for \$50 to have the electricity turned on; one asks for \$100 to feed her brother's family; one asks for \$60 to replace a pair of broken glasses. You were hoping to save some money for an emergency.

Opie has the opportunity to be in a state-sponsored competition that requires after-school practices. You want her to do that, but you must have her at home after school every day.

What resources do Opie and Oprah have? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #4:



MARIA AND NOEMI

BACKGROUND

Maria is a 10-year-old Hispanic girl. Her mother does not drive or speak English. Father speaks some English. Maria is a second-generation Hispanic born in the United States. Mother does not work outside the home. Father works for minimum wage as a concrete worker. There are five children. The family gets food stamps, and the mother is a devout Catholic.

You are Maria's mother, Noemi. You are a 27-year-old Hispanic female. You have five children. You have been married to your husband for 11 years and you love him and your children very much. Children always come first. As a child, you and your parents were migrant workers, so you are happy that you have a place to live and do not need to move around. Because of the migrant work, you didn't go past the sixth grade. Your husband works on a construction crew laying concrete. When it's

not raining and when there's plenty of building, he has lots of work. Sometimes, though, he will go two or three weeks with no work and, therefore, no money. Your parents live in your town, and they try to help you when times are bad. You get food stamps to help out. You go to Mass every Sunday, and often on weekends you go to your parents' place with your children and brothers and sisters. Your husband is a good man, and he loves his children. On a good week he will bring home \$400.

CURRENT SITUATION

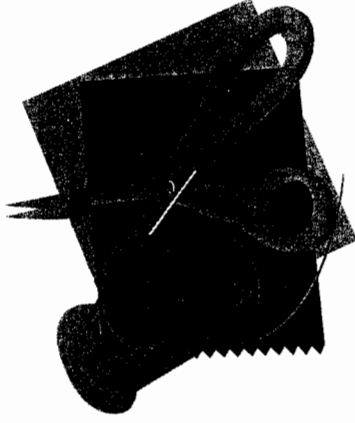
Maria comes home and says she has to do a salt map. You have just spent all the money for the week on food – and she needs five pounds of flour, two pounds of salt, and a piece of board to put it on. She also needs to get information from an encyclopedia, whatever that is. The car has broken down and will require \$100 for parts. The baby is sick, and medicine will be \$30. It has rained for two weeks, and your husband hasn't had any work or pay.

The teacher has asked Maria to stay after school and be in an academic contest. You expect her to get married and have children just as you have. But for now you need her to help you with the children.

What resources do Maria and Noemi have? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #5:



EILEEN AND WISTERIA

BACKGROUND

Eileen is a 10-year-old white girl who lives with her 70-year-old grandmother, Wisteria, who is on Social Security. Eileen doesn't know who her father is. Her mother has been arrested four times for prostitution and/or drug possession in the last two years. About once a year, Mother sobers up for a month and wants Eileen back as her child.

You are Eileen's grandmother, Wisteria. You get about \$150 a week from Social Security. Your daughter, Eileen's mother, has been in trouble for years. You have given up on her, and you couldn't stand to see Eileen in a foster home, so you have taken her into your home. Eileen's mother was never sure who the father was; she is a drug addict and has been arrested frequently. One of her various pimps or boyfriends usually gets her out of jail. Once a year, when she sobers up for a short period of time, she gives Eileen lots of attention and then leaves. The last time she came and left, Eileen cried and said she never wanted to see her mother again. You have a little money in savings, but you don't want to

use it yet. Your house is paid for, and you have a decent car. You worry what will happen to Eileen if you get sick or die, and you pray each day to live until Eileen is 18. You don't see as well as you once did. All your relatives are either dead or distant. Every Sunday you and Eileen go to the United Methodist Church where you have been a member for 40 years.

CURRENT SITUATION

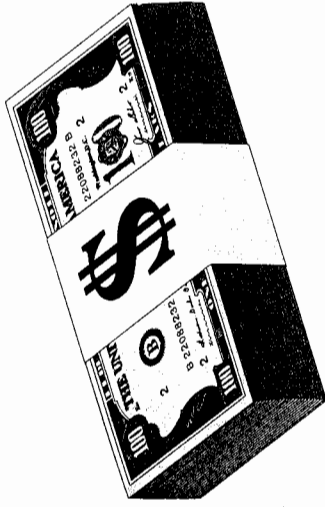
Eileen comes home from school with an assigned project. She must do a family history and interview as many relatives as possible. You aren't sure what to say to Eileen.

The teacher tells you at a conference that Eileen has an imaginary friend whom she talks to a great deal during the day. The teacher recommends that you seek counseling for Eileen. She knows a counselor who would charge only \$40 a session. She also comments that Eileen's clothes are old-fashioned and that she doesn't fit in very well with the other students. You don't tell the teacher that you make Eileen's clothes. The teacher suggests that you let Eileen have friends over so she can socialize, but you don't know if anyone would come – or if you could stand the noise.

What are Eileen and Wisteria's resources? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #6:



JUAN AND RAMÓN

BACKGROUND

Juan is a 6-year-old Hispanic boy who lives with his uncle Ramón. Juan's father was killed in a gang-related killing. His uncle is angry about the death of Juan's father. When his uncle is not around, Juan stays with his grandmother, who speaks no English. The uncle makes his living selling drugs but is very respectful toward his mother.

You are Juan's uncle, Ramón, a 25-year-old Hispanic male. You doubt that you will live many more years because you know that most of the people like you are either dead or in jail. You are angry. Your brother, Juan's father, was killed by a rival gang two years ago when Juan was 4. Juan is your godchild, and you will defend him with your blood. Juan's mother was a piece of white trash and wouldn't take care of Juan like a good mother should. She is in jail now for gang-related activities. You leave Juan with your mother often because the activities you're involved in are too dangerous to have Juan along. You are a leader in your gang and sell drugs as well. Your mother speaks only Spanish, but you have taught

Juan to be very respectful toward her. She goes to Mass every Sunday and takes Juan with her when she can. You make \$1,000 a week on the average.

CURRENT SITUATION

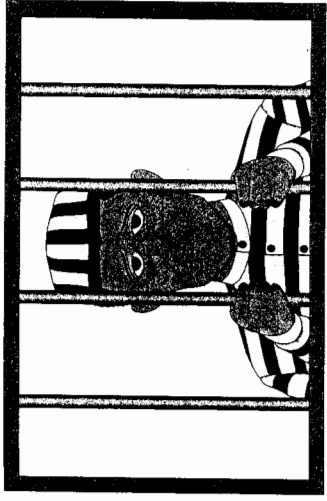
Juan comes home with a notice about a parent-teacher conference. You are away, hiding from the police. Grandmother cannot read Spanish or English.

The rival gang has killed another one of your gang members. This has forced you to be away from Juan more than you would like. Plans are that you will kill the leader of the rival gang, but then you will need to go to Mexico for some time to hide. You are thinking about taking Juan with you because he is all in the world that you love. You are stockpiling money. You don't want to take him out of school, but he is only 6; he can catch up. You don't think you'll live past 30, and you want to have time with him.

What resources do Juan and Ramón have? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

SCENARIO #7:



SALLY AND SUEANN

BACKGROUND

Sally is an 8-year-old white girl whose mother, SueAnn, has been married and divorced twice. Her mother works two jobs and does not receive child support. An older sister is pregnant. Sally has two stepiblings – one younger and one older. The current stepfather's favorite child is the youngest child, a son. The stepfather is laid off right now.

You are Sally's mother, SueAnn, a 33-year-old white female. You are on your third marriage. You have four children by four different men. You are working two jobs right now because your current husband has been laid off. He is supposed to be taking care of the kids, but he doesn't like to be tied down. You got pregnant when you were a senior in high school, so you were unable to finish school. You knew who the father was, but he changed his mind and wouldn't marry you. You kept the child, and she is now 15 and pregnant. Your second child is Sally, and she is 8 years old. Between the two jobs, you bring home about \$400 a week, and you are exhausted. You make the girls cook and clean. You are very tired. Lately you and your husband have been fighting a lot. Your mother

and father are divorced and live in the same town that you do. You remember how much you loved to dance country-western and party. All you wish for now is sleep. You may have to move again soon because you're so far behind on the bills.

CURRENT SITUATION

You get a call at work. You had let your husband drop you off at work because he was going to fix the muffler. Your husband is now in jail. He was caught driving while intoxicated. This is the second time he has been caught. You need \$500 to pay the bondsman to get him out of jail. Furthermore, he was driving your car, which didn't have insurance. They have towed the car, and the towing bill is \$80. Each day it's impounded it will cost you \$40 in parking fees, and you can't get the car out until you have proof of insurance. When and if your husband gets out of jail, he will need to see the probation officer, which will cost him \$60 each visit.

Your pregnant daughter needs \$400 to pay the doctor so that he will keep seeing her. You have told her she needs to go to the clinic where the service is free. However, the wait is usually three to four hours, and she misses a half day of school. There is also the problem of getting her there. It's in a bad part of town, and it will be dark before you can get there to pick her up.

The bill collector calls you at work and tells you he is going to take you to court for overdue electric bills at the last place you lived. You now live in an apartment where the utilities are paid, but you are behind on your rent by a month. You were OK until your husband got laid off. You are out of birth-control pills. To refill the prescription, you have to go to the clinic and wait three to four hours, and you can't take that much time off work. Also, you need \$20 for the birth-control pills. Lately your husband has been looking at Sally in ways that you don't like. But you are so tired.

What are Sally and SueAnn's resources? Check yes by the resources that are present, check no by the ones that are not, or check question mark where the resources are uncertain.

Resources	Yes	No	?
Financial			
Emotional			
Mental			
Spiritual			
Physical			
Support systems			
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules			
Role models			

DISCUSSION OF SCENARIOS

Significantly, each scenario illustrates a variance in the amount and kinds of resources available, as well as a variation on the theme of poverty. In marking the scenarios, this would be the manner in which the resources might be identified.

Resources	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
Financial	n	n	n	n	?	y	y
Emotional	n	n	y	y	?	n	n
Mental	y	n	y	y	y	y	y
Spiritual	n	n	y	y	y	y	n
Physical	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Support systems	n	n	y	y	y	y	n
Knowledge of middle-class hidden rules	y	n	y	n	y	n	n
Role models	?	n	y	y	?	n	n

Knowledge of the hidden rules is marked in relationship to the knowledge base the individual has about middle-class rules. Each of the scenarios has aspects that are unique to poverty.

For example, the jail incident in the SueAnn scenario is one. For many individuals who live in poverty, jail is a part of their lives on a fairly regular basis for several reasons. First of all, if an individual is in generational poverty, organized society is viewed with distrust, even distaste. The line between what is legal and illegal is thin and often crossed. A lack of resources means that the individual will need to spend periods of time in jail for crossing those lines because he/she does not have the resources to avoid it. The reality is that middle class and upper class also cross the lines, but not with the frequency of those in poverty. In addition, the upper and middle classes usually have the resources to avoid jail. The poor simply see jail as a part of life and not necessarily always bad. Local jails provide food and shelter and, as a general rule, are not as violent or dangerous as state incarceration. SueAnn will probably get her husband out of jail because relationships are also more important in generational poverty than is money.

Another example of a poverty characteristic is the incident with Oprah at church where she receives the extra money and is immediately besieged with requests. One of the hidden rules of poverty is that any extra money is shared. Middle class puts a great deal of emphasis on being self-sufficient. In poverty, the clear understanding is that one will never get ahead, so when extra money is available, it is either shared or immediately spent. There are always emergencies and needs; one might as well enjoy the moment. Oprah will share the money; she has no choice. If she does not, the next time she is in need, she will be left in the cold. It is the hidden rule of the support system. In poverty, people are possessors, and people can rely only on each other. It is absolutely imperative that the needs of an individual come first. After all, that is all you have – people.

The discipline incident in “Otis and Vangie” is included because another aspect of generational poverty is that discipline is about penance and forgiveness, not about change. The mother is the most powerful figure in generational poverty. Not only does she control the limited resources, she is also the “keeper of the soul.” She dispenses penance and forgiveness. The typical pattern in poverty for discipline is to verbally chastise the child, or physically beat the child, then forgive and feed him/her. The hidden rules about food in poverty is that food is equated with love. In the final analysis, all you have are people. How do you show people that you love them? You give them food so they can continue to live. One of the mistakes educators make is to misunderstand the role of punishment in generational poverty. As stated, punishment is not about change, it’s about penance and forgiveness. Individuals in poverty usually have a strong belief in fate and destiny. Therefore, to expect changed behavior after a parent-teacher conference is, in most cases, a false hope.

The Juan/Ramón scenario is included to make some points about the role of violence and gangs in poverty. Gangs are a type of support system. They provide virtually all of the resources needed for survival. Fighting and physical violence are a part of poverty. People living in poverty need to be able to defend themselves physically, or they need someone to be their protector. Middle class uses space to deal with conflict and disagreement, i.e. they go to a different room and cool off; they purchase enough land so they are not encroached upon; they live in neighborhoods where people keep their distance. But in poverty, separation is not an option. The only way to defend turf is physically. Also, individuals in

poverty are seldom going to call the police, for two reasons: First, the police may be looking for them; second, the police are going to be slow to respond. So why bother calling?

The Eileen/Wisteria scenario is included because of the growing number of children living with grandparents – and the effect this has on the emotional resources of the children. Emotional resources come from observing how role models deal with adverse situations and social interactions. Eileen will come out of the situation knowing that she doesn't want to be like her mother, but also that she doesn't want to be like her grandmother. So it will be difficult for her to identify an appropriate female role model. To have emotional resources that are healthy, one needs to have an identity. One uses role models to build that identity. Because of the limited financial resources of her grandmother, Eileen's access to appropriate role models will be limited to church and school.

The John/Adele scenario highlights the number of children who are in situational poverty because of divorce. Adele is making the slide from middle class to poverty, and she doesn't know the rules of poverty. Adele is an example of what happens when an individual allows her difficulties to erode her emotional resources. Because of her alcoholism, she is emotionally weak. (The reverse is also true, i.e., her emotional weakness leads to her dependence on alcohol.) Of all the resources, emotional resources seem to be paramount in maintaining a lifestyle with some semblance of order. When emotional resources are absent, the slide to poverty is almost guaranteed. But because her financial resources are limited, she must learn the rules of generational poverty. And one of the rules in generational poverty for women is this: you may need to use your body for survival. After all, that is all that is truly yours. Sex will bring in money and favors. Values are important, but they don't put food on the table – or bring relief from intense pressure. So Adele will probably go out with the mechanic, for two reasons: (1) She can get her car fixed and (2) she can have an evening out on the town.

Maria and Noemi are included because they represent the classic Hispanic pattern of poverty. In the Hispanic poverty pattern, the majority of families are two-parent. As can be seen, of all the scenarios Maria and Noemi have more resources than any of the others.

In conclusion, the resources that individuals have vary significantly from situation to situation. Poverty is more about other resources than it is about money. The other resources are those that educators can influence greatly.

WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION MEAN IN THE SCHOOL OR WORK SETTING?

- * Resources of students and adults should be analyzed before dispensing advice or seeking solutions to the situation. What may seem to be very workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to those in poverty.
- * Educators have tremendous opportunities to influence some of the non-financial resources that make such a difference in students' lives. For example, it costs nothing to be an appropriate role model.